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The magazine was established in 1919, during Lithuania's Independence Battles. Later revived in the USA in 1950. Re-established in Lithuania since 1991.

Dear WARRIOR readers,

At the turn of the year we had ample opportunity to see that in addition to the large-scale conventional war being waged in Ukraine, the modern evil empire that has assumed the role of 'world power' does not lack the strength and resources to launch well-organised and coordinated hybrid attacks against EU and NATO countries.

Isolated attacks in which warehouses in European countries are blown up, individuals who do not support the Kremlin are killed or incendiary packages are found on planes are no longer anything new. Recently, however, Russia has also been targeting infrastructure in the Baltic Sea. Cutting power lines and other cables with the anchors of ships is a relatively new measure, but one that will hopefully finally prove to those who are still avoiding escalation that the war is already taking place west of Moscow, except that for the time being there are no missiles exploding and no 'friendly' North Korean soldiers launching brave attacks.

This means one thing: the concept of modern warfare has long since gone beyond the boundaries of a conventional military conflict, and unfortunately those fighting the West have not only defined and studied the new methods of warfare, but are also putting them into practice. That is why there is little time for fear of escalation, for long deliberations, for planning or for identifying threats. Tomorrow there may simply be no time to act.

Sincerely,  
Darius Varanavičius  
Chief Editor

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# AN EXTRA CHALLENGE LITHUANIA LEADS THE WAY IN DEMINING UKRAINE

ILONA

Ukraine is now the most heavily mined territory in the world, and countries from around the world are coming together to help it tackle this huge problem.

The Lithuanian Ministry of Defence (MoD) took over the leadership of the Demining Coalition at a meeting of the Ukrainian Defence Contact Group (Ramstein format) back in 2023, and in just one year 22 countries have joined the Coalition; Lithuania, co-leading with Iceland, contributed nearly €17 million to the Coalition Fund last year.

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## Unprecedented demining challenges

According to the UN Human Rights Watch, mines and other unexploded remnants of war have killed up to 360 people and injured 789 others in Ukraine since February 2022. As well as endangering the lives of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians, landmines also disrupt agricultural production. According to the Tony Blair Institute, landmines are responsible for an estimated \$11.2 billion loss in Ukraine's gross domestic product (GDP) each year. To tackle the problem, the Ukrainian government adopted a demining action plan in 2024, which aims to clear around 80% of the country's mine-contaminated areas by 2034.



R. Kiškis (first from left) regularly visits Ukraine to discuss demining issues.

"The amount of landmines in Ukraine is unprecedented, surpassing even World War II in terms of how contaminated the land is. Where previously it was thought that minefields 10km long and 200 m deep would be sufficient for a war, in Ukraine they are 100 km long and 1 km deep — the density and extent of the minefields is a real challenge. In addition, Ukraine is facing unprecedented levels of not only landmines, but also artillery and aerial bombardment, which means that the land is heavily contaminated with various explosives. Mines are often equipped with various technical and engineering upgrades to cause even more damage. This makes demining even more complex than usual, and in Ukraine it will take a very long time and a lot of human and technical resources," says Rolandas Kiškis, advisor to the International Relations and Operations Group of the MoD and coordinator of the Demining Coalition.

Lithuania has been one of the biggest supporters of Ukraine since the beginning of the war, with a total support package of €1.5 billion, or more than 1.5% of the country's GDP, with military support amounting to €736.2 million. And in 2023, Lithuania

made another commitment of particular scope and significance — at a Ramstein format meeting, the MoD assumed leadership of the Ukrainian Coalition of Demining Capabilities, one of the eight coalitions supporting the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Underwater mine clearance capabilities are also being developed in Ukraine.



"Each coalition focuses on a specific area, ensuring that Ukraine receives the full support it needs to successfully defend itself against Russian aggression. Swift and coordinated work across the coalitions is essential to help Ukraine withstand Russian aggression and thus achieve a peaceful future. The focus is on long-term assistance to strengthen Ukraine's defence capabilities and ensure that they meet NATO standards. This means not just short-term assistance packages, but long-term, focused cooperation," says Algirdas Norkus, Head of the International Relations and Operations Group at the MoD.

To achieve the best possible results, the MoD has offered Iceland to co-lead the Coalition of Demining Capabilities.

"Iceland had already been contributing to the demining training of Ukrainians in Lithuania through the Nordic-Lithuanian EOC Training Initiative (NLETI) by purchasing the necessary demining equipment, so this offer developed quite organically and Iceland was happy to accept it," said Vaidotas Urbelis, Director of Defence Policy at the MoD.





## Emergency assistance in the most dangerous areas

Since the outbreak of the war, humanitarian and combat mine action assistance to Ukraine has been provided through the Ukrainian Defence Contact Group and bilateral cooperation. Various international and non-governmental organisations and partners have been involved in this process, with total donations amounting to hundreds of millions of euros. As of 2024, assistance to the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the development of humanitarian and combat demining capabilities is being coordinated and delivered through the Ukrainian Coalition on Demining Capabilities, in accordance with a concept developed by the MoD of Lithuania.

On 11 January 2024, the first meeting of the Coalition was held in Vilnius, Lithuania, to confirm the critical mine clearance needs of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces.

## International Military Assistance to Ukraine Capability Coalitions

The Ukraine Defence Contact Group has established eight Capability Coalitions to provide specialised military assistance to Ukraine. Their main objective is to provide Ukraine with vital weapons, equipment, ammunition and training as quickly and efficiently as possible. Different countries have taken responsibility for leading different coalitions, depending on their capabilities, experience and political will:

- Artillery capabilities – led by France and the USA;
- Drone capabilities – led by Latvia and the UK;
- Integrated air and missile defence capabilities – led by Germany and France;
- Demining capabilities – led by Lithuania and Iceland;
- IT capabilities – led by Estonia and Luxembourg;
- Naval capabilities – led by the UK and Norway;
- Aviation capabilities – led by the USA, Denmark and the Netherlands;
- Armoured vehicles – led by Poland, Germany and Italy.

Based on its experience and capabilities, Lithuania actively participates in artillery, drone, IT and integrated air and missile defence coalitions. Lithuania has signed the relevant Letters of Intent, representatives of the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces participate in coordination meetings, and the country provides financial, material and expert support to these coalitions.



## Lithuania's Military Assistance to Ukraine

Total value of military aid since the start of the war — €736.2 million  
2024 — 210.5 million, 2023 — 242.7 million, 2022 — 283 million

A total of €210.5 million in aid was granted in 2024:

- Military aid;
- Funds for the training of troops;
- Contributions to international funds, contributions to other coalitions (in addition to the Demining Coalition).

### Areas of military assistance to Ukraine by the MoD and the Lithuanian Armed Forces:

#### 1. Military training:

- Up to 1 600 Ukrainian troops in Lithuania;
- Up to 2 250 troops as part of the UK's Operation INTERFLEX and the Special Training Command (ST-C) courses for Ukrainian troops in Germany.

#### 2. Support for the capability coalitions:

- Artillery capabilities;
- Drone capabilities;
- Integrated air and missile defence capabilities;
- IT capabilities.

#### 3. Repair of military equipment.

#### 4. Reconstruction of the Rehabilitation Centre of the Zhytomyr Military Hospital.

#### 5. Rehabilitation and treatment of Ukrainian troops.

#### 6. Military expertise. The MoD provides advice on C2, military education and training, NCO corps development, personnel policy, capability planning and other strategic level advice.



"The Working Group, together with the Ukrainians, identified the most critical needs and agreed that we will act in areas where assistance is urgently needed. This means that the Demining Coalition is providing support to the Ukrainian Armed Forces' auxiliary forces engaged in combat operations and to the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence's units operating within 20 km of the front line. Overall, hundreds of thousands of hectares in Ukraine need to be cleared, which will take decades, while the Lithuanian-Icelandic Coalition has a narrower objective — to respond to the most urgent needs in the most dangerous areas," said Rūta Kavaliauskienė, Senior Adviser to the MoD's International Relations and Operations Group.

May 2024 saw the first visit to Ukraine by a delegation from the MoD of Lithuania, the lead country of the Ukrainian Demining Coalition. "The delegation visited Ukraine's main humanitarian and combat demining units, as well as demining coordination and training centres in Kyiv, Chernihiv, Rivne and Kamenets-Podolsk. Direct contacts have also been established with demining officials in the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In August 2024, the preparation of the long-term plan (until 2034) of the Ukrainian Demining Coalition was launched, and nine expert working group meetings of the Coalition members took place. In



September 2024, the seventh meeting of the Coalition's working group was held in Reykjavik," R. Kiškis said.

One year after the first meeting, the Lithuanian-Icelandic Coalition of Demining Capabilities in Ukraine now officially consists of 22 countries: Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and Ukraine. The UK plans to join soon and Argentina is also considering the possibility. "Coalition countries can choose

the nature and extent of their support, either in the area of combat demining, humanitarian demining or both. Support can take the form of financial contributions to the Coalition Fund for the joint procurement of equipment, the transfer of demining equipment, or the provision of training to Ukrainians," said Austė Striaukienė, Senior Adviser to the MoD's International Relations and Operations

Group, commenting on the provision of assistance.

The Coalition also works with international and non-governmental organisations and partners, which include: The UN Development Programme (UNDP, UNOPS), the EU Military Assistance Mission to Ukraine (EUMAM UA), the European External Action Service (EEAS), the NATO structural entities —

During its first year of operation, the Demining Capabilities Coalition held 9 meetings, 4 of which took place in Vilnius.





**Map of Ukraine showing the extent of mined areas.**

Partnership Assistance Programme (PASP), NATO Representation in Ukraine (NRU), NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU), the Sectoral Working Group (SWG) led by the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) and non-governmental organisations: Canada's 'Mriya Aid', Ukraine's 'Demine Ukraine', and the United States' 'Tetrattech'.

phases. By 2026, an initial capability (military units) will be established; by 2029, a core capability (military units) will be established and training centres and logistics support will be developed; and by 2035, autonomous NATO-compliant capability (reserve units) will be established and training

centres and logistics support will be developed. A detailed plan for the implementation of these objectives will be developed/approved annually, and the total cost for equipment alone will be over €700 million," said A. Norkus, outlining the key plans of the Coalition of Demining Capabilities for the next decade.

When planning what equipment to buy for combat or humanitarian demining, the needs are somewhat different. "For Ukrainian combat units to be able to carry out their tasks, offensive or defensive operations, the supporting units need to be equipped with heavy demining equipment, such as demining tanks and remote demining charges. To ensure the safety of people, all combat

## Long-term goal of over 30 demining battalions

In assisting Ukraine, the Demining Capabilities Coalition is focusing not only on immediate needs, but also on longer-term ones. According to the Coalition's long-term plan, approved at the end of 2024, more than 30 NATO-standard military units for combat and humanitarian demining are to be developed and fully equipped by 2034 in support of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces.

"These goals will be achieved in three

**By 2034, the Ukrainian Demining Coalition expects to have established and fully equipped at least 30 military units for combat and humanitarian demining in accordance with NATO standards.**



demining equipment is armoured," says R. Kiškis, who travels to Ukraine on a monthly basis to coordinate the activities of the Coalition. "Humanitarian demining ensures the operation of units behind the lines and the safety of civilians. There, demining is prioritised, with critical infrastructure such as bridges, roads, factories, settlements, agricul-

tural facilities and fields being demined first. The Coalition's demining capacity is focused on providing assistance in an area 20 km from the front line, which is very dangerous as it is constantly under artillery and aerial bombardment. In addition to remote demining equipment, protective suits, safe vehicles to travel to the site, mine detectors, and explo-

sive ordnance disposal, the deminers working there also need anti-drone systems and night-vision equipment".

Equally important long-term tasks of the Lithuanian-Icelandic led coalition are to strengthen and coordinate existing and future donor support to Ukraine in the area of mine clearance; to plan and organise the procurement of critical equipment in accordance with the identified priorities; and to synchronise/coordinate humanitarian and combat mine clearance training.

### Together to victory!



## First delivery of support

In its first year of operation, the Demining Capabilities Coalition has not only mobilised a large number of partners, carried out a great deal of organisa-

**Ukraine's mine-affected areas are vast. Thousands of demining specialists need to be trained every year.**





## Lithuania's Contribution to the Demining Capabilities Coalition:

- Contribution to the Coalition Fund of €16.7 million;
- Transfer of M113 armoured personnel carriers, anti-drone equipment, forklifts, various trailers and all-terrain vehicles;
- Bilateral purchase and transfer of equipment (trailers, trucks, loaders);
- Training of demining experts in Lithuania under the Nordic-Lithuanian Demining Training Initiative.

## Support from other countries in the coalition:

- Denmark plans to contribute €3 million to the Coalition Fund; has delivered remote demining vehicles and plans to deliver more;
- Germany has contributed €3 million to the Fund; €412 million in in-kind contributions and plans to deliver armoured vehicles, heavy engineering vehicles (tanks), mobile bridges, mine trawlers, mine clearance vehicles and excavators;
- Finland plans to provide protective suits for deminers;
- Iceland will contribute €4 million to the Fund;
- Slovakia has provided remote demining vehicles;
- Sweden has contributed €9 million to the Fund and plans to supply trucks;
- 'Tetrattech', a US company, has contributed remote demining vehicles, vans, all-terrain vehicles, drones, loaders, excavators and mine detectors.

In 2024, EUMAM, 'Tetrattech' and other Coalition countries trained some 2 900 deminers/engineers and over 3 000 humanitarian deminers.

The first handover ceremony for demining equipment procured with Coalition Fund resources in Ukraine in November 2024.

tional work, developed and adopted a long-term action plan based on the needs of the Ukrainians, but has already purchased and delivered a significant amount of equipment with the funds it has raised.

Due to the enormous and financially demanding nature of the needs, the Coalition decided in its first year of operation to procure and ship to Ukraine what was already manufactured, easy to purchase and quick to deliver. In November 2024, representatives of the Lithuanian-Icelandic Demining Coalition officially handed over the first demining equipment purchased with Coalition funds to the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces of Ukraine, with the delivery of 230 all-terrain vehicles and 240 mine detectors. The value of the equipment handed over is estimated at around €17 million.

"It is extremely gratifying to see our work translated into tangible support for our Ukrainian friends on the battlefield as they bravely defend their country. And this is only the beginning. We are committed to increasing our support by providing additional equipment and extensive training to the troops in the coming weeks and months. I sincerely thank the MoD of the Republic of Lithuania for its outstanding leadership in developing the Action Plan and planning the equipment requirements,"



livery of demining equipment and machinery is possible because the CPVA is not new to supporting Ukraine. The Agency has been working in this area since 2017, responding to a wide range of Ukrainian needs, including mine clearance. "Life in Ukraine does not stand still even in the face of war — the threat posed by landmines to human security and the country's economic development is a particularly serious issue that needs to be urgently addressed to prevent further casualties and contribute to more efficient and faster post-victory reconstruction. This experience has provided us with invaluable knowledge that we will use in our activities in the Coalition," said A. Žarnovskis.

said Bjarki Brynjarsson, Spokesperson for the Directorate of Defence at the Icelandic Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The second package of demining equipment arrived in Ukraine in December-January. It consisted of all-terrain vehicles and trucks. Trucks, ambulances, demining kits and protective equipment will also be delivered to Ukraine in 2025 using funds from the Demining Capabilities Coalition. The total value of the 2025 procurement will be around €100 million.

"Starting with the delivery of relatively simple equipment, we will gradually procure and deliver more sophisticated and expensive demining equipment. For comparison, a simple mine detector costs around €4 000 and a combat mine clearance machine costs €7-10 million, so larger purchases require more time and money," said R. Kiškis.

'The Central Project Management Agency' (CPVA), which has extensive experience of providing aid in Ukraine, has been contracted to help manage the procurement processes properly.

## Establishment of a special fund

In order to achieve its objectives, the Demining Capabilities Coalition has established a Coalition Fund with the CPVA as its administrator. It will conclude contracts, carry out procurement and contract monitoring, and administer the fund.

The Coalition Fund was launched in

September 2024, and the first equipment needed by Ukrainian deminers, some 40 all-terrain vehicles, arrived in the country later that month. These were immediately deployed for actual demining operations, and further vehicles and demining equipment were delivered later in November. "Rapid delivery of assistance is a priority for the Demining Capabilities Coalition because Ukraine needs help now," said Artūras Žarnovskis, Adviser to the Deputy Director on the European Peace Facility and Reconstruction of Ukraine.

This speed of procurement for the de-

In addition to the work of the Demining Coalition, the CPVA in Ukraine is also implementing: a rehabilitation and reintegration programme for war veterans; the 'School of the Future for Ukraine' project, which aims to develop an adaptive technical design for the construction of schools across the country; the 'Let's Power the Future: a Coalition of Devices for Ukrainian Children' project, which will provide Ukrainian children with computers with learning software; and a new EU-funded project to build five shelters in

### Women are also actively involved in demining Ukraine.



schools in the frontline regions. The Agency, which has long experience in managing EU and international donor programmes, now has a portfolio worth €17.47 billion, of which €140 million is earmarked for Ukraine.

## Training needs — over 2 000 deminers annually

Without the support of demining units, Ukrainian combat units cannot move, so there is a huge need not only to acquire the necessary equipment, but also to train specialists to operate it. "Each Ukrainian combat brigade has a demining battalion attached to it, so the need for deminers is simply enormous. The Coalition has committed to creating and equipping more than 30 demining battalions, which means that more than 2 000 deminers need to be trained each year. And this is not even the full extent of Ukraine's demining needs, at best we are meeting maybe a quarter of them," said R. Kiškis.

Training deminers is therefore rightly identified as one of the most important tasks of the Demining Capabilities Coalition, in addition to procuring equipment and raising funds. The picture is beginning to emerge as to which count-

ries might contribute to the training of deminers for Ukraine. According to R. Kiškis, 17 of the 22 Coalition partners are directly involved in the training of deminers. Poland, Germany, Spain, France and the USA (through 'Tetra-tech') are the main providers of training for Ukrainian troops. Other countries contributing some of their own resources include the Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania and Hungary, while Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Finland, Latvia, Norway and Sweden provide instructors for the training.

In Lithuania, Ukrainian mine clearance specialists are being trained under the Nordic-Lithuanian Demining Training Initiative. It involves instructors from the Nordic countries and trains 65 deminers per year.

## Donors' conference in Vilnius

After taking the lead with Iceland in leading the Demining Capabilities Coalition in Ukraine, Lithuania has also taken the largest financial initiative in the Coalition for procurement, contributing almost €17 million for the first year of purchases worth around €25 million. The other Coalition partners have followed suit, contributing millions more to the Fund.

While the launch of the Demining Capabilities Coalition and the work that has already been done is encouraging, it is clear that, given the long-term plan that has been adopted, some €100-150 million per year will be needed to meet the targets for the next decade. A Conference to discuss how to finance the Coalition is scheduled to be held in Vilnius in February. "The main objective will be to discuss with the Coalition countries how much financial or in-kind support

**The Ukrainian Demining Coalition operates in the combat zone and 20 km beyond, while the rest of the areas are cleared by the Ukrainians themselves. Farmers often take the initiative to clear their fields using improvised means.**



Photo credits: archives of A. Pliadis, R. Kiškis, MoD archive, CPVA, www.flickr.com and other open sources.



each country could contribute on an annual basis to the development of Ukraine's demining capabilities as part of the implementation of the 10-year plan. Lithuania, as the lead country of the Coalition, thanks all Coalition partners who have contributed to the development of Ukraine's demining capabilities, in particular Poland, Germany, Spain, France and the USA," said R. Kiškis.

Further discussions will be held with partners on the future administration and management of the Coalition on Demining Capabilities. According to R. Kiškis, Lithuania intends to establish sub-committees responsible for specific areas such as training, coordination of equipment

support, implementation of lessons learned and acquisition planning. The latter, being the most complex, will continue to be managed by the MoD together with the CPVA, while the other areas will be offered to the

coalition partners for management. For 2025, the Coalition plans to continue to acquire equipment and to work actively with the Ukrainians and partners to develop even more specific operational plans. ■





## Opening of the Lithuanian Cyber Defence Command

On 1 January 2025, the Lithuanian Cyber Command (LTCYBERCOM), established on the initiative of the Ministry of National Defence (MoD), became operational. The new unit of the Lithuanian Armed Forces is responsible for planning and conducting operations in cyberspace and establishing strategic and operational communication and information systems. LTCYBERCOM will ensure interoperability with NATO, the National Defence System and CIS (communication and information systems) of other institutions and organisations.

"The Lithuanian Cyber Command is particularly important because it will enable joint military planning and

coordination in cyberspace. This is a practice already followed by many NATO countries. Strengthening cyber defence and effective management of cyber incidents are the cornerstones of protection against emerging threats and ensuring the national security of the country," said Deputy Minister of National Defence Tomas Godliauskas.

The structure of the Cyber Defence Command includes the Command Headquarters, the Lithuanian Great Hetman Kristupas Radvila Perkūnas CIS Battalion and the Cyber Defence Command IT Service, the restructured former IT Service of the MoD. With the restructuring of the IT Service under the MoD, the relevant capabilities of the National Defence System were consolidated under the mandate of the Cyber Defence Command. The remaining few functions will be delegated to the National Cyber Security Centre and the Core Centre of State



Tomas Godliauskas, Deputy Minister of National Defence.

Telecommunications under the MoD.

The National Cyber Security Centre will continue to act as the national cyber security authority. The LTCYBERCOM was established in July 2024, after the Seimas approved the amendment to the law on the principle structure of the Lithuanian Armed Forces and on the limitation of troop numbers submitted by the MoD.

Information and illustration credits: MoD  
Photo credit: Sgt Spc Karolis Kavolėlis

# Political-Military Advice on Withdrawal from the Ottawa Convention

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) is proposing political-military advice to begin the process of withdrawing from the Ottawa Convention, starting with consultations with Allies and Baltic Sea countries. The recommended step would strengthen national defence and deterrence.

The MoD calls for a debate on withdrawal from the Ottawa Convention to be initiated in the State Defence Council in order to secure a broad political consensus. It is also necessary to consult with key allies that contribute military personnel to Lithuania, such as the United States, Germany and other NATO members. This would facilitate decisions in line with regional and international defence interests.

"An effective outcome requires a unified Allied position on withdrawal from the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. We are working hard to mobilise leadership for a regional de-

cision," said Minister of Defence Dovilė Šakalienė.

A unified position of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Finland and Sweden would strengthen deterrence and demonstrate a unified view on defence principles in the region.

**"Lithuania's withdrawal from the Ottawa Convention would send a clear and strong message to internal and international audiences that Lithuania is ready to protect its territory with all available means. Of course, even if the Ottawa Convention is denounced, Lithuania would still abide by the principles and norms of international humanitarian law, which protects civilians and defines methods of warfare," said the Minister.**



Following the approval by the Council of State Defence, the proposal to denounce the Ottawa Convention will be submitted to the President (on the initiative of the Ministry of Defence or on the proposal of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania) for submission to the Seimas.

Information credit: MoD  
Photo credit: www.flickr.com





## NATO Launches Baltic Patrol Mission

Following a series of sabotage incidents against underwater infrastructure, NATO has launched a maritime patrol mission in the Baltic Sea that will include frigates, naval drones, submarines and surveillance aircraft in a show of force against a shadowy fleet of vessels suspected of doing Moscow's bidding.

The operation, dubbed 'Baltic Sentry', will dispatch national contributions as well as joint assets to the strategically located body of water. The alliance's Commander Task Force Baltic, created last year and based in Rostock, Germany, will be responsible for coordinating allied ships in the area, a statement issued by all eight Baltic Sea states and NATO's Secretary General said.

NATO members bordering the sea are Finland, Estonia, Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden.

Aside from Sweden, where offi-

cialists announced the country's navy would provide up to three warships and its ASC 890 surveillance aircraft, other 'Baltic Sentry' members have yet to articulate individual contributions.

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte said the number of hulls in the water "might differ from week to week." The involved nations do not wish to make "the enemy any wiser than he or she is already," he said during a press conference in Helsinki on January 14.

Rutte and Estonian Prime Minister Kristen Michal praised the

Finnish approach used for detaining and investigating the 'Eagle S' oil tanker, suspected of ripping under-sea cables last month, suggesting the tactic could serve as a model in prosecuting future sabotage incidents.

"While it is up to each member state, we as partners are looking up to the Finns — next time if we have a threat or sabotage attempt towards critical infrastructure, probably the Finnish attitude should be the benchmark," Michal told reporters after being asked about the Nordic country's assertive detainment procedures.

Finnish President Alexander Stubb said a step-by-step report would be provided to allies about the methodology used on December 25, 2024 when authorities took custody of the vessel.

The official detailed the six-step procedure, which involved close cooperation between the Finnish military, customs officials, police and coast guard.



"First the private company reports what has happened, after that the authorities suss out the possible ships in that position when the cable was cut. Once that happens, you identify the ship, you contact it, stop it, and ask it to move into your territorial waters so you can board it," Stubb said..

The damage "would have been far worse" than four cables cut if the 'Eagle S' had continued its activities for another 12 minutes.

Information credit: [www.defensenews.com](http://www.defensenews.com)

Photo credits: [www.defensenews.com](http://www.defensenews.com),  
[www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)





On 13 January, the day Lithuania celebrates the Day of the Defenders of Freedom, Commander of the Lithuanian Navy RDML Giedrius Premeneckas, on behalf of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, signed an agreement with the Lithuanian electricity transmission system operator 'Litgrid' to enhance the security of critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea: 'NordBalt' power link with Sweden. The Lithuanian Armed Forces and 'Litgrid' will implement technical and practical measures and exchange information and expertise. The agreement provides a basis for both sides to exchange information on detected damage, unusual activities and updates on security measures.

## Contract Signed to Secure Subsea Infrastructure





"The scale and nature of the threats to critical subsea infrastructure require close cooperation. We enjoy such cooperation on an ongoing basis. The agreement between the Lithuanian Navy and 'Litgrid' will add structure and make it fully efficient," said RDML Giedrius Premeneckas.

The parties to the agreement commit to cooperate in monitoring and ensuring the security of critical subsea infrastructure, not only for 'NordBalt', but also for other critical energy and telecommunication assets in the Baltic Sea.

**This is an important step, as the infrastructure has recently been increasingly targeted by sabotage and other malicious activities, which can have serious consequences for the security and economy of the region. The majority of the assets are underwater, requiring specialised technology and constant monitoring to ensure their safety and timely response to any unusual activity.**



The agreement with 'Litgrid' involves the Lithuanian Navy in the infrastructure security process and includes public education to raise awareness of the importance of the issue and Lithuania's energy security as a whole. The cooperation with 'Litgrid' will strengthen the defence mechanisms and help to ensure that the Baltic Sea and its subsea infrastructure remain protected from external threats.

Information credit: Lithuanian Armed Forces  
Photo credits: Lithuanian Armed Forces, 'Litgrid', [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)



## Preparations for Increased Vigilance

In mid-January this year, the Lithuanian Navy's Mine Countermeasures Vessel (MCMV) and Patrol Vessel began military training and preparations for enhanced vigilance operations in the Baltic Sea. The launch is in response to the violations of undersea cables between Estonia and Finland on 25 December 2024, as well as to prevent possible attempts to damage undersea infrastructure and to strengthen regional security.



"Participation in military training and preparation for enhanced vigilance underlines our country's commitment to ensuring not only national, but also regional security. Our participation is a clear signal that Lithuania, as a NATO member, is doing its utmost to ensure the protection of critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea," said Commander of the Lithuanian Navy RDML Giedrius Premeneckas.

**The enhanced vigilance operations will involve a wide range of NATO forces on land, in the air and at sea to ensure prevention, rapid response and security of critical infrastructure in the Baltic region. Lithuanian ships will conduct patrolling and surveillance activities, working closely with NATO Allies and using state-of-the-art technology to detect and prevent potential threats in a timely manner. An underwater robot on board the MCMV will be used to monitor the Baltic seabed.**



"We are pleased that NATO has responded swiftly to the threats to critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea. Operation Baltic Sentry is a sign of the Alliance's solidarity and unity, demonstrating NATO's responsiveness to all types of attacks, including those in the Baltic Sea. We are not at war, but we are not at peace either. In the face of clear signs of aggression by the enemy, we must be constantly vigilant and review national and international law," said Minister of Defence Dovilė Šakalienė.

Military training and preparedness for enhanced vigilance demonstrates the solidarity of NATO Allies, their ability to respond quickly to threats and act in a coordinated manner to strengthen regional stability. The Lithuanian Navy is working with other Allies to ensure that the undersea infrastructure of the Baltic Sea is protected from potential threats and destabilising actions.

Information credit: Lithuanian Armed Forces  
Photo credit: Lithuanian Navy



PHOTO ESSAY

AN

# "IN JANUARY 1991, LITHUANIA HAD TO CHOOSE. D LITHUANIA DID"

"In January 1991, Lithuania had to choose. Either let the bloody red terror machine crush its young independence, or stand like a wall to defend it. And Lithuania did choose. Selfless citizens rallied together and held off the raging invaders, even though, sadly, 14 of them had to give their lives for the freedom of our homeland. So the least we can do is to keep their memory alive, never to forgive and never to allow the enemy's forces to trample on our land again," said General Raimundas Vaikšnoras, Chief of Defence of Lithuania, who himself participated in the events of 13 January 1991, during the commemoration.

The 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lithuania's bloody victory is captured in the photographs by Alfredas Pliadis.















# AXIS > KORE

DARIUS SUTKUS

"We have a 70% shortage of ammunition! Shoigu! Gerasimov! Where are the shells?!" Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of the 'Wagner Group', who has since flown out to see Kobzon's<sup>1</sup> concert (i.e. died), once theatrically shouted into the camera in May 2023. That means the Wagnerians must have been starved of ammunition for almost half a year. And soon the ammunition did arrive. But the markings on them were no longer in Cyrillic. They were in Korean symbols. And then there was talk of the weapons and troops that the 'great leader of the brotherly nation of Korea, Kim' was going to send to the aid of Russia...

<sup>1</sup> Iosif Kobzon — Kremlin-worshipping, EU-blacklisted Russian singer, died in 2018.



A strategic friendship forged in wine and now in blood. North Korea, virtually shut off from the world, is not interested in capturing Kyiv. Two things are more important: the material benefits... and that Beijing does not object.

## Part I: Weapons Korean Army Fist

Here's a typical excerpt from a journalist's report: "I'm in Seoul. The border with North Korea is only a few kilometres away. Stationed right next to it is a huge North Korean artillery group, ready to open fire at a moment's notice. And with half of the South Korean population concentrated in and around the capital, any artillery fire would, of course, cause enormous damage."

Artillery is a vital part of the North Korean armed forces. Here's why: until the Kim family developed nuclear weapons, North Korea's main fighting force was its artillery.

Cannons are relatively easy to produce — they are less technologically advanced than another strike vehicle, such as a bomber.

North Korea currently has about 80 bomber aircraft, but many of them are either unsafe or simply no longer flying. Furthermore, aviation requires

# A-RUSSIA

**W**hat happened that the 2022 slogan 'Kyiv in three days' was replaced by another — 'Kim, help!'?

How should we react to the fact that the 'world's second army' is asking for help from one of the poorest and most isolated countries in the world, where the ordinary worker is still paid a mere food ration and a tourist must be accompanied by a local security officer at all times?

The jokes that it's like an axe finding its handle — they fit together perfectly — and that Russia is about to suffer the fate of North Korea are not entirely far-fetched. On the other hand, it is no laughing matter — the Kim dynasty, by keeping its citizens in a state of semi-starvation, has created a huge military machine that is used as a tool of political blackmail.

Demonstrative firing into the sea is not only a show of force, but also a way to dispose of obsolete ammunition. Wonsan, 2017.



a well-developed infrastructure and a large number of specialists of various kinds. Artillery units, on the other hand, are relatively easy to train. As in many Third World countries, where technology is expensive and manpower cheap, the mass use of artillery is an important element of military doctrine.

Finally, historically, the northern part of the Korean peninsula has had a strong heavy industry since the Japanese occupation, which surprisingly socialist Korea has managed to maintain. A conversation between Kim Il Sung and Josif Stalin in 1952 has also survived, in which the 'leader of the nations' urges his counterpart to look after the economy and improve trade relations, even with capitalist countries, to which the first dictator of North Korea responds: No, no dealings with the capitalists! All we need is more industrialisation and heavy industry!

And, of course, this industry was not designed to produce agricultural, let alone domestic, machinery: it was designed from the outset to produce weapons. According to the North Korean political leadership, the military sector must develop in parallel with the civilian sector. As a result, at least half of the budget is spent on arms — what is known locally as the 'second economy'.

The North Korean armed forces have at least 21 000 tube and rocket artillery systems, according to the most conservative estimates. These are either the Soviet-built *D-30* howitzers and *BM-21 Grad* rocket launchers, or their local modifications, such as the *M-1977* self-propelled cannon/howitzer and the *BM-11* multiple rocket launcher, based on the same 1960s technical designs.

North Korea also has at least 10 000 82mm and 120mm mortars. The tank fleet includes several modifications of the Soviet *T-62* (about 2 000) with cannons for 115mm and 125mm ammunition.

But there is no point in going into all the different types of artillery in North Korea's arsenal. The most important detail is that the main part of their

arsenal consists of ammunition compatible with the guns used by Russia.

But even so, things are not that simple...

## A bit about ammunition

Undoubtedly, a militarised North Korea has amassed huge stockpiles of ammunition over the years. How much? No one can say for sure. Projectiles are produced in underground factories and it is difficult to estimate the scale of production.

But there is a more important point. Militarised industry is like the tale of the magic pot of porridge — it is difficult to stop the production of ammunition, even when there is clearly too much of it. New

little to do with real-life tactics: numerous howitzers are lined up on the seashore and the whole armada is firing shells.

A real spectacle. Kim can admire the firepower of his army, while the rusting ammunition flies far out to sea.

But now there is a new way to get rid of the ageing ammunition stockpiles: give it to Russia.

## And what about Russia?

Russia is currently capable of producing up to 2 million artillery shells a year. According to media reports, the preferred number of rounds identified in talks with Pyongyang was 10 million. That is, at least a five-year norm.

If this is indeed the desired amount, it indicates a serious ammunition deficit. Not surprisingly, given Russian military doctrine, one of the cornerstones of which is the weight of artillery fire (a topic covered in issue 12 of *WARRIOR* in 2023).

Of course, Russia will not get the ammunition for free. North Korea's political leadership is interested in many things: fuel, food, but also new technologies, especially military ones. But the ammunition may cost the Russians more than rice in return. And it all has to do with logistics. The maths is very simple.

Once loaded onto a train in North Korea, the only way for the cargo to reach Russian territory is via the Korea-Russia 'Druzhba' Bridge over the Tumen River.

Once in Khabarovsk, it would have to be transported on the Trans-Siberian Railway. After travelling just over ten thousand kilometres, the cargo would then reach the Ukrainian front.

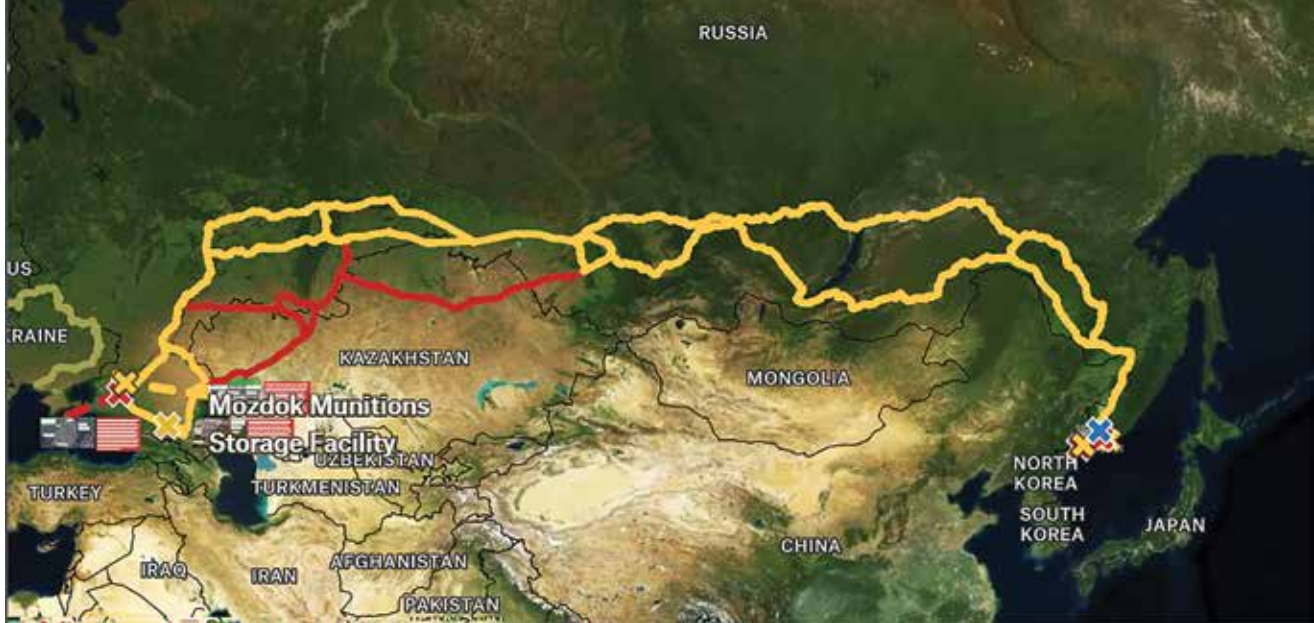
Up to now, trains consisting of 3 to 5 wagons have been running between North Korea and the Russian Far East. But even if a convoy of 2-3 times this size were to be formed, capable of carrying some 500-600 tonnes of cargo, the net quantity of ammunition (excluding the weight of the wooden crates) would be no more than 5 000 pieces.



A photo that appeared on the Russian internet. A North Korean artillery shell (centre), probably repainted to cover corrosion.

batches of ammunition go into storage, but what to do with the millions of ageing projectiles and rockets? Tube artillery shells can sit in boxes for a couple of decades, but *Grad* rockets become obsolete after ten to twelve years. And North Korea has not been at war for seven decades.

The generals of the North Korean People's Army try to solve the problem of surplus ammunition in their own way, for example by organising grandiose artillery demonstration firings. The video footage shows that these are events that have



The ammunition has to travel more than 10 000 km, but political ambition outweighs any cost.

As a reminder, in May 2022, when the war became a positional war, Russian artillery was firing up to 50 000 shells/day into Ukraine, then it had to slow down a bit — in early 2023 it was down to 20 000 shells/day, and by the end of the year it was down to 5 000-6 000 shells/day.

Including the logistical costs of 10 000 kilometres, the ammunition will be worth almost as much as gold, and a shipment of it will be fired in a day.

The next question is: if 10 million units of ammunition were to be delivered, how much time and capacity would it take to get it from point A to point B?

Some analysts have suggested that the 10 million is not a real number, but simply an information attack to create impact. Even if such a titanic project were to be undertaken, it does not seem economically viable. But political ambition outweighs any cost.

## Ammunition? We don't know anything about that...

Nevertheless, Korean munitions are being shipped to Russia. And the first shipments appear to have reached the Russian occupying forces even before the formal mutual assistance agreements.

North Korea's intention to supply weapons for aggression against Ukraine has been rumoured as early as September 2022, as reported by 'The New York Times', citing unnamed intelligence sources.

Naturally, Pyongyang immediately de-

nied the information. A report by North Korea's Central News Agency (KCNA) stressed that "the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has never exported arms or ammunition to Russia and has no plans to do so in the future".

There is this humorous dialogue:

"How can you tell if a communist is lying?"

"His mouth moves."

Pyongyang's denials proved to be worthless. At the end of December 2022, one of the social media accounts linked to the 'Wagner Group' (the data protection situation there is really bad) reported a shipment of Korean ammunition.

Subsequently, more intelligence emerged which led the US Presidential National Security Adviser, John Kirby, to confirm that "North Korea has completed the initial delivery of weapons to the 'Wagner Group', which paid for the wea-

pons. Last month, North Korea delivered missiles and artillery shells to Russia."

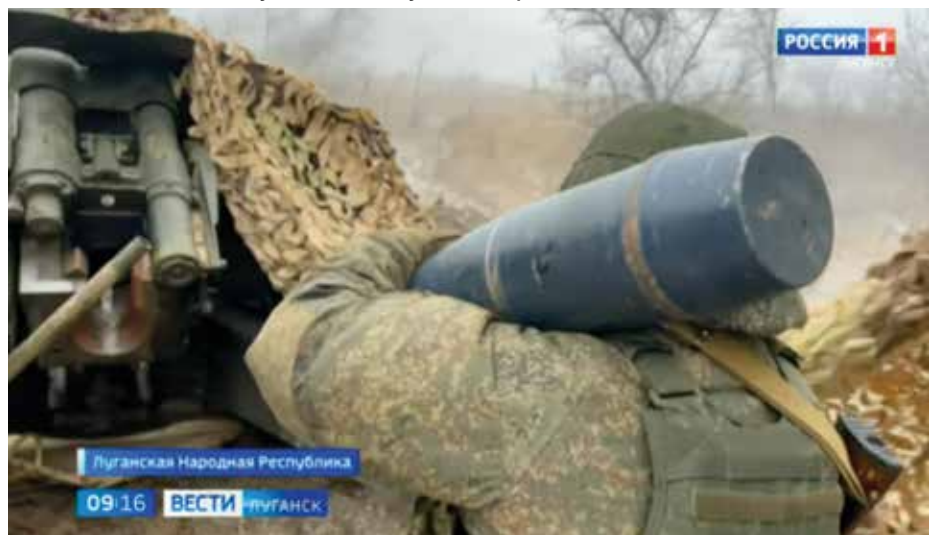
The US State Department's Ned Price suggested that these arms shipments were routed through African countries and the Middle East, which is entirely plausible given that North Korea has set up an entire shadow trade network to evade sanctions.

Of course, both Pyongyang and Moscow, as well as the 'private businessman' Prigozhin, have again denied this information, using terms such as 'slandorous fabrications', 'absurd manipulation of public opinion', 'gossip and fabrications' in their statements.

Half a year later, at the end of June, the so-called 'Wagner Group' Rebellion broke out, and a few months later Prigozhin himself and the leader of the group, the outspoken Russo-Nazi Dmitry Utkin 'Wagner', died in a plane crash.

The issue of arms from North Korea

Good news for the Russian occupiers — Korean ammunition has arrived. The bad news is that it sometimes fly off inaccurately or even explode in the barrel.



naturally faded into the background of these events.

## The next phase

Only to rise like a phoenix from the ashes a few weeks later.

Based on satellite photos and other information, intelligence specialists concluded that train movements on the only rail link between North Korea and Russia increased in September. In addition, cargo ships such as the 'Angara', 'May-1', 'Maria' and 'Lady R' began carrying containers from the port of Najin to the ports of Dunay and Vostochny. The transport was illegal as the ships' automatic identification systems were disabled during the voyage.

By 1 October, some 1 000 sea containers unloaded in the Far East had been transported by rail to arms depots in Tikhoretsk in Krasnodar Krai and Mozdok in North Ossetia.

The shipments continued throughout the winter. According to the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) think-tank, by spring 2024 Russia have received



A fuse from an exploded munition with an interesting marking. Kharkiv region, February 2024.

some 7 000 containers of Korean munitions in this way — an estimated 1.5-2 million pieces of various artillery ammunition. These figures have been confirmed by US, British and South Korean intelligence.

Military cooperation got a second wind after a visit to Pyongyang by

Shoigu, who was then defence minister, at the end of July 2024, and a meeting between Kim and Putin in September of the same year. By December 2024, North Korea had transferred to its strategic partner up to 5 million pieces of ammunition, around 100 artillery systems and the same number of *Hwasong-11* ballistic missiles, as well as an unspecified number of *Bulsae-4* anti-tank guided missile systems.

There is no doubt that the replenishment of stocks with Korean ammunition gave the Russians the impetus to renew their offensive on the Donetsk front. From 10 October, the storming of the settlement of Avdiivka began, followed by the battle for the key transport hub of Kupiansk-Vuzlovij. Massive 'meat-grinder' attacks — in some cases up to five a day — also resumed, each launched by the Russians with heavy artillery fire. And on the Kharkiv front, during artillery training, between half and two-thirds of the ammunition fired was Korean.

However, it is said that the Korean ammunition is in poor condition, which is not surprising: much of it is not yet antique, but certainly vintage, dating back to the 1970s. From intercepted conversations with the occupiers, it is clear that at best it does not go where it is aimed, and in some cases it is unsafe to use at all.

Thus, by providing fraternal aid to a strategic partner, Kim has in fact benefited twice: he has received something in return and he has been given the opportunity to dispose of potentially dangerous munitions for free.

Let us hope, by the way, that sooner or later, for every shell or missile fired into Ukrainian territory, the Russian accomplices will be duly 'rewarded'.

## Part II: People A land of barracks

To get an idea of the extent of the DPRK's militarisation, let's look at the numbers.

The North Korean armed forces

have around 1.3 million personnel, not including reserves (around 0.5 million). This is a huge number: in terms of personnel, it is the fourth largest army in the world. And with a total population of around 25 million, North Korea's relative militarisation is one of the highest in the world. The North Korean armed forces have a manpower level roughly equivalent to that of neighbouring Russia, even though the Russian Federation has about six times the population.

And that's just the regular and reserve military forces of the DPRK, with another 5 million or so belonging to the so-called 'Worker-Peasant Red Guards', a paramilitary force — essentially a paramilitary wing of the Party.

Not surprisingly, the so-called *Songun* (military first) doctrine has been in place for some time alongside the dominant so-called national communist ideology of *Juche*.

All men between the ages of 17 and 30 are conscripted and have to do real military service, which until recently was ten years (!), although this is now said to have been 'liberalised' to an average of 'only' about 7 years. Compulsory military service for women also came into force around 2015.

Only recently, NATO countries have been discussing spending 3% of GDP on defence. Meanwhile, North Korea's military apparatus eats up about a third of its GDP! But there are two sides to this story: firstly, huge military spending means that the well-being of the population suffers — even the conscripts themselves look as if they are permanently malnourished. Second, the army itself has to help prop up an already weak economy. This means that most soldiers not only have to do all the household chores in the military unit, but also work for free in the fields, constructing buildings, repairing roads, loading goods and other low-skilled jobs. In essence, the bulk of the armed forces is a mobilised labour army: an unpaid workforce with only a passing acquaintance with combat training. In North Korea, for example, the post office is run by the military — there is still a military field post — and there is no civilian postal



The DPRK has one of the largest armies in the world, but its soldiers appear ill-equipped and poorly fed. For comparison, look at the troops of the US and South Korea, and one North Korean among them.

service. It is cheaper and, above all, more communist this way.

And now let's make some assessments. Even those units of the DPRK that are considered combat units are very particular. Asia is a different world from ours, but those who served in the Soviet army will easily remember that there were two kinds of Soviet army: the glorious army shown in films and news reports or described in newspapers, and the other, the everyday army, characterised by illegal relations, theft and absolute material and spiritual poverty. Looking at the photos and videos of the North Korean armed forces, one cannot help but think that what they are trying to show is nothing more than a crude construction and a self-serving mirage in which slogans and paper reports are more important than reality. After all, North Korea is a land of contrasts: its generals are often more decorated than Brezhnev ever was, even though its large army has not been involved in a real military conflict for seven decades.

The natural question is: wouldn't

the political and military leadership want to test its war-fighting capabilities, if only to ascertain the capabilities of its armed forces? Since Kim supported both the annexation of Crimea and Russia's aggression against Ukraine from the start, there is an opportunity here to do a little fighting against the hated West.

## To fight or not to fight?

Some researchers find this completely implausible.

But here's a very typical opinion, expressed by Fyodor Terticky, a senior research fellow at Kookmin University (Seoul). Extract from an interview with him:

"Such an army should be interested in training under real war conditions. Couldn't they arrange with Shoigu for Korean 'volunteers' to fight in Ukraine?"

"Any North Korean general's career would be over for such talks. All the

rumours about Koreans going to the front are in complete contradiction with the state ideology."

"How so? You can't go to the front to fight?"

"This is fatally dangerous for the regime. Because once a person leaves the country, it's impossible to control them. They see the world, which is always a very bad thing, especially if they are in the army. A soldier has weapons and weapons shoot. If you study history, you will see that North Korea is extremely reluctant to send its soldiers into conflict. I remember that they sent pilots to the Vietnam War. How many years have passed since then? In principle, they are not interested in taking over Kyiv. North Korea's priority is to keep the Iron Curtain closed as much as possible, so that everyone only knows what the leadership says about the outside world, and sits quietly and doesn't make a fuss..."

Yes, the Kim dynasty is very much afraid of the possibility of a military coup and is doing its utmost to control its military machine with the carrot and the stick. But academic insight is not always a good judge of the vicissitudes of totalitarianism.

In June 2024, Moscow and Pyongyang signed a strategic cooperation agreement at a high-level summit. The full content of the agreement is not made public, but it discusses military assistance from one country to the other.

In August, a number of Russian internet profiles spoke of the likelihood that the DPRK would contribute to the aggression against Ukraine. This, in turn, was leaked through diplomatic channels. The possible size of the Korean contingent was also mentioned — 100 000. This was followed by a public speech by Igor Korotchenko, a journalist with links to the highest Russian military circles. However, no official statements have been made on the subject.

Soon after, the Western media picked up the story, citing intelligence reports. By early October, the military assistance treaty was already in effect: South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) found that 1 500 troops had been transferred to Vladivostok on 8 October.

According to the NIS, Moscow has

also agreed on a price: Pyongyang would receive \$2 000 per soldier. This means that Kim would receive \$200 million for a combat reinforcement of 100 000 troops. In addition, the DPRK would receive about 700 000 tonnes of rice, which, according to the *NIS*, would cover about half of the annual demand for this product.

Between early and mid-October, up to 3 000 North Korean troops were transferred to Vladivostok by ship and plane. This was only the first batch — soon 10 000 to 12 000 (4 brigades), including at least 500 officers and three generals of the general staff, were on Russian territory.

## Accommodation and preparation

The People's Army personnel arriving in Russia were immediately distributed among the military units; for example, the first batch of arrivals was probably accommodated in the 127<sup>th</sup> Motor Rifle Division, unit No. 44980, stationed in the Primorsky district, in the settlement of Sergeyevka. The other batches, as far as is known, were stationed in at least four other places — Ussuriysk, Ulan-Ude,



Many conscripts are simply cheap labour, with limited combat training.

Yekaterinoslavka and Knyaz-Volkonsky.

On 18 October, the Ukrainian Centre for Strategic Communication and Information Security released a video showing dozens of North Korean soldiers lining up in a large room. They are seen moving from one table to another, where they are issued with Russian uniforms and equipment. An interesting fact was also mentioned: allegedly, the Koreans are issued with fake documents — military cards

stating their nationality as 'Yakut' or 'Buryat' — in an attempt to disguise their true nationality.

It was also mentioned that in addition to weapons, ammunition, clothing and bedding, each Korean is entitled to 50 metres of toilet paper and 300 grams of soap for a month.

The newcomers were given a short basic training, but it seems to have been very difficult for them: the 'internationals' could barely remember a dozen Russian

**DPRK demonstration. Does anyone believe that these 'nuclear backpacks', hastily embroidered with gold ribbons, are anything other than props?**





teams. But it is unlikely that they could have learned anything of substance in just a few weeks, even with some good instructors.

The Russian public also began to be prepared for the new reality, as was the case with military cooperation with Syria: stories about "friendly North Korea — our strategic partner" began to circulate on the Russian internet, accompanied by comments such as "a Russian and a Korean — brothers forever!" In particular, messages were circulated saying that North Korea was "a beautiful country, with good, unpolluted air, no garbage and no unemployment".

Meanwhile, the 'Yakuts' and 'Buryats', generously supplied with soap and command trained, were already on their way to the front by train.

## Between the polygon and the front line

The news that troops from one of the most isolated and militarised countries in the world were joining the aggression against Ukraine had a snowball effect. There were many questions and many answers, often very contradictory. Will they operate separately or be attached to other units? How will their command and control functions be resolved? Will the obvious communication problems be solved? What tasks will the Koreans be assigned — direct participation in combat operations or resupply and other support tasks?

The Russian leadership itself seems to have encountered similar problems. After that, it was just a matter of waiting to see how long it would take for these allies to appear on the front line and when the first contact would take place.

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) reported about the first Koreans in the conflict zone even before the mass transfer of the DPRK contingent to Russia. On 3 October, after the Ukrainians fired rockets at a Russian training area in occupied Donbas, six North Korean soldiers were killed and three wounded. This was also confirmed by Russian social networks, which mentioned that

the North Koreans had come there to gain experience. Except that during the mock exercise the participants were hit by very real fire...

On 21 October, as the Russians attacked towards Pokrovsk in the Donetsk region, two flags, one Russian and one DPRK, were photographed side by side on a spoil heap near the settlement of Tsukuryne. The images of these flags, published on the Russian internet, were most likely a psychological campaign to demoralise the Ukrainians and boost Russian morale. And it is possible that the Koreans had no physical involve-

## THE DPRK contingent in the Russian army is led by North Korean General Kim Yong Bok

He is a mysterious figure who seems to have appeared out of nowhere. Even South Korean intelligence, which takes a keen interest in all aspects of its closest neighbour, does not even know the general's date of birth. His whole life has been one big mystery, and Bok has only recently come into the public eye.

So what exactly is known about this high-ranking military and political figure who will be in charge of integrating the DPRK contingent into the Russian army?

Kim Yong Bok is one of the deputy chiefs of staff of the DPRK People's Army. In 2015, he was appointed head of the Special Task Force. A year later, he joined the political elite by becoming a member of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea — in other words, a politically credible member of the nomenclature.

In 2020, on the 67<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the so-called 'Victory Day' (the end of hostilities on the Korean peninsula), Kim Jong Un presented the General Staff with special nominal pistols. In the official photo, General Kim Yong Bok is seated second to the 'Supreme Leader' — not an accidental detail in a country with a totalitarian hierarchy.

After Putin's visit to the DPRK for the signing of the strategic partnership agreement, Kim Yong Bok has been in the public eye more frequently, almost always alongside Kim Jong Un. This may reflect both the trust he has earned and Kim's desire to let Moscow know that the contingent is being led by a 'tried and tested man'.

In addition to Kim Yong Bok, there are two other DPRK generals in Russia — the chief of intelligence of the General Staff and the chief of the Supreme Operational Command.

ment in the attack. However, on the same day, the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Russian ambassador and lodged a protest against the use of North Korean troops in the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

A few days later, reports of actual combat units were announced: "The first North Korean forces are expected to arrive at the front today, October 23," said Kyrylo Budanov, chief of the Main Directorate of Intelligence of the Ukrainian Defence Ministry (GUR), adding that DPRK troops



Watching footage of the DPRK's military exercises, one gets the feeling that they have a very peculiar understanding of a soldier's skills and tactics. The top photo, by the way, is from an inspection of the 11th Corps in early October 2024, before its contingent was deployed to Russia.

were likely to take part in the fighting in the Kursk region.

**Contact!**

"The first DPRK soldiers have already come under fire in the Kursk region," Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council reported on 4 November.

The battle was short. The Koreans were probably sent on a reconnaissance mission to assess the Ukrainian defensive line and identify its weaknesses. During the exchange of fire, it was reported that a significant number of the attackers had been killed.

The GUR confirmed that several hundred Koreans had been deployed along this front and provided some details of their armament: the Russians had equipped them with newer AK-12 assault rifles, sniper rifles, machine guns, RPG-7 grenade launchers, Phoenix anti-tank rocket systems and 60mm mortars. Some were also equipped with night vision goggles and thermal imaging cameras.

Ukrainian Defence Minister Rustem Umerov said at the time that this was the first direct encounter between Ukrainian Armed Forces and DPRK troops, noting that more Korean involvement was expected in the coming weeks.

However, Oleksandr Syrskyi, Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, assured: "We will destroy both Russian and North Korean troops and all those who threaten Ukraine".

**A turbulent end to the year**

7 November: Russia reportedly has plans for the formation of at least five formations of DPRK troops. Each of these

units would have 2-3 thousand troops.

12 November: The US and South Korea confirm that DPRK troops are involved in the fighting.

20 November: A South Korean NIS report mentions that up to 11 000 North Korean troops have already moved into the Kursk region. Part of this contingent is involved in the fighting, with some of them killed and wounded.

22 November: DPRK troops arrive in the Russian-held Mariupol and eastern Kharkiv region. They are reportedly deployed separately from Russian units, but wear Russian uniforms.

Further details of the units and their affiliations emerged — the DPRK's 92<sup>nd</sup> and 94<sup>th</sup> Brigades of the 11<sup>th</sup> Assault Corps were mentioned, with their personnel assigned to Russia's 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Assault

The 'Assault Corps' — the photo is probably a demonstration, but in Kursk the 'elite' Koreans attacked in much the same way.



Brigade, the 810<sup>th</sup> Separate Marine Brigade and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Motor Rifle Regiment.

By early December, the 'Yakuts' and 'Buryats' became a reality on the front line: in the Kursk region, they took part in the fighting and tried to drive the Ukrainians out of the settlement of Plekhovo — reportedly by running through a minefield first. That extreme aside, the rest should have been easy for them — according to Russian sources, the settlement had been shelled with *Solntsepyok* thermobaric shells before the attack.

Increasingly, the North Koreans were given other support tasks — manning checkpoints, security checkpoints, etc. This shows that the Russians have discovered that the level of 'Kim's Special Forces' praised in propaganda was not so high and that the combat capabilities were not up to the technological level of today's war.

North Korean troops fighting for Moscow in Russia's Kursk region... have also begun to complain of food shortages! Soldiers from North Korea, where there is still a ration card system where even rice is considered good food and meat is a privilege for state employees, have not received enough rations in Russia!

To solve this problem, Russian officials sent Major General Mavliutov, deputy commander of the Leningrad Military District, to the Kursk front.

Meanwhile, images of malnourished Koreans trying unsuccessfully to evade Ukrainian drones began to circulate on the internet. Or footage of them staring in amazement at Ukrainian quadcopters hovering in the air, as if they were some alien creation from another galaxy.

In mid-December, the Ukrainian Special Operations Forces declared the Korean hunting season open: in the first three days, the operators of the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment killed about half a hundred of them and wounded as many. Two armoured vehicles, two cars and a quad bike were also destroyed.

The Ukrainian soldiers also noted some peculiarities of the newcomers from the DPRK: first of all, they have a poor understanding of the fact that the modern aspects of warfare are technology and the destruction of a detected enemy at a distance. Thus, Kim's much-praised 'Spetsnaz' are nothing more

than 'meat attacks': they attack in waves, standing at full height (the Ukrainians call it 'a feast for the machine-gunner'). On the other hand, they are resilient and ruthless.

There have also been reports of a possible incident of 'friendly fire' between Russian forces and the DPRK contingent, as well as isolated cases of desertion by the Koreans. One of these was caused by the Russians simply forgetting them in their positions and leaving them without food.

Just before Christmas, a group of wounded were taken to a hospital in Kursk. The medical staff there had been warned in advance: the patients arriving were 'special'.

"We used to hear rumours that the Koreans were fighting over there, but I didn't believe it. No one had ever seen them here before. I thought it was a lie until they were actually brought to us," said one of the doctors at the hospital. Many of the injured were diagnosed with fractures, and some seemed

frightened and nervous. They have all been isolated from other patients on a separate floor of the hospital building, guarded by police. Only medical staff and interpreters are allowed in.

On 26 December, a photo of the first DPRK soldier to be captured was published on Ukrainian social networks; he was reportedly seriously wounded but could not be rescued and died the next day.

By 23 December, North Korea had lost 1 100 of its troops on the Ukrainian front, according to South Korean intelligence. The total number of DPRK soldiers killed and wounded has now reached 3 000, according to the official Ukrainian figures.

All in all, nothing special, the usual battlefield routine.

Russia has discovered a supply of low-maintenance bio-robots, and Kim has found a way to improve his economy a little. But even so, the Z-Patriots are still trying to argue that there are no Koreans fighting at the front... ■

Russian military ID. The holder's nationality is listed as 'Tuvan', his signature — Korean.





## Who is this 'Elite Corps'?

According to the South Korean NIS, the bulk of the military contingent sent to Russia (four brigades in total) consists of the 11<sup>th</sup> Corps of the DPRK People's Army.

It has also been established that Kim Jong Un inspected two special units of this corps on two occasions (11 September and 2 October) shortly before the troops were sent to Russia.

Also known as the 'Assault Corps', this unit is considered elite by the North Koreans. It is based in the town of Tokchon, in the province of Southern Pyongyang.

The Corps has its origins in the Special Reconnaissance Diversionary

Unit 124, which raided South Korea on 21 January 1968. The target of the North Korean 'Spetsnaz' was the Blue House in Seoul — the residence of the South Korean president. The raid failed — 29 saboteurs were killed or committed suicide to avoid capture, one was captured and only one managed to escape. However, 26 South Korean and 4 US soldiers were killed in the firefight.

The 124<sup>th</sup> Diversionary Unit became the 8<sup>th</sup> Special Purpose Corps in 1969. Since then it has been reorganised and expanded several times. In 1991 it became the basis for the newly formed 11<sup>th</sup> Assault Corps.

All information about this unit is, of course, classified, but the corps is said to consist of about ten brigades and an estimated 60 000-70 000 personnel. Among them:

- Light infantry assault units designed to break through the front line or to be thrown behind the front line to seize base areas.
  - Reconnaissance diversionary brigades, sometimes called 'sniper brigades'. Their main purpose is reconnaissance and small unit tactics — ambush, diversion, raid.
  - Specialised units — airborne, mountain troops, etc.
- Some sources emphasise the 'elitism'



Kim and his entourage visiting one of the 11<sup>th</sup> Corps units. September 2024.

of the 11<sup>th</sup> Corps, but a few clarifications should be made here. In reality, many of the soldiers in this combat corps are heavily indoctrinated and ready to die — not for their families and not for their homeland, but for the ‘Supreme Leader’.

However, fanatical determination alone does not determine combat effectiveness: a lack of knowledge of modern tactics and gaps in technical equipment can also play a role. Hyon Sun Li, a North Korean refugee who served for a time in the 11<sup>th</sup> Corps, puts it this way: "These soldiers are likely to have difficulty adapting to modern warfare. They are not trained to use technology and modern

equipment. They have not had that experience".

Moreover, the speed and initiative of decision-making is completely overshadowed by the fact that the function of the political commander still exists: the company commander cannot assign a combat task without the approval of the ‘*politruk*’<sup>2</sup>. This practice was probably introduced for fear of a military coup, but it is, of course, so flawed under combat conditions that it was abandoned in the Soviet Union as early as 1942.

<sup>2</sup> *Politruk* — (Russian: political officer) — a colloquial term for the deputy commander of a USSR army unit in charge of political and ideological affairs.

Judging from the video footage, the spirit and combat training of the 11<sup>th</sup> Corps is very similar to that of the former Soviet airborne forces — certain privileges, the belief that you are ‘the toughest’, gruelling marches with all the equipment, brick-bashing with every limb, including the head, and not a single operation of strategic importance.

"They will not be super soldiers. But they are young, resilient and physically fit — much better than units made up of middle-aged Russian prisoners," suggests Go Myon Chyon, a senior fellow at the Institute for National Security Strategy in Seoul.

# "COMMANDER OF 250 LIVING A 1 000 FALLE

Lionginas Baliukevičius was destined to live through an extremely tragic period in our country's history. The terrible ordeal that the country had to go through revealed the mature outlook of the young man and his strong principles, according to which he saw freedom not only as freedom for himself, but also as freedom for others.

His vision of the world coincided with the vision of the nation, but, according to Algirdas Greimas, the nation itself never acts as a whole — at certain moments in history it is embodied and manifested by individuals, groups or social classes. L. Baliukevičius is an archetypal example of such a manifestation. Lionginas Baliukevičius-Dzūkas, a partisan commander of the Dainava partisan district, is one of the best-known Lithuanian freedom fighters. In 1948-1949, while fighting in the ranks of the partisans, he wrote a diary in which he described the struggles and reflections of the resistance, known to modern readers today as 'The Diary of a Partisan'. The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas was celebrated on 1 January 2025.

## In the whirlwind of events

Lionginas Baliukevičius was born in Alytus on 1 January 1925. His father, Kostas Baliukevičius, left Vilnius, which was then occupied by the Poles, for patriotic reasons and moved to Alytus, where he later married Joana Petruškevičiūtė, an educated young woman of a quiet nature. There, in Margio Street, next to their house, the Baliukevičius family opened a furniture workshop, which became the family's main source of income. The hard-working family lived well and even had their own car, which at the time was not only an unaffordable luxury for many townspeople, but also a technological marvel. In 1926, the Baliukevičius family welcomed their second child, a boy named Kostas.

In 1934, Lionginas began attending the Alytus State gymnasium. He was very



# UNDER NG AND ABOUT EN PARTISANS"

ALGIS KAŠĖTA  
DALIUS ŽYĖELIS

active from childhood and loved sports, being a member of the school basketball and football teams. He also enjoyed military games and was active in the school's marksmen and scout clubs. His long-time school friend Vincas Lapinskas remembers him as follows: *"Lionginas was a diligent, friendly, honest, intelligent student who hated lying. He was eager to absorb everything, to master everything, to participate in everything, but he lacked a little discipline <...>. He was a great patriot of Lithuania".*

The family was, of course, also an impor-

tant influence on Lionginas's character and views. Jūra Kupriūnaitė-Želionienė, who was a few years younger than Lionginas and a former student of Alytus gymnasium, remembers him as an exemplary student: *"Lionginas came from a good background — a well-educated and extremely energetic student, the kind of person who used his energy for good causes. What*

*stood out was that he was very respectful of older people — teachers. For us younger students, he was an example to follow...".*

And it was at the Alytus Secondary School, when — as it seemed at the time — the historical turmoil that shook Lithuania was still a long way off, that the fates of several future Lithuanian freedom fighters and commanders of the Dainava



partisan district intertwined. The partisans Juozas Gegužis, Mykolas Babrauskas and Antanas Kudzys studied there together in the same class. One class above them was L. Baliukevičius.

Antanas Kudzys remembers those times and the friendship between the future comrades as follows: "Juozas Gegužis (Dainava District commander 1950-1951) came from the countryside and always kept a low profile. Lionginas Baliukevičius, on the other hand, was a childhood friend of Mikas Babrauskas (who later became the head of the Dainava District Public Section and the publisher of the partisan press). Lionginas studied in the class above his. It was a strange friendship. Both were ready to give their lives for Lithuania, but they belonged to different organisations — Mykolas was a member of the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters (LLKS, Lietuvos laisvės kovotojų sąjunga), while Lionginas belonged to the Lithuanian Freedom Army (LLA, Lietuvos laisvės armija). There were major tactical differences between the two organisations. It was already clear to everyone that the Germans would lose the war; the Soviets would occupy Lithuania again and

it would be necessary to fight again for Lithuania's freedom. It was time to decide whether to take up arms, prepare to go into the woods and resist the Soviet invaders in every way possible, as the LLA proposed, or to work as teachers, educating the public and preserving them for the future, as the LLKS, to which Mykolas belonged, proposed. Lionginas Baliukevičius was unequivocally in favour of armed resistance. Sometimes, during a discussion, Mykolas and Lionginas would get so angry with each other that I had to spend a long time trying to reconcile them afterwards".

Naturally, the young men were also affected by the historical cataclysms that followed — the first Soviet occupation and, in particular, the deportations of June 1941, which painfully affected many of their family friends. The Baliukevičius family furniture workshop, like all private businesses, was nationalised by the Bolsheviks in 1941. A number of families they knew were exiled... This undoubtedly greatly influenced the young men's later life choices.

After graduating from secondary school, in 1942 Lionginas enrolled at the Faculty

of Medicine at the University of Kaunas. However, he only stayed there for one year. On 16 February 1944, General Povilas Plechavičius made a radio broadcast calling on young people to join the 'The Lithuanian Territorial Defense Force' (lit. Lietuvos Vietinė Rinktinė, LVR). It was agreed with the German occupation authorities that the Lithuanian troops would fight against the Soviets and the Polish partisans (Polish: Armia Krajowa), who were terrorising the Lithuanian population, and defend their country against the approaching Red Army. The Germans promised not to interfere in the LVR activities. And so, driven by his patriotic convictions, L. Baliukevičius, a first-year student, was one of the tens of thousands of young men who immediately responded to the call and enlisted in the LVR. The huge number of volunteers frightened the Germans; at the time, the SS battalions they organised were being boycotted by Lithuanian men. And the Germans broke their promise. On 9 May they ordered all the battalions of the LVR to come under their command — to become auxiliary police battalions. When the LVR leadership refused to

A student's card of Lionginas Baliukevičius at the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. This shows that on 19 September 1942 L. Baliukevičius was admitted to study at the Faculty of Medicine.





Statement by L. Baliukevičius, dated 19 July 1946, requesting readmission to medical studies at Vytautas Magnus University. A pencil notation at the bottom of the document refers to a military service card issued in Kaunas on 5 July 1946, but it is likely that this was forged.

comply, the Germans managed to disarm some of them — about 3 500 men were sent to Germany to work or guard airfields. However, most of the men managed to escape with their weapons and hid wherever they could — with relatives, in the woods, etc. On 11 July 1944, amidst the echo of the cannons of the approaching front line, L. Baliukevičius bid a sad farewell to his parents (a few weeks later, his father was killed after a bomb fragment accidentally hit his head) and went to join the units of the Homeland Defence Force (lit. *Tėvynės apsaugos rinktinė, TVR*), which were being formed in the Žemaitija region. He later described it with regret: "Nothing came of the Homeland Defence squads. We had hoped to defend the homeland in disgusting German uniforms, but the Germans didn't differ much from the Communists. They deceived us and used us..."

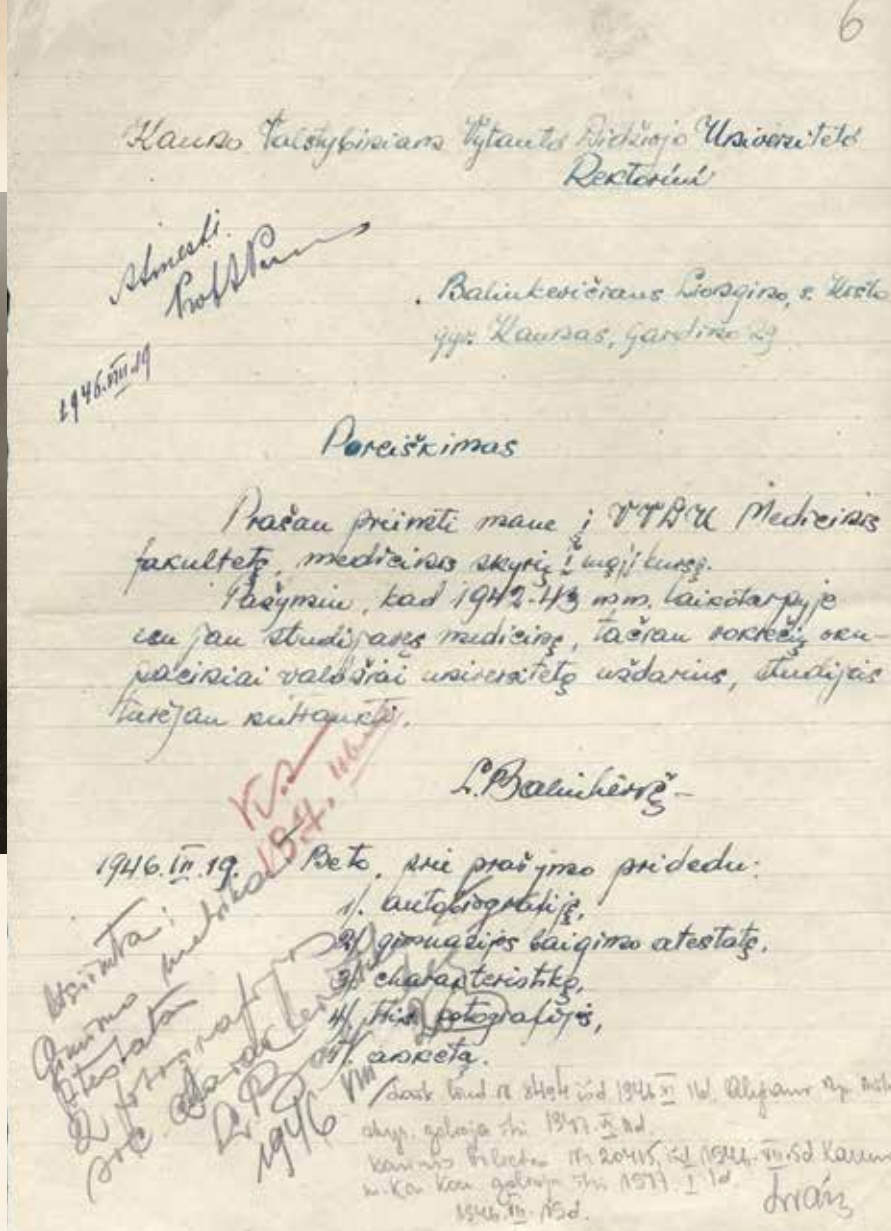
Under armed guard, L. Baliukevičius and his comrades were transported to Czechoslovakia to guard German airfields. On 15 May 1945, as a private in the German army, he was captured by the Russians. For a year he was tossed around prison camps in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Ukraine. He finally managed to escape from the Donbass coal mines in Ukraine, where prisoners

of war were being forced to work in slave-like conditions. In the early summer of 1946, physically exhausted, Lionginas was finally able to return to his homeland. However, as a fugitive, it was too risky for him to stay at home in Alytus — the Soviet security services had already interrogated his family and inquired about his whereabouts.

On 11 June 1946, in Alytus, Lionginas managed to obtain a temporary registration certificate and a military identity card. This success encouraged him to take the next step — to apply to the Chancellor of Kaunas State Vytautas Magnus University (VDU) for admission to the first year of the Faculty of Medicine. In his application, he stated that he had already studied medicine in 1942-1943, but had to abandon his studies when the German occupation authorities closed the university. However, he did not mention on his application form that he had been involved with the Scouts,

the LVR, or that he had been deported to Germany and captured by the Soviet army as a member of the *Wehrmacht*, or that he had escaped from the labour camp and returned illegally to Lithuania. However, his application form also contained a note in red pencil (not his handwriting) — "was a scout for 4 years". This indicates that L. Baliukevičius did not pass the screening test of the *Chekists* supervising the university. There was also a numerical code, also in red, which led to the Chancellor's decision of 19 August 1946 to reject the application.

Lionginas had the option of obtaining false identity papers and becoming a teacher, according to his former school friend A. Kudzys. Many people did just that in those days. There was a shortage of teachers in the villages and towns, and the headmasters of the schools were willing to ignore many things. But it is likely that L. Baliukevičius did not even consider this option...



Partisan Lionginas Baliukevičius-Dzūkas.



## In the ranks of partisans

L. Baliukevičius sought other opportunities and soon joined the armed resistance against the Soviet invaders. His later comrade Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas described him in his memoirs as follows: "Dzūkas wanted to go to the West, but he did not succeed. For some time he was in hiding with his relatives. There he met the partisans — Ūselis, Tēvelis and Gegužė. As I have already mentioned, these three partisans committed crimes in their time, for which all of them were later sentenced to death by the decision of The Partisan Field Court".

Dzūkas had to serve with them in the same unit for some time, as the partisans were no longer able to stay together in large groups due to the constant Soviet raids in the region. Even then, Ūselis, Tēvelis and Gegužė were known for their lack of discipline. They let themselves be treated by the locals, and they were no strangers to merry gatherings, especially if there were girls present.

Such things, however, did not suit the character of Dzūkas, for he was well aware of the true goals and tasks of the partisan struggle. Things turned out in such a way that L. Baliukevičius came into contact with Babrauskas, a friend from his school days, who at that time was a teacher in Daugai and was in contact with Vaclovas Voveris-Žaibas. It was through the mediation of Babrauskas that a meeting took place between L. Baliukevičius and V. Voveris-Žaibas. The partisans apparently had a positive view of each other and of further possibilities for cooperation, because Dzūkas was immediately accepted into the group of partisans led by Žaibas.

Unfortunately, Babrauskas himself was less fortunate. Shortly afterwards, around Christmas 1946, he was tipped off and arrested by the MGB. According to the arrest warrant, Babrauskas was arrested "for criminal links with armed bandits of the nationalist underground since autumn 1945, for participating in the meetings of the 'Žaibas' Platoon and for bringing L. Baliukevičius into the Platoon". Fortunately, Babrauskas managed to escape these charges, avoided being sent to the camp and, as we shall see, became a comrade of L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas.

On 1 September 1946, L. Baliukevičius was enlisted as a private in the Geležinis Vilkas group of the Dzūkai Detachment of the Dainava partisan district. At that time, the group was led by Vaclovas Voveris-Žaibas — one of the bra-

vest partisan commanders in the Dzūkija region — with whom L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas soon became very close friends. This partisan unit was active in the parishes of Daugai and Alovė in Alytus district, and had more than 30 fighters at that time. These areas were not completely foreign to L. Baliukevičius, as his mother's sister lived in Viesmūnai, and he and his parents had often visited the area during his childhood.

Thus L. Baliukevičius joined the ranks of the partisans at a time when the armed underground resistance was entering a new phase: the days when large groups of partisans boldly attacked the Soviet administration in the centres of the districts or 'hunted down the stribai like mice' were over, and when they encountered the NKVD they engaged in open and prolonged fighting. Such operational tactics had resulted in heavy losses for the units. Fierce battles, ambushes, enemy spies, all this thinned out the ranks of the partisans, and new recruits were not enough to replenish the ranks (by 1946 about 400 fighters had already been killed in the Alytus district). The occupiers filled all the district centres with NKVD army garrisons, whose large forces reacted swiftly to any partisan presence. In the end, the partisans were forced to avoid open and prolonged clashes with the enemy forces, to hide more and to cover their tracks. The fighters divided into smaller units and began to camp in divisions. It became necessary to prepare underground shelters — the bunker was the main place of refuge for the partisans. The 'combing' of forests and villages forced the fighters to crawl deeper and deeper underground, spending weeks in the bunkers. However, despite the difficult conditions, in the spring of 1946 the partisans of Dzūkija managed to unite and create the Dainava partisan district, which consisted of military territorial units — formations, groups (battalions) and squads. The territory of the district included the present-day districts of Alytus, Lazdijai, Varėna and parts of the neighbouring districts of Marijampolė, Prienai, Trakai and Šalčininkai.

The partisans of the Dainava District and the Dzūkai Detachment were led at that time by the former Lithuanian Army captain Domininkas Jėčys-Ažuolis, who was known to L. Baliukevičius from his

childhood, as he had been the deputy commander of the Alytus Detachment of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union in 1935-1940. In the summer of 1946, the command of the Dainava District ordered the combat units to carry out a number of tasks, one of the most important of which was to lay ambushes for the officials and soldiers of the occupying power. L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas had to experience his first baptism of battle. His surviving service record contains short entries about his participation in these battles and encounters: "On 04.09.1946, in the village of Rimėnai, Daugai parish, in ambushes organised by the partisans, the men killed 1 *istrebiteles* (rus. *istrebitel* — armed soviet collaborator) and wounded 1. 1 partisan

was killed and 1 wounded. The ambush in the village of Rakatanskiai, Daugai parish, on 14.11.1946 was particularly successful. Almost the entire Daugai garrison was destroyed — 13 MVD men and 5 *istrebiteles* were killed, although there were also losses: 1 partisan was killed and 3 slightly wounded. On 03.01.1947, on the Alytus-Daugai road, in the Gediminas forest, the fighters cut down 2.5 km of telephone poles, destroyed 2 trucks and 1 car, and killed 1 enemy officer".

This was a baptism of fire for L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas that only strengthened the friendship and trust between him and the leader of the group, V. Voveris-Žaibas. Not surprisingly, Žaibas is frequently mentioned in L. Baliukevičius' diary,

Comrades Lionginas Baliukevičius-Dzūkas and Vaclovas Voveris-Žaibas. Photographed in 1947.



which he began writing in 1948. In one of the entries from August 1948, *Dzūkas*, overwhelmed by depressing thoughts, writes: *"These days I'm flooded with images of the past, all of them are so dear and beautiful. Unexpectedly, your heart seizes up: the passage of time, youth, and love — everything is flying past you... In front of us is the unknown, a terrible unknown. Those Anglo-Saxon diplomats in Moscow are deciding the fate of millions. I have doubts they remember us at all (I have in mind here not just the partisans and Lithuania, but all of Eastern Europe). They probably can't agree on the spheres of influence, so who cares about us here? <...> It seems like Žaibas is also overcome with similar moods. We remind each other that we are grown men: I'm twenty-three and he is twenty-six. We didn't notice when we grew up, maturing too soon with guns in our hands and danger around us. Can it be we are grown men already? It seems that not so long ago we were children, students. How time flies!"*

As time went on, taking part in active military action became more and more of a luxury. And when the partisan commanders began to notice *Dzūkas's* literary skills, analytical thinking and dutifulness, they began to attribute to him another weapon of political struggle — the underground press. What the partisan headquarters lacked most of all were intelligent, educated and creative people. And so, on 1 February 1947, *Dzūkas* was appointed chief of staff of the Geležinis Vilkas group, responsible for the publishing and information dissemination.

In the spring of 1947, when L. Baliukevičius-*Dzūkas* was on his way to the first big meeting of the commanders of the Dainava partisan district in the Punios Šilas forest, called by D. Jėčys-Ažuolis, he met the then commander of the Merkio Detachment, reserve lieutenant Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas. The latter would later recall: *"He seemed to me to be closed off, not very talkative and a little bit clumsy. I got to know him better on a later trip to meet with Ažuolis. It was interesting to talk about Alytus, where I had spent the last years of my free life (A. Ramanauskas had taught at the Alytus Teachers' Seminary for several years) <...> At that time, I couldn't have imagined from my conversations with *Dzūkas* that in the*

*future he would become my most diligent and honest comrade"*.

Indeed, beneath *Dzūkas's* reserved and often cold exterior, there was a passionate character and a sensitive soul who, even under the brutal conditions of the partisan war, retained the ideals of his youth, his love for his country and its people. *"I often think, who are you, my homeland? Why are your children so strange, so stubborn in their own way? Where does this great power of resistance come from? I feel that I am falling more and more in love with my country. If someone today offered me freedom in America, I would not go. For it is better to be killed here, fighting honourably, than wait with my hands clasped for something to drop from somewhere,"* L. Baliukevičius-*Dzūkas* wrote in his diary.

In the same spring of 1947, L. Baliukevičius received the painful news that his mother and his mother's brother Alfonsas Petruškevičius (a well-known agronomist during the independence years) had been exiled to Siberia. All the family property was confiscated. Sooner or later, the fate of exile awaited all relatives of the partisans. Later, in his diary, *Dzūkas* reflected on the painful subject of the fate of the family members of every freedom fighter: *"<...> Two kinds of great forces keep colliding: either you sacrifice your parents by joining our ranks, which makes our struggle easier by supporting the whole nation and awakening it; or, for the sake of your parents, you survive until you are arrested and taken away, most likely with your parents. This second scenario is of no benefit to the movement"*.

L. Baliukevičius' uncle died in 1955 in the Tyumen Oblast (Western Siberia), and his mother returned to Lithuania from exile in 1956. She died in 1972 and was buried in Naujoji Vilnia. It was while she was still in exile that she received the news of the tragic deaths of her two sons, Lionginas and Kostas. *"The mothers of my fate, only they will understand the pain of my heart. Only they, only they can understand..."* she described her pain in a letter to her sister.

L. Baliukevičius' younger brother Kostas, a student at the Mechanics Faculty of Kaunas University, became a partisan liaison in 1948. *"Just as Lionginas stood out among the older students, Kostas stood out among the younger ones. While studying in Kaunas, he literally spent his*

*summer holidays in the forests of Dzūkija, at his brother's side. In 1949, when the school year was coming to an end, he told me that it was no longer possible to live legally — that he was going to go to the forest for good. But wow, how he went out! During a break between lectures, he just stood up in front of the whole auditorium and gave a speech: "Please allow me to say goodbye to you all. I wish you all a successful graduation, to achieve your dreams and goals, to serve Lithuania. But I am leaving to join the partisans. Long live free Lithuania!" He spoke at length, sincerely and passionately. And no one rushed to file a complaint,"* is how A. Kudzys remembers Kostas Baliukevičius.

K. Baliukevičius (*Tylius, Rainys*) was killed on 16 February 1951 while working as the head of the Public Section of the headquarters of the Southern Lithuania (Nemunas) partisan region.

## The underground press

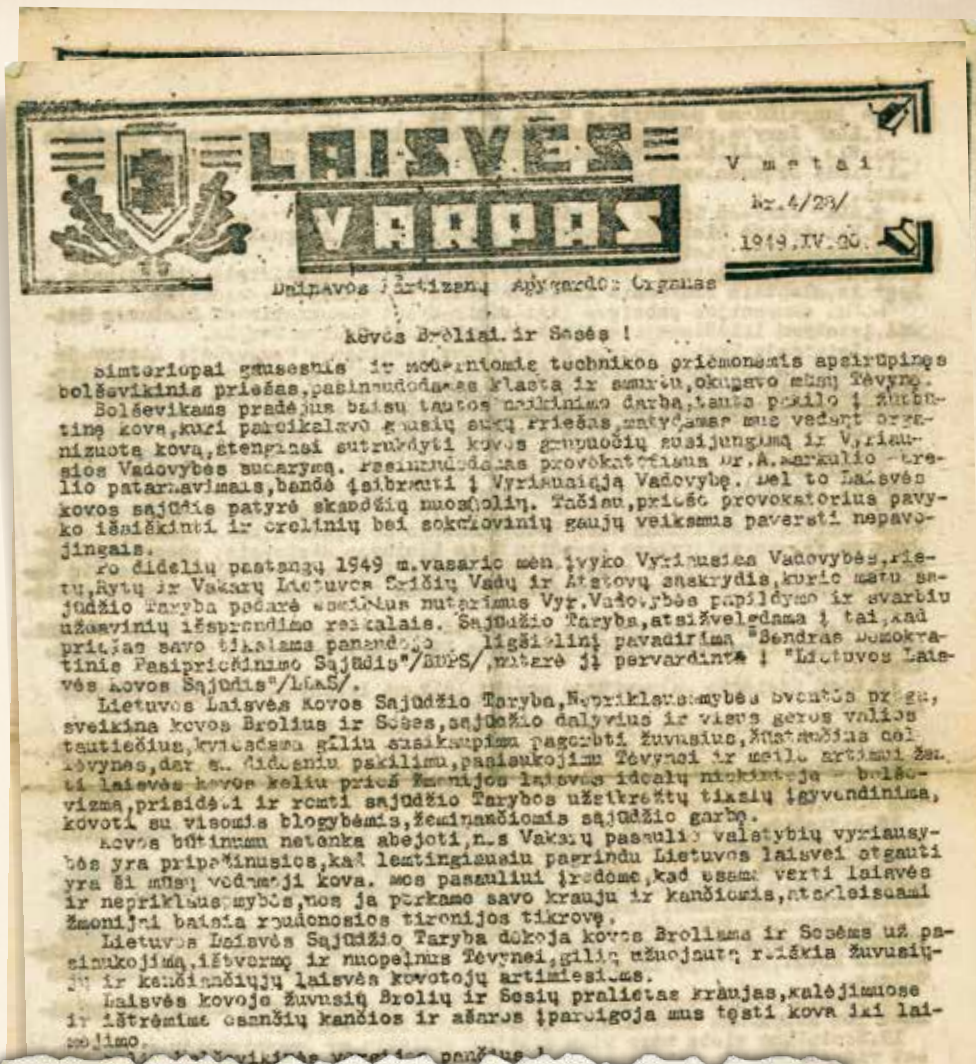
The changes in L. Baliukevičius-*Dzūkas's* partisan life became evident when, after the death of D. Jėčys-Ažuolis (in August 1947), commander of the Dainava partisan district, on 24 and 25 September 1947, in the forests of Marcinkonys parish near Varėna, he and the other commanders of the combat units, elected A. Ramanauskas-Vanagas as the new commander of the partisan military district. The latter appealed to the commander of the Geležinis Vilkas group, V. Voveris-Žaibas, to allow him to recruit L. Baliukevičius-*Dzūkas* to the newly established district headquarters. *Dzūkas* had to move from Daugai parish to the forests of Merkinė parish. The district headquarters was established there, 5 km from Merkinė, near the village of Purpliai. L. Baliukevičius was appointed adjutant to the district commander, A. Ramanauskas-Vanagas, and soon after he was appointed head of the press and propaganda unit. The new headquarters revived the publication of the Dainava District partisan newspaper '*Laisvės varpas*' ('The Bell of Freedom'). *Dzūkas* and *Vanagas* took turns writing articles and editorials. A drum press was used to reproduce the newspaper. The circulation was about 1 800 copies. The

conditions for publishing were very difficult: printing had to be done in a cramped, usually damp, underground shelter, and there was a constant shortage of tools and materials for reproduction, such as paper or ink. When they received a typewriter with Russian characters, the men decided to influence the enemy not only by force of arms but also by means of the printed word, publishing a newspaper in Russian, 'Svobodnoye slovo', dedicated to the soldiers of the occupying army. It dealt with the absurdity of Soviet propaganda and the harm of communist ideology. The one-page newspaper was put up at night in the squares of towns in the Dzūkija region. It was also distributed in Vilnius and Kaunas. According to Vanagas, "Dzūkas knew Russian best because he had studied it at school <...>. I had Dzūkas regularly listen to the radio news in German and Russian and then write summaries of the news to be published in the newspapers 'Laisvės varpas' and 'Svobodnoye slovo'."

The partisans saw the underground press as an essential weapon against the lies of the Soviet party press and the poison of Bolshevik ideology. A. Ramanauskas-Vanagas wrote in his memoirs that the topics were relevant, the facts were not exaggerated and the news, although not encouraging, was true. As a result, the partisan press gained the full trust of the population. The villagers did not read Soviet newspapers at all, but they eagerly read the partisan press. It was an indispensable tool for the development of the people's spirit and consciousness. L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas was convinced that "our strength lies in our souls, in our hearts, not in the weapons". His thoughts were later echoed by Professor A. Maceina, who was in forced emigration: "The struggle against Bolshevism will be won not so much with the weapons of war, but with the weapons of the spirit".

The partisans believed in international law and moral politics. Like many people in Lithuania, they "counted the days until war broke out". Having a more sober view of the international political situation, partisan leaders often doubted that a military

Dainava partisan district headquarters. From left: sitting Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas, Jonas Jakubavičius-Rugys, standing Lionginas Baliukevičius-Dzūkas, Julius Makaravičius-Zilvitis, lying Viktoras Kazlauskas-Vanagas. 6 July 1948.



ryba  
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conflict between the democratic Western countries and the totalitarian Soviet Union would come soon. The inaction of the politicians of the free world towards the enslaved nations was a source of concern and frustration. "Oh, those English politicians! They talk and talk, buy and sell everything, entire nations," Dzūkas wrote bitterly.

The headquarters of the Dainava partisan district often changed location to avoid detection. In the winter of 1947-1948 it was located in the yard of a resident of Dokučka village in Merkinė parish, in the summer of 1948 — in bunkers near Ilgininkai

and Meškučiai villages, and in the autumn of 1948 — in the forest of Kalesninkai in Daugai parish. These places were very familiar to Dzūkas, as he had spent the first years of his partisanship in these areas. In 1948 he was promoted by the district commander to the rank of partisan NCO.

In November 1948, A. Ramanauskas-Vanagas left for the all-Lithuanian congress of Lithuanian partisan leaders in Žemaitija. After several months of working hard to get the underground press published and dealing with other organisational matters of the partisan district, Dzūkas missed

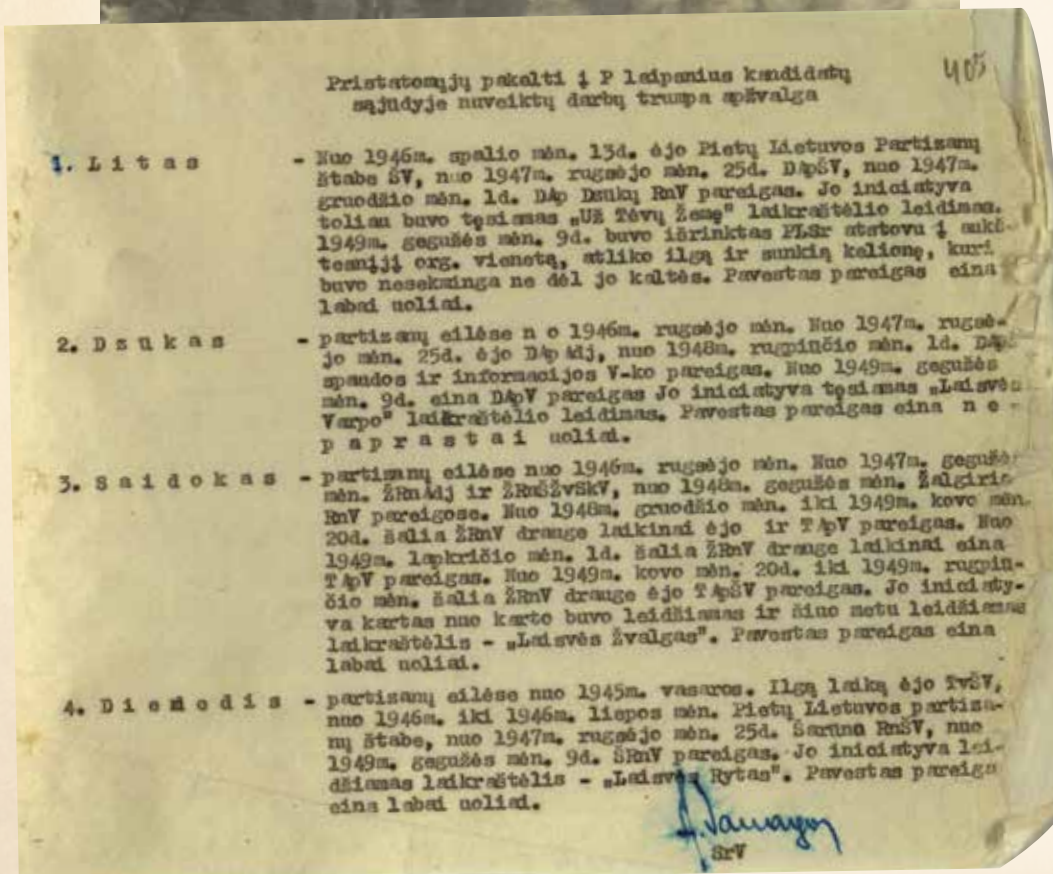
his close friend more than ever: "I missed Vanagas very much. I am better at working with him than anyone else, and we know each other well," he wrote.

Before Vanagas' departure, the command of the Dainava partisan district was entrusted to Benediktas Labenskas-Kariūnas, the commander of the Šarūnas Detachment. Also, in order to attract more intellectual talent and strengthen the information propaganda work, the partisans of the district headquarters invited two young writers — Kostas Kubilinskas-Kapsas and Algirdas Skinkys-Vilnis — to work in the headquarters. However, it soon became clear that this was a fatal mistake.

The 7<sup>th</sup> of March 1949 was a particularly painful day for L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas and for all the partisans. The Soviet security agents K. Kubilinskas and A. Skinkys cleverly infiltrated the ranks of the partisans and cunningly murdered the acting commander of the Dainava partisan district B. Labenskas-Kariūnas; they led the MVD troops to the headquarters of the Kazimieraitis Detachment, where the enemy was able to kill the commander of the said detachment and the Geležinis Vilkas group, V. Voveris-Žaibas, together with his

three comrades. L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas escaped the disaster by sheer luck and partly by precaution, but the betrayal and death of his close comrades made him suffer greatly. He wrote in his diary: "Žaibas, dear Žaibas, can it be that you are really gone? How can it be that you were destined to die now, when we need you most? I'm staring down into the depths of the pit, my eyes examining the bunker's entry, and I'm trying to imagine how this terrible tragedy took place. And it almost seems that I can see you, Žaibas, in the bunker, hurling grenades out through the opening. How for the last time, you are telling the men what needs to be done. How you were the one who forced your way out into this hell and fought! You must have

**Southern Lithuania Partisan Area Command. From the left: Vincas Daunoras-Ungurys, Lioginas Baliukevičius-Dzūkas, Sergijus Staniškis-Litas, Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas and Kostas Baliukevičius-Rainys. Photographed in 1949.**



**Descriptions of the partisan fighters by the commander of the Southern Lithuania partisan area, Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas, to the members of the partisan leadership.**



Dainava partisan district commander Lionginas Baliukevičius-Dzūkas (seated in the centre) with fighters from the Kazimieraitis Detachment. Photographed in autumn 1949.

terrified our enemies! Žaibas, my dear Žaibas, you are gone... Inside of me, there's so much hatred growing towards the traitors. Those damned cowards, those bastards! If only I could get my hands on you! I'd give up years of my life to look you in the eyes. Then you'd find out how a traitor dies".

A. Ramanauskas-Vanagas returned from Žemaitija six months later, at the beginning of April 1949. On 19 May he convened a joint meeting of the commanders of the Dainava partisan district, attended by the commanders of eleven district detachments and groups. Vanagas informed the participants about the merger of the Lithuanian partisan areas and the establishment of the High Command, and presented the decisions of the Council of the Lithuanian Freedom Struggle Movement (LLKS), which were approved and it was decided to make efforts to implement them. The merger of the armed resistance organisations, which finally took place, strengthened the partisans' determination to continue the struggle that had already lasted for five years. Vanagas also announced an order of 16 February 1949 by Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas, chairman of the presidium of the LLKS, that L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas should be promoted to the rank of partisan lieutenant. And since Vanagas himself had been confirmed by the High Command as the new commander of the partisan area of Southern Lithuania and was to form its headquarters, it was decided to elect a new commander of the partisans of the Dainava District.

## Partisan commander of the Dainava District

On 19 May 1949, at a meeting of the district commanders, L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas was unanimously elected commander of the partisans of the Dainava District, and at the same time he was given the task of temporarily taking over the duties of the commander of the Kazimieraitis Detachment. "Commander of 250 living and about 1 000 fallen partisans," Dzūkas succinctly described his new position in his diary. The burden of responsibility for all the partisans in the entire district was heavy. But it was not by chance that L. Baliukevičius was entrusted with this position. Having visited the partisan units in the district several times together with A. Ramanauskas-Vanagas, he was well aware of the situation in the fighting units, knew many of the partisans personally and had authority and trust among them. He also had the qualities necessary for a commander: a strong will to fight, a great sense of duty and strict principles. At the same time, he was kindhearted and sincere. And it was no easy task to communicate with the men who volunteered in the forests of Dzūkija because, according to Dzūkas, "they are all colorful and stubborn types with no one to oversee them. All of them have stared into the face of death many times. They are not afraid of death, so what else is there to fear? That's why you need the right approach in order to lead them".

L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas took over the leadership of the district at a particularly critical time, when the chances of receiving help from abroad were diminishing, and in the first six months of 1949 alone 121 partisans were killed in the district, i.e. one third of all fighters.

Dzūkas actively began rebuilding the district's weakest organisational links. He visited the units, appointed new commanders to replace those who had died, and explained to them the challenges that the organisation was facing. Strengthening the morale of the fighters was also very important.

In early 1950, Dzūkas wrote to the command of the LLKS about the situation in the Dainava partisan district, stating that "the numerous deaths and the pressure from the enemy <...> and the lack of experienced partisan commanders make the situation undoubtedly difficult. However, there is no lack of spirit, determination and will to overcome the obstacles". Despite the lack of intellectual talent in the district, the district headquarters continued to publish a wide variety of underground press. L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas started a periodical for the fighters of the district called 'Dainavos partizanas' ('Dainava Partisan'). The publication, produced on a typewriter in an edition of 10 copies, paid much attention to the creative work of partisans. Dzūkas also actively participated in the publication of the newspaper 'Partizanas' ('Partisan') of the Southern Lithuania region. In his report to the command of the LLKS, Dzūkas described the difficulties and problems

of publishing as follows: *"The publication 'Partizanas' was intended to be published monthly, but due to the enemy's activities it was not always possible. Four issues were published in 1949. In 1949 the partisans of Dainava suffered two total destructions of their headquarters with all printing facilities — on 7 March and 23 September"*.

In the same year, 1949, L. Baliukevičius also received some help. M. Babrauskas, an old friend from his youth, who had introduced him to V. Voveris-Žaibas a few years earlier, joined the ranks of the partisans. Immediately, Babrauskas-Vaišvilkas was appointed to the responsible position of the head of the public section of the district headquarters of Dainava. The statute of the LLKS stated that the Public Section was responsible for *"the spiritual education of the members of the movement, participants and other residents of the region for the liberation struggle"*, i.e. the Public Section was responsible for the partisan press, proclamations and other, in today's terms, military-partisan periodicals. Thus, the entry of Babrauskas-Vaišvilkas into the ranks of the partisans greatly facilitated the work of L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas on the publishing front.

It is known that in the summer of 1949 the partisan commander of the Dainava District, L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas, together with Babrauskas-Vaišvilkas, visited the Šarūnas Detachment. The commander of the unit at that time was Juozas Gegužis-Diemedis. One could say that it was a reunion of former students of Alytus gymnasium. The only difference was that the participants were wearing Lithuanian partisan uniforms instead of the suits appropriate for such an occasion.

## The death

Unable to wipe out the fighters by brute force alone, the occupying authorities organised secret operations with the help of the MGB-MVD. In order to break the organised fight for freedom, scores of newly recruited spies and agents were used. The targets were the partisan leaders. On 23 September 1949, Kazimieras Pyplys-Mažytis, the LLKS commissioner for foreign relations, who had returned to Lithuania in May of that year, was killed in a battle in the Kalesninkai forest when the enemy discovered the headquarters.

Julius Makaravičius-Žilvitis, a staff officer, was also killed. On 15 December 1949, Jurgis Krikščionas-Rimvydas, chief of communications and intelligence at Dainava District headquarters, was killed in a forest hideout near Szlinokiemie, Poland. Babrauskas-Vaišvilkas was killed on 17 May 1950. Although the losses were painful, L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas wrote to the High Command of the LLKS about the future plans of the partisans in Dzūkija that *"as long as there are partisans, the fighting will continue, perhaps not as it was a few years ago, because the continuing occupation has naturally imposed new forms and methods of fighting, perhaps there will be fewer armed strikes against the enemy, but in such a case a partisan will strive to maintain the inextinguishable love for the homeland and the desire for true independence through the written word"*.

However, the night of 24 June 1950 was also a fateful one for Lionginas Baliukevičius-Dzūkas. Through Kazys Kalanta-Aidas, an agent who had infiltrated the ranks of the partisans, the MGB leadership was informed that Dzūkas would be staying in a bunker in Žaliamiškis, at the junction of Leipalingis and Merkinė parishes, during a tour of the partisan units. At midnight, after killing Anastazas Kaknevičius-Švedrys, a partisan guarding the entrance to the bunker, the traitor led an MGB task force to the exit storm positions. The MGB documents mention that during the storming of the bunker the following partisans were killed: L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas, commander of the Dainava partisan district, his adjutant Augustinas Babrauskas-Radvila (brother of M. Babrauskas-Vaišvilkas), A. Kaknevičius-Švedrys and Antanas Vailionis-Špokas, commander of the village of Juozapavičius.

However, Angelė Žekaitė-Vilimienė, an eyewitness to these tragic events, claims that the facts recorded in the MGB documents are inaccurate and distorted. Several years ago, the authors of this article wrote down her account of the events that took place in Žaliamiškis on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1950. Her recollections are truly remarkable, unpublished and important, and it is therefore worthy of presentation in its entirety: *"I was 16 at the time. All the events are deeply engraved in my memory. Our family lived in Žaliamiškis, in the village of Dubraviškės, in the parish of Leipalingis. My father's cousin was a well-known*

*partisan of Dzūkija — Antanas Grušauskas-Siaubas. So we had contacts with the 'forest' from the very beginning of the resistance movement. In the spring of 1950, the partisans built a bunker in the forest near our homestead. I have no doubt that this was coordinated with my father, Adolfas Žėkas. Our family became the keepers of the bunker — we delivered messages to the partisans and fed them. It was not easy to maintain the bunker, but my father was a great patriot of Lithuania and this was the best he could do to contribute to the freedom struggle movement.*

*The bunker was frequented by the partisan Sapiega, A. Kaknevičius-Švedrys, Kazys Kalanta and a young boy whom nobody knew — small, weak and very poorly dressed — we assumed that he had escaped deportation or had been taken in by the partisans after the Soviets had shot his parents; we simply called him Piemenėlis. Another partisan was Antanas Vailionis-Špokas (Dainava District, commander of Juozapavičius unit) — he was not a regular visitor there. He would come, stay a few days and leave.*

*24 June 1950 was a very hot day. Mid-summer. Sapiega came to our homestead and told us that the commanders were coming to the bunker in the evening. He asked us to prepare some food and bedding. When my mother and I took it to the bunker in the evening, the commanders were not there yet. They must have arrived a few hours before the tragedy. Sapiega had gone somewhere because the bunker was small and there was not enough room for everyone. Kalanta had gone somewhere too. He was always going out, supposedly to get food. We were very suspicious of him from the beginning.*

*At midnight our dog started barking. We knew from the barking that something was wrong. And sure enough, the forest suddenly erupted with the explosions of grenades, followed by the firing of various weapons. Just as it had suddenly started, it suddenly stopped. Stribai came into our yard. First they stabbed the dog with a bayonet, then they told us to get the horse ready. My mother and I took the horse out, but the angry stribai started beating us with their rifle butts and shoved us inside. They prepared the horse themselves and rode off into the woods towards the bunker. After a while, at dawn, they came back. Four bloody*

bodies were thrown into the horse cart. They were placed right under the windows of our house. They were arranged in a row, as if in a hierarchy. As I remember it now, Baliukevičius was the first to be laid out, followed by his deputy, Švedrys, a young boy with a handsome face, and the young boy Piemenėlis. When I went out to fetch our horse, the sribai grabbed me by the neck and pushed me on top of the dead partisans. I got covered in blood. But I was in no hurry to get up. I stumbled and tried to look at the faces of the partisans. Their faces were bloody, but recognisable...

Some time later a lorry arrived. When they started throwing the bodies into its back, it looked to me as if their legs and arms were really badly battered, because they were swinging in all directions. The lorry with the bodies of the dead partisans drove off in the direction of Leipalingis.

I can firmly testify that the partisan A. Vailionis-Špokas was not among the dead. Although now everyone writes that he was. And his name is engraved on the monument. I knew Vailionis well, I would have recognised him. It was not Vailionis who was among the dead, but the boy Piemenėlis. Stribai must have been so angry because Vailionis had slipped through their fingers. I never saw Vailionis with my own eyes after that, but I know that the Russians had been laying ambushes for a long time, both in his home village of Jovaišiai and in our homestead. It is said that he was shot near the village of Jovaišiai in October 1950.

I visited the site of the bunker more than a year later, in the summer of 1951."

## Commemoration

Over the years, the place where L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas and his comrades were killed was forgotten — the site of the bunker became overgrown with trees and bushes, but some of the old inhabitants of the nearest villages still kept at least an approximate location in their memories.

In 1999, the authors of this article, with the help of Juozas Petraška and Vytautas Nenartonis, partisans from Dainava District who were still alive at that time, and the aforementioned old residents of the surrounding villages,

searched the part of Žaliamiškis they had indicated and found the location of the bunker where L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas and his comrades were killed. The shallow bunker hole, surrounded by swamps and covered with dense spruce trees and bushes, was hardly visible. After the area was cleared of all the flora, a wooden cross was erected and consecrated.

In 2000, on the initiative of the Lithuanian Genocide and Resistance Research Centre, a typical memorial sign was erected next to the forest and the Merkinė-Leipalingis road.

In 2011, at the place where Dzūkas and his comrades had died, a stone monument with a traditional Lithuanian blacksmith's sun was erected on the initiative of the rock band 'Skylė', which at the time was working on a music album based on the partisan theme — 'Broliai' ('Brothers'). This monument replaced a wooden cross that had been erected in 1999 and had already deteriorated. The monument was made by sculptor Robertas Ožalinskas and the sun by blacksmith Andrius Liaukus. The unveiling ceremony was held on 24 June 2011. As the place where the partisans died is

located deep in the forest, concrete pillars with signs were erected to guide visitors.

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Lionginas Baliukevičius' contribution to the partisan movement was recognised while he was still alive: On 24 December 1949, L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas was awarded the Freedom Fighters' Cross, Second Degree, by order of the Commander of the Southern Lithuania Region, Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas, "for his exceptional devotion to the cause of the LLKS and his extraordinary diligence".

On 4 December 1950, by decision of the LLKS command, the commander of the Dainava partisan district, L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas, was posthumously awarded the highest partisan decoration — the Freedom Fighters' Cross, First Degree.

In 1997, L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas (posthumously) received the status of a volunteer soldier.

On 19 May 1998, by decree of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, L. Baliukevičius-Dzūkas was (posthumously) awarded the rank of Colonel and the Order of the Cross of Vytytis, First Degree (now the Order of the Cross of Vytytis, Grand Cross). ■





Drawing by Ramūnas Vaitkus

## Youth Underground

**D**uring the years of organised partisan warfare, independent underground youth organisations and groups emerged in almost every town. Their members actively sought contact with the partisans and, in the absence of such contact, acted independently. The entire post-war resistance movement was driven by young people. Organisations were set up mainly in schools, where young people were most likely to be found. In 1953, when the armed struggle in the forests and villages was over, the baton of resistance was passed from the partisans to the unarmed students and teachers. The partisans had prepared for this change by creating and supporting such organisations while they were still active. In this context, we can mention, for example, the youth organisation called 'Vyčiai Union' (lit. *Vyčių Sąjunga*), founded by the partisan commander of the Western Region, Antanas Bakšys-Klajūnas. According to historical sources, the repressive structures of the occupiers exposed and targeted: members of the underground student organisation of the United Labour Union, participants of the Lithuanian Youth Union 'Vytiš' and the student organisation of the Lithuanian Union for National Liberation, which was annihilated in the Ignalina district, also the group 'Partisan Children's Revenge' in Kaunas, and the underground student organisations in the schools of Joniškis, Juodupė, Mažeikiai, Panevėžys, Ramygala, Skaudvilė, Skuodas, Šeduva, Šiauliai, Šilutė, Tauragė, Veisiejai and Žagarė. The abundance of organisations shows that the patriotic youth of Lithuania did not want to accept the occupation. Not every group had specific strategic goals, but every action against the political policies of the occupying power was a sign of free people resisting oppression.

Sources: *The Crossroads of Freedom (XXXIV): Youth Underground* (lit. *Laisvės kryžkelės (XXXIV): Jaunimo pogrindis*), Ričardas Čekutis and Dalius Žygelis, [www.bernardinai.lt](http://www.bernardinai.lt), 2006; *Partizans [N16]*, Rūta Gabrielė Vėliūtė, Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2009, Vilnius.