

CONTENTS

4

FEATURE STORY

The Dragoons'
'Dragons' Are Ready

18

IMPORTANT MATTERS

Ukraine is Launching
Strike-drones from
Everything

20

Giving Away Something
for Nothing

22

Transparency and the
Profession of a Soldier

24

UNDER THE RADAR

Constructing a Tragedy:
The Case of Starobilsk

40

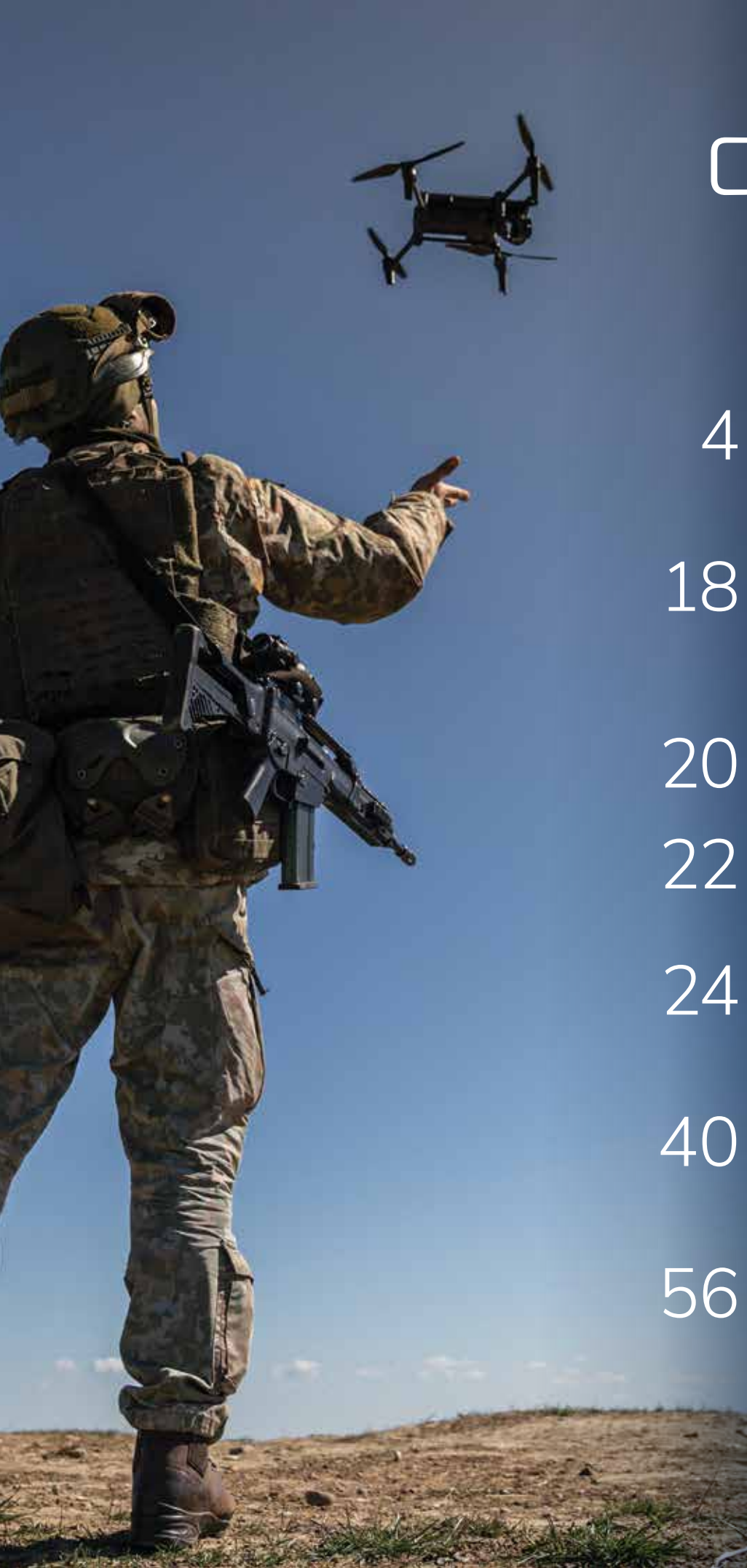
WILL TO RESIST

The June Uprising:
the Northeast Field

56

WAR HISTORY MADE FUN

It's Great to Eat with a
Fork and Knife!



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,

The world's largest 'gas station' has come to a standstill. This is because its production and supply lines have, quite literally, gone up in smoke. And whenever *Madjar* appears on social media — not from some bunker, mind you, but from somewhere near the front lines — we can look forward to another raid by Ukrainian 'birds' on the Russian oil refineries, ports, or even Moscow itself, which is already 'rejoicing' heartily over the consequences of the 'victorious three-day special operation.'

"If you sow the wind, you'll reap a storm," as the saying goes. Wonder how the Russian people — who are seen in lines at gas stations, even in satellite photos, waiting, arguing among themselves, and even throwing punches, and for whom Crimea isn't so 'nash' (rus., 'ours' — translator's note) anymore — would rephrase this proverb today.

All that's left is to recall another folk proverb, turning it into a wish for the entire aforementioned bunch: "Burn, burn brightly, just don't go out!"

Sincerely,
Darius Varanavičius
Chief Editor

EDITORIAL TEAM:

- **Chief Editor** Darius Varanavičius,
Darius.Varanavicius@mil.lt
tel. (85) 210 3897
- **Assistant Editor** Dalius Žygelis,
Dalius.Zygelis@mil.lt
tel. (85) 273 5744
- **Reporters:**
Ilona Skujaitė, tel. (85) 210 3896
Žydrė Švobienė, tel. (85) 278 5285
Laura Janušienė, tel. (85) 264 8573
Darius Sutkus, tel. (85) 273 5744
Lukas Yla, tel. (85) 278 5275
- **Designer** Aistė Lapinskaitė,
tel. (85) 210 3896
- **Administrator** Aušra Narsutyte,
tel. (85) 210 3895
- **Archivist** Valdas Balciukevičius,
tel. (85) 210 3895

ADDRESS:

- Totorių st. 25, LT-01121 Vilnius
- To request a copy of WARRIOR magazine please get in touch with us at:
Ausra.Narsutyte@mil.lt, (85) 210 3895,
(85) 210 3897
- **I and IV covers** —
photo credit: Sgt. Modestas Tolušas.
- WARRIOR magazine is funded by the Ministry of Defence. Every issue is printed by the Centre of War Cartography for the Lithuanian Armed Forces, Muitinės st. 4, Domeikava, LT-54359 Kaunas.
- Views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the editorial team.
- Circulation: 2 700 copies in Lithuanian, 300 copies in English
- ISSN 2783-7416.
- Print Order No. GL-530

Photo credit: www.flickr.com

Contribute to a
common goal!



**BROLIAI
AITVARAI**



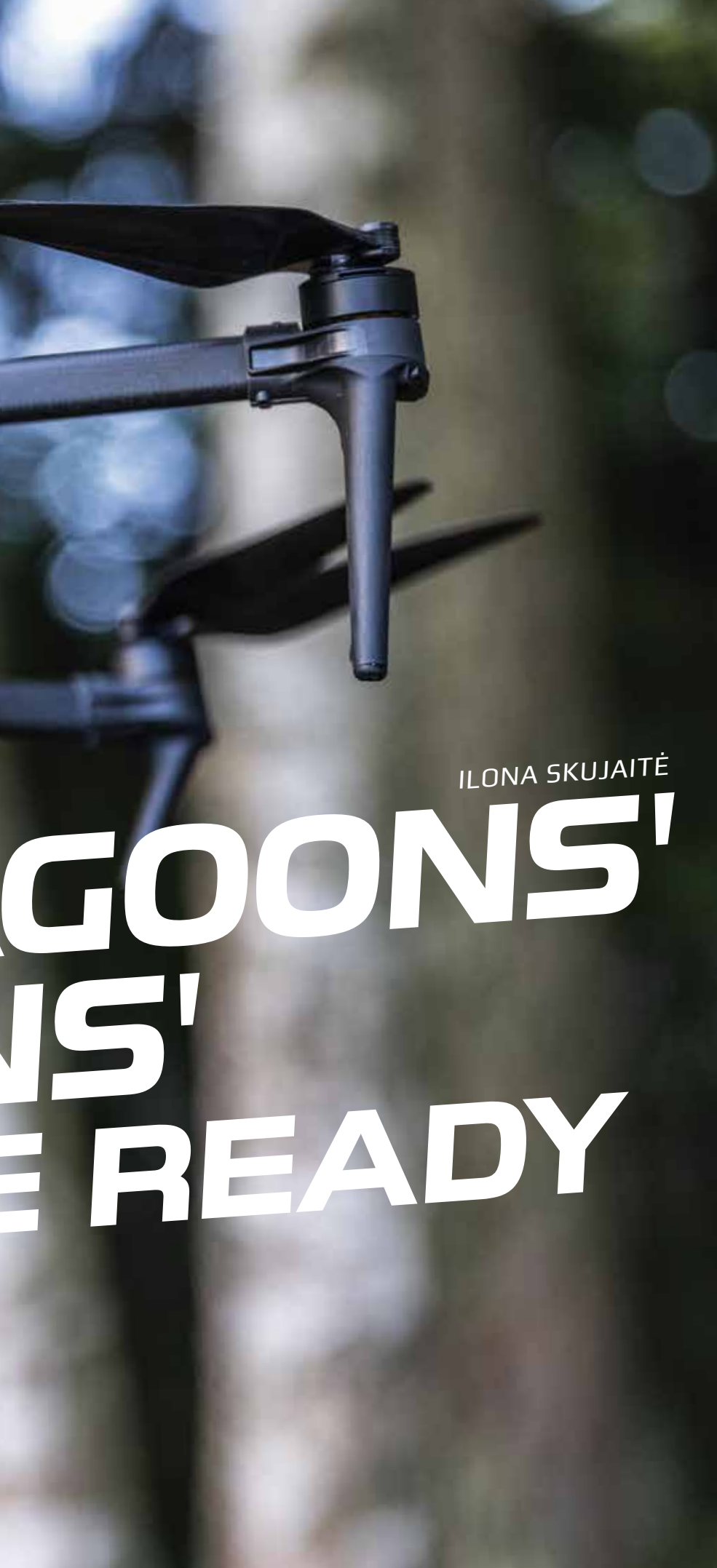
€ Donate 1.2% of your taxes



You can support Broliai Aitvarai by purchasing items from their e-shop at

BroliaiAitvarai.lt

THE DRA 'DRAGON ARE



ILONA SKUJAITĖ

DRAGOONS' WE'RE READY

2026 can be called a turning point, when various drones began to be massively deployed in the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Lithuanian Grand Duke Butigeidis Dragoons Battalion is actively integrating drones into its operations, completing the assembly of a Combat Drone Unit and one of the first to start broadcasting real-time drone-generated imagery to decision-makers at the command post during exercises.

Mandatory Initial Military Service soldier Jr. Pvt. Lauryna Butvydaitė — one of the best operators of the new Combat Drone Unit. She voluntarily enlisted in the Lithuanian Armed Forces, after her studies in the Netherlands. "During my studies abroad, I felt that I really missed Lithuania, and after return I wished to serve in the Armed Forces. I chose the Dragoons Battalion, because many friends said that it was very difficult here and I would definitely not succeed. These words only further encouraged me to prove myself and others what I was capable of, because looking for easy ways is not for me."



The first stage in learning to fly a drone is training in a simulator classroom.

After putting on her military uniform, she never thought that soon she will be operating drones. During the Basic Course she noticed an invitation to participate in a selection for the combat drone unit being developed. "I became curious, before I never had my own personal drone, nor experience in operating it. It was a new thing, which I wanted to try, and I passed the selection process", Jr. Pvt. L. Butvydaitė said.

Although it is often believed that the younger generation can operate drones without any effort, Deputy Commander of Combat Drone Unit Sgt. Ernestas Polteris is telling, that finding the right people is not so easy. "People often think that just buying a small drone and flying it is enough, but that doesn't mean you are a good drone operator, nor you will be suitable for an army. Our priority is slow, long, confide and

precise flights, not racing against others drones for a distance of 50-100 meters. That is what people usually do with small drones."

According to Sgt. E. Polteris, when searching for suitable candidates, the first steps was to check soldiers health and drone operational skills. "During the selection, the applicants took various tests, spoke with a psychologist, and demonstrated drone control skills in a simulator. Those who had used virtual reality glasses before had no problems, while others had everything from nausea to dizziness. We mostly chose so-called 'scientists', because working with drones, the brain can do more than muscles. We already have a strong core, based on which we will form a whole team", Deputy Commander of new Combat Drone Unit said.

After successful participation in the selection Jr. Pvt. L. Butvydaitė told us, that she had no dizziness, but the first day in the simulator was hard. After the instructors gave her a lot of valuable advices, she not only quickly caught up with her colleagues, but, according to the commanders, surpassed them. This soldier's success story is an inspiring example for anyone, who wishes to become drone operators, but doubts their abilities or lack of experience.





In conquest of the sky

The new recruits of the Combat Drone Unit trained for three weeks to operate first person view drones, and then for another week went deeper to reconnaissance drones secrets. "Having tried various types of drones, I can say that I enjoyed working with the most the most acrobatic, capable of performing various maneuvers and movements, so called FPV (first person view) drones", Jr. Pvt. L. Butvydaitė said.

This course was just the first step for newcomers, because learning to operate drones is not everything. Sgt. E. Polteris Deputy Commander of the Combat Drone Unit emphasizes that soldiers must not only sit at the control panel, but also to be able to program the drone themselves, to know very well how it works, where it can get stuck, and where it can fly through. Since this is a flying machine, it is equally important to be aware of the weather, which is especially changeable at the seaside. "For example, the sun is shining today, and in 5 minutes it could be raining, so operators need to know when it's okay to fly a drone and when it's not. They need to have meteorological knowledge,

know programming, robotics, and soldering, because you may have to assemble the drones yourself in the field," Deputy Commander of the Unit explained.

Drone operators training in Dragoon Battalion is carried out sequentially, alternating between practical flying, technical tasks and tactical exercises. For Dragoons Battalion soldiers it is not enough to just mechanically lift the drone into the sky, it is equally important to understand what exactly to look for when looking from above. "We organize tactical training every other week to give soldiers an understanding of basic tactical tasks. For example, we demonstrate how should such elements like ambush and concentration area look from the sky. When operators perform these tasks themselves on the ground, they understand the whole scheme perfectly. Later, after flying the drone into the sky, they already exactly know how everything should be arranged and what to look for", the specifics of the preparation were detailed by a sergeant.

According to Deputy Commander of the Combat Drone Unit, soldiers training during military exercises takes place according to a well-thought-out algorithm. "Most often one group is flying with reconnaissance drone searching for targets, the other per-

forms certain tactical maneuvers, and third simulates the destruction of a detected target with attack drones. Soldiers perform these tasks on a carousel basis, so everyone has to work in all positions", Sgt. E. Polteris described the work of the Combat Drone Unit. "If at some point the soldiers fail to complete the task, instructors come back to it again and again. We do not seek quick results in drone operators training, instead we try not to leave any gaps, and only move forward when all the complex skills are fully mastered."

Drones in the hands of infantry

The new Combat Drone Unit is just one of departments operating the drones in the Lithuanian Grand Duke Butigeidis Dragoons Battalion. All infantry companies are also equipped with them, because now, compared to previous years, acceleration of drone usage in Lithuanian Armed Forces is truly enormous. "I remember that at first we had maybe seven quadcopters, which we used to detect enemy forces, to evaluate our own installed positions camouflage and to 'scan' the route march searching



for hidden enemies along the way", Capt. Martynas Jurčiukonis 2nd Infantry Company Commander told us. "Now the situation has changed radically. No exercises take place without drones, they are used much more widely. It seems that drones are simply 'grown' into the hands of soldiers."

The officer remembers, that first they need to discover the tactics for using drones and prepare the specialists. Because for almost everyone it was a completely new and unfamiliar 'toy', that soldiers were afraid to damage or break. So at first, Battalion drones were entrusted to professional soldiers, but now conscripts also operates them without any problems. "We have drone departments, where the largest number of drones is concentrated, but also every maneuver infantry squad must have a drone, so that soldiers can exploit its capabilities according to their needs." Capt. M. Jurčiukonis explained. "Now soldiers of almost all specializations are learning to work with drones. Expertise in this area and technical capabilities are growing rapidly. Soldiers of professional military service usually acquire the necessary knowledge in Military Schools and Training Centers of Lithuanian Armed Forces, and later passes on their experience to the battalion colleagues and the conscripts serving here."

Drone integration at the Headquarter

Every day the battlefield is becoming more complex, requiring considerable effort and care to ensure that different technologies used together work smoothly and do not interfere with each other. Headquarters Company is responsible for this in the Dragoons Battalion. Company commander Capt. Tomas Čepas told us, that the main challenge is to properly integrate all battalion unit drones into single Headquarters system. Allowing for direct monitoring of drone flights and images they generate, and commanders would see everything that was happening on the battlefield. "Headquarters and Communications Platoon is responsible for all battalion communications systems. We seek, that battalion leadership could see on their screens not only images



Dragoons excel at drone-based reconnaissance, successfully transmitting aerial imagery directly to the command post.

transmitted by Headquarters Company Reconnaissance Platoon fixed wing drones, but, if necessary, could directly connect to any other Manoeuvre Company or Drone Squad units in the sky." Capt. T. Čepas commented situation.

Lt. Col. Aurelijus Neifaltas Commander of Lithuanian Grand Duke Butigeidis Dragoons Battalion emphasizes, that having a live view of the battlefield at the battalion headquarters thanks to drones is a huge advantage: "In the war in Ukraine, and during the exercises we organize, it is clear to see that the initiative is often retained by the side, which detects the enemy faster, assesses the situation more accurately and makes decisions faster. However, drones have not changed the very nature of war. They are another tool in the hands of the commander, providing an extra set of eyes, but the decisions are still made by a human. The territory is still taken by infantry, soldiers are carrying out orders, and victory is determined by their readiness and ability to act together. Drones allow for faster situational awareness. Therefore, not only the drones themselves are important to us, but also the entire system, which allows the information they gather to be transmitted in real time to higher command and to fighters on the ground."

According to Commander of Headquarters Company, such integration processes

require significant resources, especially in terms of communication, but at the same time new challenges force us to stretch ourselves. Thanks to them, the competence of soldiers grows as needed. "Dragoons Battalion in 'Žemaitija' brigade demonstrates leadership in the use of drones: our soldiers are doing great in conducting aerial reconnaissance and successfully transmitting images from drones directly to the command post. A new mobile command post for drone

operations is currently being set up, for work with fixed wing drones, operated by Reconnaissance squad of Headquarters Company. Their main task is to scout the intended area and determine the directions of enemy movement in advance. Reconnaissance drones are able to fly much further and ascend much higher, than those used by infantry companies. Their 'eyes', cameras, are several times better and the 'brain' is technically much more complex," Capt. T. Čepas said.





The Commander of Headquarters Company emphasizes that innovations are being introduced in other areas as well, one of which is anti-drone systems. "Right now, our specialists are helping to install the drone jamming devices on 2nd Infantry Company JLTV vehicles. These devices block GPS signals with various frequencies and neutralizes enemy drones. At the same time, drone detection systems are being installed, allowing for detection of enemy operators precise location and their drones flight direction. In field conditions, these devices successfully detect signals at a distance of several kilometers, and during battalion exercises it allows for observation and identifying, where do civilian or potentially dangerous drones fly. These technologies are also integrated into the overall Battlefield management system down to the lowest section level. Each Section Leader, using their own military phone, can send messages directly to the Company commander, and all data flows into a unified Headquarters system. Using the received information, commanders in real time can see exactly where the companies are located, therefore gaining a tactical advantage on the battlefield."

GPS interference and other challenges

The rapid development of drone technology also brings new challenges. One of them is GPS signal jamming using electronic devices. Therefore, Lithuanian Armed Forces had to find ways to protect itself from this type of disruption. "Losing GPS positioning signals the drone can no

longer see where it is, therefore, our drones operators had to learn flying without GPS assistance. This required much higher competences and skills of personal operators, because when flying a drone, the soldier must be very well oriented in the sky and understand exactly where his drone is going. Of course, the operator does not operate blindly, he uses certain maps to help him follow the drone flight path, but still it is vital for him to have



excellent orientation in the environment. So technology is great, but soldiers also need to be smart and able to operate successfully without a phone, electricity, or GPS signal." Capt. M. Jurčiukonis emphasized.

Rapid technological progress creates more specific challenges. For example, Battalion units are becoming extremely dependent on electricity. In the past it was enough for a soldier to have a small external battery, a so-called power bank, to charge the phone. "Now the energy requirement is a hundred times bigger, because powerful drone batteries, control panels and additional monitoring screens have to be constantly charged." Capt. T. Čepas told us. "I recently spoke with communications specialists and we remembered the times when we could still count the number of computers on our fingers and knew all the IP addresses by heart. Today, the situation is incomparable — there is a computer in every office, and now they, together with smartphones and drones are integrated in a single command and control network in our Battalion."

Capt. M. Jurčiukonis, 2nd Infantry Company Commander, seconds his colleague. "Now, the mass use of drones is actually enables soldiers to make decisions much faster. Since I served in the Operations section, I can compare how things have changed dramatically: previously, headquarters had to rely only on information provided by intelligence or received directly during the enemy's appearance. And now our Headquarters Company is setting up a command post where you can see the action on the ground in real time on screens thanks to drones. Additionally, not only a simple image, but also thermal cameras are used to monitor the battle — this helps the headquarters to understand what is happening around even faster and make much more effective decisions."

Since the enemies on the battlefield are also intelligent and use similar technologies and tactics, the company commanders have an additional headache in how to properly organize their defense. "The arrangement of combat positions now also looks completely different: if earlier it was enough for infantry to cover their

trenches with logs and branches so that they could not be seen from the side or from the adjacent hill. Now, in order to protect oneself from the 'insects' flying above, one has to fundamentally change the trenches themselves, installing special canopies over the entrances to the dugouts and covering the positions themselves. This is the so-called passive air defense part — to completely hide from the enemy's eyes and prevent his drones from flying into our trenches. This requires a lot of hard work in finding different ways to protect yourself. One of the innovations is the installation of various imitation positions for the purpose of deception, misleading the enemy, because in this technological age, soldiers must be able to adapt quickly to changes." Capt. M. Jurčiukonis commented new challenges.

According to Commander of Dragons Battalion, the biggest challenge of the drone era is not the technology by itself, but its constant change. "By constantly training ourselves and analyzing the experience of modern conflicts, we see that solutions that were effective a few months ago may be much less effective today, so we must constantly learn, adapt and look

Rapid technological progress creates more specific challenges. Battalion units are becoming extremely dependent on electricity, and the arrangement of combat positions now also looks completely different since the dawn of the drone era.





for new ways of operational methods." Lt. Col. A. Neifaltas stated. "No less important challenge is the maintenance and repair of equipment. Intensively used drones break down, wear out, require constant maintenance, spare parts and qualified specialists. Therefore, in developing unmanned drone forces, one of my main priorities as a Battalion commander was the creation and development of repair capabilities. I am glad that in a relatively short time we managed to set up both stationary and mobile repair workshops and assemble a strong team of specialists from professional military service soldiers and young dragoons. Today, they are able to perform not only technical maintenance and serious problems troubleshooting, but also to improve existing systems, adapting them to our needs."

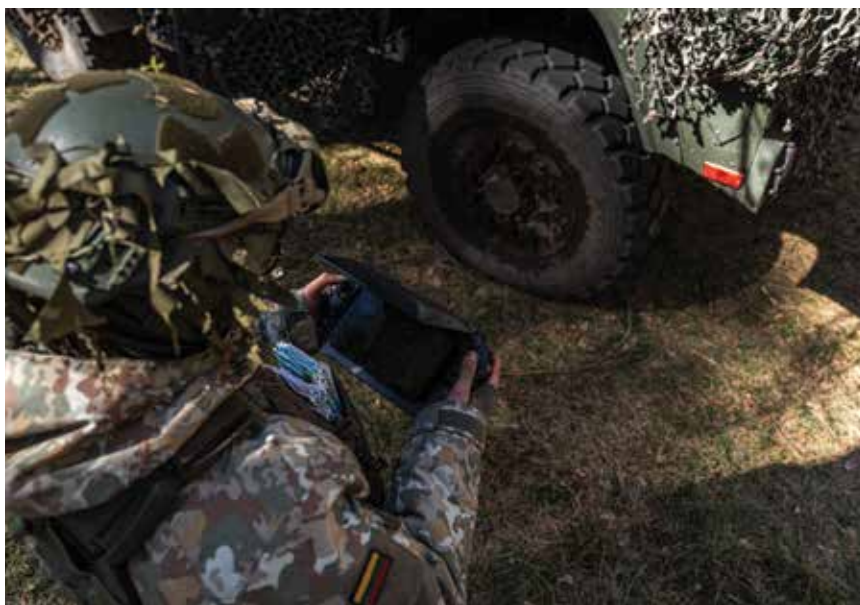
Battalion commander states that another key challenge is integrating all new measures into the battalion's overall operational system. The development of drones, counter-drone measures, communications and data transmission systems is proceeding very rapidly, therefore harmonizing them into a single functioning entirety requires considerable effort. "Howe-

ver, the professionalism, flexibility and openness to innovation of our dragoons allow us to successfully overcome these challenges. I am convinced that by continuing the consistent development of these capabilities, we will be even stronger and better prepared to carry out our tasks," Lt. Col. A. Neifaltas said.

Ukrainian advices

Observing war in Ukraine, it seems sometimes that drone technology and tactics for their usage are changing not by days, but by hours. Soldiers and Officers of Dragoons Battalion assured that they always keep their finger on the pulse — they not only closely monitor emerging





innovations in the field of drones use, but also closely cooperate with their colleagues from Ukraine. Just at the end of May, one of their delegations visited, sharing the latest news and experiences from the front.

One of the lessons learned is drones repair. We have established a specialized supply and repair department in Dragoons Battalion, which performs

all technical work: prepares drones and hands them over to companies and squads. And in case of breakdowns, repairs them and orders parts. Very similar processes are now taking place in Ukraine, only in our country everything is done in order to prepare in advance and carry out everything as efficiently as possible. Because equipment failures, including drones failures, during intensive work are

a daily routine. "For example, it is quite common for electrical boards to burn out and motors to fail, and with a specialized repair department, these types of failures can be easily fixed within one or two hours," Sgt. E. Polteris told us.

Company commander Capt. T. Čepas revealed, that in order to ensure uninterrupted operation of drones in Dragoons Battalion, on the initiative of its soldiers, also utilized the latest production technologies, such as printing spare parts with a 3D printer: "This really saves a lot of time and resources. Drone specialists independently print the necessary parts, bodies and various accessories. Our main goal is to be completely autonomous in field conditions: to have independent power sources and to quickly repair the equipment ourselves."

Another expected innovation in the Dragoons Battalion — mobile drone control stations. These will be specially equipped vehicles that will contain all the necessary systems, such as computers, screens, power supply and all other necessary resources, so that after reaching a certain location deep in the rear operation area, drone operators can autonomously launch and control drones from them safely.

The Dragoons Battalion is also actively integrating the latest anti-drone systems.





The Combat Drone Unit, currently in its final stages of formation, will significantly reinforce the battalion's operations.



Optical cables and 'bombers'

Sgt. E. Polteris stated, that the tasks of drone operators are increasingly becoming complex and interesting. As one of the most striking examples he named the recently held demonstration exercises, which were also attended by The president of the country. "During these exercises, flights were conducted using drones with a fiber optic cable. Operating such drones requires special precision and the ability to pilot them

smoothly, because the cable simply unwinds from the drone in flight. If it is accidentally cut or damaged, you instantly lose vision, control and the drone simply falls," Sgt. E. Polteris emphasized. "Although the Dragoons Battalion will fully integrate drones with optical cables a little later, they are already operational at the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Our soldiers have also tested them, so we already have operators who have gained real experience in this type of drone operation."

Soldiers of Dragoons Battalion do not hide that cooperation with Ukraine

military opens the door to the most modern technologies and methods of their use. For example, dragoons are currently actively taking over from Ukrainians the so-called 'bombers' (drones, adapted to drop grenades and mines) concept. It has been already successfully developed, tested and is operational — soon the dragoons will use these capabilities in exercises with maneuver companies, simulating real damage to the enemy.

Meetings with instructors from Ukraine take place regularly at the Dragoons Battalion, and the Lithuanians immediately apply the received advices in their activities. "The close collaboration with Ukrainians ensures, that we keep up with innovations in practice, although technologies in this area changes almost every month. Of course, from the outside it may seem that such constant change and lack of stability should be frightening, but our soldiers accept it as a necessity," Sgt. E. Polteris commented. "Moreover, the Ukrainians themselves test everything live on the real battlefield: if something fails, they immediately analyze the reasons why the system does not work, and look



The new generation is excellent at combining traditional and modern warfare methods.

for ways to fix the malfunctions that occurred. Thus, all negative factors are analyzed in detail and solutions are found. The successfully tested methods are immediately integrated into tactics,

and they almost always work. Following the Ukrainian example, we also try to learn by doing, rather than learning first and then acting."

Technology generation

Modern technological progress not only dictates new fashions on the battlefield, but also noticeably changes the country's youth coming to serve in the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Capt. M. Jurčiukonis observes, that previously the average age of conscripts was around 24-25 years, and their daily civilian life naturally included much more movement and physical activity. Now young people often join the army right after school, and are physically weaker because they spend more time sitting in front of computer screens.

However, The Commander of 2nd Infantry Company emphasizes, that physical readiness is not a sentence, because now many tasks in the army can also be performed while sitting at computers, and commanders have accumulated many years of experience and proven methods for changing this situation. "Today's young people bring different strengths to military service — they are excellent at navigating the digital environment, quickly master



smart technologies and have excellent hand-eye coordination, which is indispensable when operating modern systems, including drones. Our most important task as commanders is to combine technological skills with the endurance necessary for the military profession, and for this purpose a consistent and balanced training system has been created in the Armed Forces," Capt. M. Jurčiukonis stated. "I remember very well, when the new soldiers came to my company last year. Some said

that the weakest batch had arrived, but I replied that they were the most successful — which means we would make the most progress and achieve the best effect. And so it happened: soon most of the company's soldiers passed the physical tests, and their physical ability, depending on individual characteristics, increased by an average of 10-15, and some even by 20 percent. This is an excellent result, proving that motivated young people of the modern generation are able to quickly

regain strong physical shape and become universal soldiers of the future."

Currently Dragoons Battalion is one of the largest Lithuanian Armed Forces units, preparing soldiers of Initial Mandatory Military Service. Today, young men and women are joining the battalion — a generation that naturally understands technology and very quickly comprehends new systems. "We see that they are curious, receptive, and able to quickly master complex technical skills. It is gratifying that the current



and future conscription classes are comprised of young people who have voluntarily chosen to serve. This is especially important in today's military, where a soldier must be able to handle not only weapons, but also various technologies — from communications systems and unmanned drones to modern military equipment. Today, conscripts serve not only in infantry units: they drive *JLTV* vehicles, serve in reconnaissance platoon, sniper teams, perform communications, repair,

logistics and other combat support and combat supply tasks. Therefore, from the beginning of their service, we make every effort to get to know our young soldiers as well as possible, and discover the area in which they can best reveal their strengths and be most useful to the battalion." Commander of the Battalion emphasizes. "During the nine months of service, it is important for us to not only prepare the future active reserve, but also to interest young people in professional military service.

It is encouraging that after each conscription, the number of those wishing to remain in the service is growing. However, competition for talented and motivated people is high, as many of them seek for a higher education and a career in civilian life. So we must create conditions for them to grow, develop and realize their abilities in the army, because the modern battlefield requires not only a physically strong, but also a thoughtful, proactive and technically competent soldier." ■





Ukraine is Launching Strike-drones from Everything

The *Sea Baby's* new aerial-strike role is the latest front in an arms race Ukraine is exporting to the United States and the other NATO member-states.

Ukraine has turned its signature naval drone — the little boat that drove Russia's fleet out of the western Black Sea — into a launch platform for first-person-view attack drones, putting Kyiv's strike reach beyond the coast.

The *Sea Baby*, a strike boat built and operated by Ukraine's Security Service (ukr. *SBU*) can now carry six to eight *FPV* drones in side compartments that open during an attack, alongside thermobaric *Shmel* rockets, according to Russian accounts of the boats operating around the Kinburn Spit, roughly 40 miles east of Odesa, shared by 'Forbes'.

Ukrainian officials count on

the autonomous vessels' ability to move closer toward Russian military positions than land-based launchers could, with the *SBU* assuming a range of 1 500 kilometers on a 2000-kilogram payload. Some of the drones in the cargo hold are guided by fiber-optic cable, leaving them immune to the radio jamming that downs ordinary *FPVs*, according to 'Forbes'.

Ukraine has turned nearly everything it fields into an *FPV* launcher. Sea drones carrying fiber-optic *FPVs* struck the Russian ports of Tuapse and Novorossiysk in September 2025. Several companies have rigged ground robots to fire the same drones, and both sides have flown balloons carrying them.

"The *SBU* became the first in the world to pioneer this new kind of naval warfare," Brig. Gen. Ivan Lukashevych said at an unveiling of the *Sea Baby's* latest generation in October 2025, "and we continue to advance it."

Ukraine fields two distinct naval drone families. The *Sea Baby* is developed and operated by the *SBU*, Ukraine's domestic security service. The *Magura* — built by 'Uforce' for the *GUR* (ukr.), Ukraine's military intelligence directorate — is a separate system with its own lineage and export path.

The *Sea Baby* is primarily remote-piloted from a mobile ground station but carries AI-assisted targeting and navigation systems that allow it to operate autonomously when communications are jammed or degraded — a design imperative born from Russia's intense electronic warfare environment over the Black Sea.

American forces have begun using the boats themselves. US special forces sank a target ship with a Ukrainian *Magura* at the 'Balikatan 2026' exercise off the Philippines on June 24, the first use of the technology in the Indo-Pacific.

The interest is not one-off. A

cheap, expendable boat that can carry a cluster of attack drones to within striking range is exactly the kind of weapon the United States is looking for as it prepares for a possible conflict with China across the Pacific's vast distances. "Magura's successes on the Ukrainian-russian front confirm their value for use in the Indo-Pacific region," Oleg Roginsky, chief executive of 'Uforce', the London-based startup that makes the *Magura*, told 'Bloomberg'.

'Uforce' is in talks with Indo-Pacific buyers and weighing at least two production sites in the region, Roginsky said. Ukraine barred weapons exports in 2022 to keep its arms at the front, and only began opening that market in 2025. Ukrainian naval drones have sunk or damaged roughly a dozen Russian warships since 2022 and forced the Black Sea Fleet to pull its main operations back to No-

vorossiysk, the US Naval Institute reported in September 2025. Each boat costs a few hundred thousand dollars, below the price of a single modern torpedo.

The Pentagon is studying the lesson as it shifts focus toward a possible conflict with China. The US Navy expects to field thousands of small uncrewed surface vessels across the Indo-Pacific by 2030, Capt. Garrett Miller, who leads its Surface Development Group One, said at a Navy symposium on April 20, as reported by 'USNI News'.

In a report last July, the Center for Strategic and International Studies urged the US military to copy Kyiv's acquisition methods, arguing that "unlike theoretical models or peacetime pilots, Ukraine's innovations in defense acquisition are battlefield tested." And Ukraine has continued to innovate. Its *Sub Sea Baby* underwater drone struck an *Improved Kilo*-class submarine at

its pier in Novorossiysk on Dec. 15, the first time an unmanned underwater vehicle has hit a submarine in port, the *SBU* said.

Russia denied any damage, but satellite imagery taken the following day showed a 9-meter crater in the pier, the submarine visibly lower in the water, and the vessel, later identified as the *B-271 Kolpino*, unmoved at its berth more than a month later. Ukrainian and independent analysts assessed it as a mission kill.

NATO is already training with Kyiv's tactics, too. Ukraine's navy led a NATO red team and beat the alliance's blue force in all five scenarios at the 'REPMUS' naval-drone exercise in Portugal in September 2025, the first time it had run the opposing force.

Information credit: www.defensenews.com
Photo credits: www.flickr.com





Giving Away Something for Nothing

Although some of the recently announced changes to US troops levels in Europe have been signaled for a year or more, they have nonetheless unnerved America's allies and potentially emboldened Moscow. American troops have been in Europe for decades not merely to underwrite NATO treaty commitments but more specifically to safeguard the country's most important trading and investment relationship in the world.

Cutting US troops in Europe places transatlantic trade and investment ties in jeopardy, but additionally, the decision represents a potential missed opportunity — Washington risks giving away something for nothing. Russia wants US troop reductions in Europe, and it's not too late for the United States to get something in return from Moscow.

Cutting US troops in Europe now carries great risk, but if troops must leave, bargaining with Russia makes far more sense than cutting unilaterally. Doing so could reduce the threat posed by Russian forces to NATO, it could facilitate an end to Russia's war in Ukraine, and it could lower the risk posed to the transatlantic trade and investment relationship.

Earlier the United States notified its NATO allies that it would reduce the number of forces it makes available to NATO for the implementation of the alliance's operations plans. These plans — approved by all allies — were developed by NATO's American-led military headquarters in Mons, Belgium, and they are largely focused on the defense of allied territory against Russia. The alliance uses the plans to build a list of the required military forces, and then those requirements are apportioned among the individual allies, building a country-by-country capability target list.

The reduced commitments unveiled by the United States earlier this month

were, in many ways, expected. They've been signaled by American leaders for at least a year, most notably in February 2025 when Secretary of War Hegseth announced that Europeans would need to take the lead in conventional defense of Europe.

But keen observers of NATO understand that this trend has been unfolding for years. Between 2017 and 2025, the proportion of all capability targets assigned to the United States dropped from 46 percent to 38 percent. At the same time, the number of high-end, "exquisite" capabilities provided by the United States, such as advanced air defense, were reduced from 13 (out of 26 total) to 5.

In other words, America has long been on the path of reduced commitments in European defense planning, in the name of fair burden-sharing as well as the shifting of US resources to the Indo-Pacific. The latest changes are the result of dialogue between American and European defense planners as well as between US military officials based in Europe and those based in the Indo-Pacific.

These latter discussions, and the analyses that informed them, were necessary to truly assess what was needed by American military leaders based in the

Pacific. It should come as no surprise therefore to see that naval and air forces are reportedly on the list of what the United States will no longer make available to fulfill the NATO operations plans.

Coincidentally and largely unrelated to American capability targets and NATO plans, the United States also announced in early May that it would withdraw 5 000 troops from Europe. This decision, in contrast to the one described above, reportedly came as a surprise.

Initially, American military leaders decided that the largest portion of those 5 000 troops would come in the form of a 4 200-person tank brigade deployed to Poland on a rotational basis. However, that decision was quickly reversed following conversations between top American and Polish leaders. Now American military officials in the Pentagon and in Europe are wrestling with how to implement the cut, perhaps considering drawing down US forces that are permanently stationed (usually with families) in places like Germany, Poland, Italy, Spain, Turkey or the UK.

Reducing American troops stationed in or rotationally deployed to Europe makes little sense for several reasons. First, most of those troops are ground forces, which are unlikely to be as important for a conflict in the Indo-Pacific. Second, basing US troops in Europe can be cheaper than



stationing them in the United States, especially when European allies like Poland or Lithuania pick up the costs. And third, US reductions while Russia's war in Ukraine rages on sends the wrong message to allies and enemies alike.

Even if none of these things were true and it made great sense operationally, fiscally, and strategically to withdraw US forces from Europe, doing so in exchange for nothing amounts to a very bad deal. Moscow has made clear it doesn't want US forces based in Europe, so why not bargain with Russia and get something in exchange?

This is precisely what US officials did a generation ago as the Cold War came to an end — they negotiated simultaneous

reductions in conventional and nuclear arms with Moscow.

It's not too late — if Washington is intent on reducing troop levels in Europe, it can still wield this bargaining chip. In exchange for a 5 000 troops cut in US forces based in Europe, Washington could demand Russia end its war in Ukraine, eliminate the military bases it's been building up near NATO borders, or cease its hybrid war against US and European interests across Europe and North America.

Something — really, anything — is better than nothing.

Information credit: www.defensenews.com

Photo credit: www.flickr.com





Transparency and the Profession of a Soldier

The word "corruption", in the dictionary of terms, comes from the Latin word *corruptio*, which means damage, decay, degeneration or bribery. The origins of corruption date back to the beginning of civilization and are closely linked to the emergence of power. The first cases of bribery and abuse were recorded more than 2 000 to 4 000 years ago in the Middle East, in the territories of present-day Iraq, Kuwait and Syria, as well as in Egypt, when officials and judges began to accept gifts to satisfy personal interests. Corrupt practices were also recorded in military affairs around the same time. In ancient Rome (1st to 4th century AD), corruption within the Roman Empire army manifested as high-ranking officers demanding bribes from ordinary soldiers in exchange for exempting them from heavy daily duties or guard duty. As centralized states and bureaucracy emerged, various methods were employed to influence decision-makers for personal gain, notably, the purchase of government positions and attempts to influence officials for selfish gain were observed. In the later period, the fight against corruption gained

greater importance. For example, 1920s and 1930s Lithuania saw major scandals involving the purchase of low-quality melton cloth for uniforms, food supply fraud, and counterfeit shoe soles. These cases were investigated by the Legal Department of the Ministry of National Defense and military courts (A. Stolarovas. Military Justice in the Republic of Lithuania 1919–1940).

Characteristics of corruption offenses

Modern corruption is not seen as a single negative phenomenon; it is understood much more broadly. It manifests not only as bribery, but also as document forgery, conflicts of interest, or nepotism. Corrupt actions often extend beyond direct monetary benefits to include various services and agreements for future gain. At the level of grand corruption, these take the form of complex criminal schemes involving multiple intermediaries. Often driven by destructive tasks against the state — such as seizing critical infrastructure or acquiring sensitive intelligence on vital sectors — corruption actively targets key personnel. Consequently, it

increasingly poses a severe threat not only to national economies but also to state security. Recent Lithuanian court decisions imposing stricter penalties for corruption demonstrate the state's zero tolerance for such legal violations. It is crucial to understand what constitutes a corrupt act, recognize illegal activities, and prevent them. The Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Prevention of Corruption defines three main groups of criminal acts of a corruption nature:

- bribery, trading in influence, abuse of official position;
- criminal offenses committed in the public sector or in the provision of administrative or public services by abusing authority and directly or indirectly seeking benefit for oneself or another person: dereliction of duty, disclosure of a state secret, unlawful financing of political parties and political campaigns, fraud, misappropriation of property, squandering of property, disclosure of a commercial secret, laundering of criminally acquired property, submission of false data on income, profit or property, disclosure of official secret, forgery of a document or possession of a forged document;
- other criminal acts aimed at bribery, corruption, or the concealment and disguise of bribery, trading in influence, or corruption.

Transparency *versus* corruption

The expanded interpretation of corruption blurs the line of demarcation between it and other illegal acts; any misconduct can show signs of corruption if linked to violations in professional activities. Therefore, it can be concluded that, transparency becomes an important term in the formation of public awareness. It signifies complete openness — barring specific legal restrictions — publicity, accountability for decisions and results, and clarity regarding what, how, and why the relevant decisions were made. Global transformations, security threats, business diversification, technological breakthroughs, and the need to manage hybrid threats drive the formation of a resilient and responsible environment in which transparency must become an integral constant.

Transparency in a soldier's service

There are several aspects where transparency is crucial in the military profession:

- **A value-based approach to this profession and activity** means that a soldier's conduct is modeled on fundamental moral and ethical principles (such as honesty, justice, and respect for others). This approach fosters a conscious personality — one that understands values originate from within the person and are embraced voluntarily, rather than being imposed from the outside or dictated solely by legal regulations. Being an example to others is an honorable mission.

- **Principles established in the Lithuanian Armed Forces doctrine.** Managing corruption-related risks is essential because corruption undermines desired outcomes, obstructs sustainable governance and security assurance results. Fuels instability and wastes institutional resources. Moreover, countering these illegal acts demands heightened regulatory requirements and increased oversight, which ultimately damages international credibility.

- **The clear and correct performance of functions and res-**

pensibility for results require an understandable and precise implementation of powers, alongside transparent, objective, and impartial decisions that ensure the legitimacy of actions in accordance with the granted authorities. Being resilient in the modern context of a soldier's professional activities means not only having the ability to adapt and act in changing conditions, but also being invulnerable — capable of recognizing, assessing, and countering potential threats to personnel vulnerability.

- **Leadership and continuous awareness raising**, which involves recognizing criminal acts of a corrupt nature and other illegal activities, taking active steps to prevent them, and reporting such behavior to the responsible departments or law enforcement authorities.

Information & photo credit:
Corruption Prevention Division of the
Chancellery of the Lithuanian Armed Forces



CONST A THE STA

The vocational college building in Starobilsk, formerly a branch of the pedagogical university. Prior to the occupation, it was a branch of the T. Shevchenko Luhansk National University.



On the night of May 22, Ukrainian drones once again struck russian targets. According to a report by the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (ukr. ZSU), the targets included an oil refinery, ammunition depots, air defense systems, and command posts, including one of the command centers of the russian drone force's '*Rubikon*' unit, located in the city of Starobilsk in the temporarily occupied Luhansk region.

STRUCTURING A TRAGEDY: THE CASE OF STAROBILSK

GUSTAVAS
ŠTRIMAS

It would seem that this is just another report on medium-range strikes against the aggressor. However, this time the russian media — which usually suppresses information about successful Ukrainian strikes — began sounding the alarm about a great tragedy: allegedly, a dormitory at a local college



Another building that housed two educational institutions and a dormitory. The old building — the vocational college mentioned earlier — is also clearly visible. Both buildings share the same address.

in Starobilsk was bombed, with 86 students aged 14 to 18 inside at the time. Conclusion: this is terrorism; the brutal Kyiv regime is deliberately killing children!

The narrative began to spread unusually quickly and widely. By the very next day, the Starobilsk issue was being discussed not only by Z-patriots and kremlin propagandists, but also by representatives of ministries, the security council, and the highest political echelons. Although it seems the sequence of events should be reversed — the coordination and dissemination of this information campaign suggest that it was in fact generated and directed from above, with purely political objectives in mind.

The information noise on the 'RuNet' about children allegedly being deliberately killed has become so loud that its audience is left with virtually no other versions of the events.

The audience of the 'vast motherland' is undiscerning. The brain of the average russian — brainwashed by television and cheap alcohol — is surprisingly uncritical. It soaks up any interpretation of events like a sponge, no matter how absurd. Re-

member the wild fantasies about corpses being transported on the *MH17* airliner? Or the 'facts' about combat mosquitoes from secret biolaboratories? Compared to those, the strike on Starobilsk is a real goldmine for the engineers of the soul!

Measured publicity

On May 24, the russian ministry of foreign affairs (rus. *MID*) announced that it was organizing a trip to Starobilsk for representatives of the mass media. The ministry of defense provided logistical support: in a flash, it organized yet another so-called '*Za pravdu*' ['For truth' — author's note] (written in Cyrillic, of course, but with a Latin 'Z') media convoy, designed to transport journalists to the scene so they could "see for themselves what an act of terrorism the Kyiv regime has committed." On the same day, the *MID*'s 'spokesperson,' Maria Zakharova — known for her eccentric statements and even more eccentric dance moves — expressed her delight: a sizable group — about fifty people from 19 countries — had expressed a desire to go.

MID representatives promised a comprehensive program: journalists would have ample opportunity not only to visit the scene of the incident in person but also to speak directly with rescue workers, students and their parents, eyewitnesses, and city administration officials.

Despite persistent invitations, world-renowned news agencies and media representatives concerned about their reputation decided not to travel to the russian-occupied territory of Ukraine and not to participate in this information game.

The *MID*'s counter was predictable — they tried to extract some benefit at least from the very fact of their non-participation. An outburst of righteous anger flared up on the 'RuNet': "The reaction of the major Western media outlets was pathetic — the BBC refused to go, CNN used vacation time as an excuse, and Tokyo banned Japanese journalists from traveling there. Instead of exposing the crimes of the Kyiv regime, these outlets continued to spread anti-russian fakes." Understand this: an invitation from the *MID* is an order.



A small room, bunk beds, brightly colored toys — some of which seemed a bit out of place for students of that age group — and, of course, a St. George ribbon on the handle of the dresser...

Still, how reminiscent this is of a founding meeting of a collective farm: "Joining a collective farm is a voluntary matter — it's not like, 'If I want to, I'll join; if I don't, I won't!'"

What's more, at a security conference held a few days later, M. Zakharova directly lashed out at a Japanese journalist who tried to ask her about

relations between Moscow and Tokyo: "Why didn't a single Japanese journalist go to Starobilsk? Did you write a report on what happened there? No? Then don't ask me questions... Why are you interested in relations between our countries if you're not interested in how the Kyiv regime is killing children in our country? What kind of relations can

we even talk about?..." And to top it off, the diplomat made a very diplomatic remark to the Japanese journalist about his professional competence: "You're not a journalist!"

As for those who agreed to participate, they were showered with praise. "Members of the press who did visit Starobilsk saw with their own eyes the wreckage of drones and their wings bearing foreign markings," emphasized the MID. And it reached a resounding conclusion: "Therefore, in this case, there can be no question of any staged events or 'Russian propaganda.'"

However, once the media representatives had left, the emotional pendulum swung back the other way. The international response, as can be inferred from MID's reaction, fell short of expectations. A wave of irritation and accusations swept through Russian media outlets: the Italian channel 'RAI' and the Austrian 'ORF' did not show a single frame, while 'Reuters' report was deemed 'biased' by Russia.

Apparently, Russia understands impartiality differently than the world-renowned news agency does. However, the journalists who did not publish reports after visiting Starobilsk likely had their reasons. What were they?

Media representatives did not speak with the victims, but listened to speeches by the 'head of the LNR' and the Russian human rights commissioner outside the hospital.





CHRISTOPHER HELALI

This imposing, tall man with a thick, dark beard is presented not only as an "independent American journalist," but also as a "human rights defender" and "fact-checker." However, there are some nuances...

K. Helali was indeed born in the United States. His father is Iranian, and his mother is Greek, a left-wing activist. While still a high school student, Helali became a member of the youth wing of the Communist Party of the United States, later joining a more radical communist faction. He signed up for military service to earn money. However, upon hearing that he might be deployed to Afghanistan, the ideological communist transferred to the military chaplain corps and then was discharged altogether. He traveled to Syria, where he supported Bashar al-Assad. Upon returning to the US, he began his political career in 2020 by running for the US Congress. He received 0.97 percent of the vote. He then switched parties again — this time becoming general secretary of the newly founded American Communist Party (ACP). The party's founder, pro-kremlin activist Jackson Hinkle, fled to Moscow due to fear of arrest; Helali soon followed suit, later stating that "in spirit, he is Russian, and he fell deeply in love with Russia while still in school."

He publishes content on 'DD Geopolitics' (DDG) and the 'Global Fact-checking Network' (GFCN). Both resources are characterized as pro-kremlin. For example, GFCN was founded in 2024 and began active operations in 2025. It claims to combat disinformation, but this pretext serves as a cover for spreading Russian propaganda. On social media, Helali posts messages supporting Venezuela, North Korea, and Iran. In 2025, he attended the funeral of the slain 'Hezbollah' leader H. Nasrallah, and in late January 2026, he posted a video in which he signs documents to join 'Hezbollah'. This is most likely just a publicity stunt.

It is very strange how this figure reconciles the ideologies of communism and radical Islam (and, on top of all that, manages to be a human rights advocate), but it is even stranger that he also appears on the roster of the law firm 'JPA International Legal Services,' where he is presented as a legal expert, a specialist in international relations, and a holder of master's degrees in law, politics, history, and economics, as well as a bachelor's degree in philosophy (our apologies if we've missed anything).

A characteristic quote from this 'independent journalist': "Listen, Russia is fighting for all of us, for the whole world." He is listed in the Ukrainian database of extremists and separatists, 'Mirotvorets.'

JOURNALIST

CHAY BOWES

He visited Starobils'k as an "Irish journalist." The only problem is that this Irishman lives in Moscow and works for 'Russia Today' (RT). This channel is entirely funded by the Russian government and is arguably the Kremlin's largest propaganda tool aimed at foreign audiences. Due to its aggressive dissemination of disinformation, RT is blocked in many countries.

Bowes himself is one of the founders of the alternative media websites 'The Ditch' and 'The Islander.' These sites target an English-speaking, pro-Russian audience. He appears on pro-Kremlin 'YouTube' channels such as 'Tara Reade,' 'George Galloway,' and 'DDG.' On June 29, 2003, at the invitation of Russian



representatives, he delivered a statement during a United Nations Security Council meeting as an "arms expert," criticizing NATO's aid to "corrupt Ukraine."

On May 1, 2025, during the Romanian presidential election, he traveled to Romania but was deported at the Bucharest airport. Attempts were made to escalate this incident — alleging that a journalist had been arrested, that freedom of the press had been violated, and so on.

Bowes called the incident in Starobils'k "terrorism," though he presented it cleverly, through the lens of subjectivity: "This is terrorism. That's what I think. I see terrorism. I don't see any military targets."

STS... AND NOT QUITE



HAUKUR HAUKKSON

The videos feature the caption: "journalist (Iceland)." But surely it goes without saying that Haukur, like the experts mentioned earlier, also lives in Moscow. And he's been residing there since the 'good old '90s,' yet for some reason he's always presented as a representative of Iceland...

In December 2020, at a press conference, this unknown man asked Putin some very flattering question. And since then, his career in Russia has been secure. The Icelandic

began to be courted by the MID (yes — not everyone gets to clink glasses with Maria Zakharova at receptions). He works for the 'First Federal News Agency' (RIA FAN), where he spreads lies about "Ukrainian biolabs," calls the massacre in Bucha a "staged event," and marches in the 'Immortal Regiment' parade... He also disseminated information through other media platforms: for example, by participating in broadcasts on the Reykjavik-based radio station 'Utvarp Saga.' The radio station itself is described as controversial, and its format features popular music interspersed with discussions on various sensitive topics. According to the website of the 'Russia-Iceland Friendship Society,' in the programs he hosts, Haukson "highlights important events in Iceland and Russia, not always agreeing with the official Western view."

THOMAS RÖPER

German. Of course, in Starobilsk he was presented as a "German journalist," even though he has no formal training in journalism and lives in St. Petersburg.

Röper holds a degree in economics. He began working in the insurance industry in 1994 and has been operating in Russia since 1998. He collaborates with the Russian Ministry of Defense's channel 'Zvezda.' He is the author of the blog 'Anti-Spiegel' — the title itself indicates that in his publication, Röper opposes official German policy.

He appears on the 'YouTube' channel 'russkaya Germaniya.' He spreads disinformation, conspiracy theories, and pro-Russian narratives — for example, he claimed that Russia did not shell the maternity hospital in Mariupol and that this was allegedly just a staged event. He denies the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government. He himself denies having any ties to Russian government officials. In 2025, he was added to the European Union sanctions list.



GIOVANNI PIGNI

Born and raised in Italy, near the picturesque Lake Como. Sound familiar? Yes, it's the same lake in the foothills of the Alps where two villas belonging to the russian propagandist V. Solovyov stand on the shore...

But let's get back to the Italian. He first studied russian philology at the University of Pavia, and in 2015 he arrived in St. Petersburg, where he began writing about post-soviet phenomena and current events in russia.

It was expected that the Italian's report from Starobinsk would be published by the newspaper 'La Stampa,' for which he occasionally writes, but the editorial board most likely declined to publish such one-sided information.



ELDRAN ADJAR

Presented as a Turkish journalist. However, an in-depth search fails to identify such a person within the Turkish media sphere. Initial links lead only to russian sources. It appears that the man referred to as Eldran Adjar is an employee of the russian outlet 'Sputnik Türkiye.'

MAHDI DIRANI

He represents the Lebanese television channel 'Al Mayadeen.' This media outlet has been identified as a propaganda platform for Iran and 'Hezbollah.' Its funding is linked to the Iranian government and Syrian businessman Rami Makhlouf, a cousin of Bashar al-Assad. The channel has a cooperation agreement with the russian multimedia information center 'Izvestiya.'



LU YUGUANG

Chinese correspondent. He published his first article while serving in the Chinese People's Liberation Army. In 1983, he graduated from the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Liaoning Pedagogical University. In 1994, he went to study at moscow state university, where he completed a master's degree in journalism three years later. In 2002, he began working for a moscow television station. He heads the moscow bureau of the

pro-Beijing television channel 'Phoenix TV' and is accredited by the russian ministry of foreign affairs. The channel is registered in Hong Kong but is led by Lu Chanle, a former officer and political commissar in the Chinese People's Liberation Army. Most of the funding also comes from mainland China. Lu Yuguang frequently visits frontline areas. On one occasion, he was wounded in the head — according to the official version, when a drone exploded nearby. His own testimony fully aligns with the narrative about 'neo-Nazism in Ukraine': 'I've seen neo-Nazis with my own eyes. They're indoctrinated from childhood; they're tattooed with swastikas, and it's very frightening... I've also witnessed the brutality of the neo-Nazis — they showed no mercy to anyone, including their own soldiers. For example, they chained a mortar gunner to a pole so he couldn't escape...'

A rhetorical question: to what extent can the ind...
light on the circumstances of such a politicized c

SONJA VAN DEN ENDE

"Dutch journalist." She is not officially employed by the editorial staff of any publication. In 2015, her message about the "tragic events in Odessa" was published in the 'Letters to the Editor' section of the newspaper 'Metro.' She later claimed that her trip was paid for by the nonprofit organization 'Global Rights of Peaceful People'. However, a legal entity with that name was only registered in 2019 and has a clear pro-kremlin orientation.

In 2017, she represented the obscure 'Syrian Committee in the Netherlands' and organized a protest against US actions in Syria. In 2019, van den Ende openly denied russia's guilt in the downing of the civilian airliner *MH17* over Donbas, claiming that there was no evidence to support it.



RAYID AL-AKBAR

He is described as a correspondent for 'Al Arabiya,' but upon verification, neither this author nor any of his publications were found. The man seen in the video filmed in Starobilsk is wearing a helmet and goggles, making him quite difficult to identify. He speaks russian, but, notably, his accent is not typical of an Arab — it is more likely Caucasian. It is likely that a real person with that first and last name does not exist at all.

KARIM SALIM MURTADA

Correspondent for the United Arab Emirates newspaper 'Al Khaleej.' He studied at Voronezh University and defended his candidate's dissertation in philology.

ISHTIAQ HAMDANI

A Pakistani journalist and editor-in-chief of the pro-russian portal 'Sada E-Rus.' Accredited to the russian ministry of foreign affairs in 2015. A columnist for the aforementioned GFCN. He promotes a positive image of russia in the Pakistani and British media.



Individuals listed here shed
event in an objective and impartial manner?...

Questions of location

First of all, it was noted that the route was severely restricted. Participants were allowed to move only within the area cordoned off with barrier tape. It was explained that this was for the safety of the media representatives themselves, but they were not permitted to enter some of the buildings. Only the dormitory was open for inspection. The other buildings remained uninspected because they were supposedly administrative and educational facilities; the attacks took place at night when no one was there — so there's nothing to see there, my dear friends, let's move on...

Most interestingly, only one building is consistently mentioned in Russian reports. In a statement by a representative of the so-called LNR, it is identified as the dormitory of the Starobilsk Pedagogical College (a branch of Luhansk State Pedagogical University). The investigative committee refers to it as an administrative building and a dormitory. In fact, this newly constructed five-story building houses two educational institutions: a branch of the pedagogical university (an institution of higher education) and

a pedagogical college (an institution of secondary vocational education) with classrooms and administrative offices, as well as a dormitory.

However, this is not the only building that was attacked. Drones also struck another building nearby. It is an old, two-story building in the historicist style that housed a completely separate educational institution. This is the Starobilsk Vocational College — essentially a technical school designed to train professionals in various trades.

An interesting detail: these two adjacent buildings house educational institutions with completely different profiles, and next to them is a building containing a garage and auto repair shops. But they are all registered at a single address: 1 Gogol Square.

Now let's assume that near the front lines, in the operational depth, you want to deploy a unit for unmanned systems or a training center for drone operators. A complex of a couple of educational institutions with all the necessary infrastructure — and sharing a single address — is very convenient in terms of both location and secrecy.

And if that's not the case — then why

not show journalists the full picture of the tragedy, rather than limiting them to just one building and a few corridors inside it?

We'll tell you what you think

What can be seen in the footage that has been released? To be honest, there isn't much. It's surprising that, in this case, there aren't any videos filmed by random passersby circulating online. Experience shows that after drone strikes, Russian social media is usually flooded with footage showing the aftermath of the attacks. However, the Starobilsk case has been met with an almost complete media blackout. This may be explained by the fact that the area was likely surrounded along its entire perimeter, with access restricted to representatives of certain agencies — and only later granted to journalists.

Even so, the footage captured by the media is rather sparse. One gets the impression that only that which the authorities wished to show was permitted to be seen.

The selectivity and manipulative nature of granting access to the scene are

Journalists are shown photos of 'children' who are likely not being held by their parents or relatives. Clearly visible is the vocational college building, cordoned off by at least two rows of barrier tape, which was off-limits to visitors.



striking. What does this mean? It refers both to the aforementioned restrictions and to the noticeable creation of so-called 'information noise,' which essentially overshadows the scene itself: some people holding photos right in front of the vocational college building (to which journalists are not admitted), emotional speeches endlessly repeating the word 'children'...

There is also another subtle detail that will catch the eye of anyone familiar with propaganda techniques. The deaths of children evoke much stronger emotions than those of adults, so as cynical as it may sound, exploiting the theme of children's deaths is a classic propaganda tactic. There are practically no images of the bodies of those killed in Starobilsk in open sources. Instead, certain symbolic images are being manipulated. The footage shows a great many children's stuffed toys — which is quite strange, given that the victims were adults. The toys are visible not only in rooms but also in piles of cleared-away rubble. It seems they haven't even gathered dust.

The images also feature other non-random household details — for example, bright yellow rubber bath ducks, pink girls' slippers, and the like, standing out against the backdrop of the rubble. One photo of a room is dominated by utter chaos, yet on the refrigerator standing against the wall, we see a large bouquet of flowers neatly arranged. The contrast and the language of symbols engage the viewer's mind more than logical thinking.

But if the overly childish details against the backdrop of the Starobilsk ruins are not a staged scene, then one cannot help but notice the cinematographers' deliberate intent. The chosen visual language is no accident: it constructs very clear narratives.

The Russian media operates in a similar way, albeit on a verbal level: minimal facts, maximum emotion, while playing just as much on symbolic details: "the girls who died will be buried in bridal gowns," "the attack took place at night while the children were sleeping," "the fascists are killing what is most precious to us," and so on.

After the scene of the incident was shown, the journalists were taken to Luhansk itself, where the victims were



A still from a few-second clip showing the victim — who is definitely not a girl or a child. This moment has been edited out of official sources.

allegedly being treated at a hospital. Why 'allegedly?' Because the journalists never actually saw them — they were met at the hospital by the leader of the separatist LNR, who delivered yet another speech. That was the end of the visit. No opportunity was provided to see the victims or their relatives, much less to speak with them confidentially.

Reports from the hospital and interviews with those who experienced the incident appeared only on extremely loyal and vetted channels. Can international experts rely on them uncritically? Probably not — especially considering that even footage with a lower emotional impact (such as 'Putin's meeting with working-class people,' etc.) is very often labeled as staged. Meanwhile, the theme of the "atrocities of the Kyiv regime" is being exploited to the fullest. Here's an example of how such reports are constructed: the frame shows a building in Donetsk — with shattered windows and peeling facade cladding. The journalist reports that on March 8, the ZSU struck a children's hospital. Unfortunately, the film crew does not show the other, completely destroyed building on the opposite side of the street. It turns out that a munitions depot had been set up in the building of a former car dealership, and that was the target. The explosives detonated upon impact with the Ukrainian drone, and the shockwave shattered the windows of the adjacent hospital. The children's hospital itself had been under renovation for some

time and was not operational, but TASS, of course, was not authorized to report that...

In summary, the media event organized by the ministry of foreign affairs can be described not so much as an effort to familiarize the audience with factual material, but rather as a manipulative attempt to foist pre-prepared versions of the incident, resorting to emotional pressure and obvious propaganda clichés. This becomes particularly evident given that Russia did not allow independent investigators to visit Starobilsk...

"They're just kids!..."

Let's take a closer look at this cliché, which has already managed to take root in the minds of a significant audience. It all began that morning, when the leader of the separatist LNR announced that "children between the ages of 14 and 18" had been affected.

Later, reports began to surface about bodies that had been found, and finally an official list of the deceased was released, listing 21 people — 18 girls and 3 boys. The youngest was born on May 18, 2008, and the oldest is listed as having been born on September 14, 2003.

So what's the story? The 'deceased children' are all adults. Their ages range from 18 to 23. However, the initial report about 14- to 18-year-olds has never been refuted and continues to be circulated to this day.

A typical example is Yana Lantratova's speech to journalists near the ruined vocational college building. Lantratova is a russian politician and human rights commissioner who could be described as the public face of the event for the media (of course, the actual organizers from the special services did not reveal themselves publicly).

"...A terrible tragedy took place here, at the school" (the phrase 'university branch' is replaced with 'school'). "While the children were sleeping — here they are, children aged 14 to 17 — you can see the photographs; we can tell you about each of these children" (the word 'children' is used consistently; their ages are incorrectly stated; there is practically no information about them in the databases). "Three waves of jet drones at 10–15-minute intervals, 16 drones in total" (in the footage showing drone wreckage, we see internal combustion engines, not jet engines). "They waited for the children to run out; they were specifically shooting at the children" (a

strange statement designed to appeal to emotions). "When rescuers and parents arrived here, the shooting continued in order to hinder the rescue of the children" (how could parents have arrived at the dormitory so quickly, especially during an air raid, and who would have allowed them in?). "21 children were killed, and a large number of children were injured" (Lantratova already knows the final death toll, meaning the victims have already been identified, yet she still insists that children were killed, avoiding even mentioning the age of 18 — the age of majority). The reporter goes on to explain that this is a school, not a military facility, but such a claim does not necessarily correspond to reality, as there have been numerous documented cases of russian military personnel using civilian facilities or vehicles for military purposes. The call to look around and verify that there are no military items here, only children's belongings, is an unconvincing argument, since we were not allowed to inspect everything, and within a day, unwanted

items could have been removed and replaced with, say, teddy bears...

This is followed by a full-scale indoctrination campaign claiming that the West is lying, that the Kyiv regime is killing peaceful civilians, dividing Ukrainians into first- and second-class citizens, and treating the residents of the Donbas as genetic trash. Lantratova makes a rhetorical appeal to human and humanitarian rights, calls the incident a war crime, and hopes for a fair assessment by the UN and other international organizations. This is an interesting statement, considering that russia did not allow a UN commission or independent investigators to visit the scene of the incident...

There is no need here to conduct an extensive contextual or semiotic analysis of Lantratova's entire statement. We can conclude by noting that in just under three minutes, the russian representative repeats the word 'children' approximately 15 times...

The word 'children' was picked up by officials, internet trolls, and other useful idiots alike.

The *Karatel* drone is on display at the 'Voin' center. Luhansk.



The logic here is simple: in rhetoric, this manipulative technique is known as the 'argument from repetition,' and people tend to believe information that is repeated often. This phenomenon is most vividly described by the saying attributed to Joseph Goebbels: "A lie repeated a thousand times becomes the truth."

Is it possible to counter the 'children' cliché with the argument that the victims were of legal age? It's very difficult. Those who have bought into it simply won't hear it. At best, this leads to sophistry: "After all, they're still not adults," "To their parents, they remain children, regardless of age..."

All of this is not argumentation, but once again, mere manipulation. From a legal standpoint, including in Russia, an eighteen-year-old is considered an adult.

Or were they combatants?

One crucial detail should not be overlooked: eighteen is the age of conscription. I would very much like to see how an 18-year-old could avoid mandatory military service by arguing that he is still a child. What's more, it is precisely high school graduates and young people of college age who are currently being actively recruited to sign military service contracts, with promises of interesting work in the "most technologically advanced" unmanned systems forces (as reported in the May 2026 issue of WARRIOR).

However, the entire process of militarizing youth in Russia — including in the occupied territories — begins even earlier. Both adolescents and young adults, including girls and women, are actively drawn into the paramilitary and militaristic spheres. Elements of military training, including military-oriented drone operations, are already a systemic phenomenon in youth organizations such as 'Dvizhenie Pervykh,' 'Yunarmiya,' and DOSAAF, as well as in non-governmental organizations and clubs.

One organization of particular interest in this context is 'Voin,' which is described in its documentation as a center for military-athletic training and patriotic education, as well as an autonomous, non-commercial organization for



HUMAN RIGHTS AS A CAREER LADDER: JANA LANTRATOVA

In 2009, she became the regional project coordinator for the 'Young Guard' (the youth wing of the 'United Russia' party).

In 2012, she unexpectedly rose rapidly through the ranks: by order of Putin, she was appointed to the so-called 'Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights under the Presidential Administration.' In addition, she headed the public organization 'Russian Union of Volunteers,' and in 2014 served as an observer during the pseudo-referendum in Crimea.

Lantratova was very zealous in her concern for human rights. So zealous, in fact, that in 2015 she suggested including the statement that "in Norway, sex with children and infants is the norm" in a media report. It's odd that a Russian representative would 'expose' Norway with such sweeping generalizations instead of addressing her own country's problems. That's why, following the wave of anti-corruption protests that erupted in June 2017 — which were not without casualties — the human rights advocate described the police's actions as "appropriate." In her words, the protesters themselves provoked the police and caused the traffic jam...

Of course, such zeal did not go unnoticed. From 2017 to 2019, Lantratova worked in the presidential administration, and in 2021, she was elected to the State Duma. She voted in favor of incorporating the occupied Donbas regions into Russia. In 2025, she became chair of the Civil Society Committee, and a year later was appointed Human Rights Commissioner of the Russian Federation.

Following the de-occupation of Kherson, Ukrainian law enforcement, after reviewing documentation at children's homes, discovered documents signed by Lantratova. These documents prove that the 'human rights defender' was directly involved in the forced deportation of children from Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine. She not only signed the deportation documents but also participated directly in the process: In September 2022, after arriving in occupied Kherson with her assistant Varlamova, Lantratova personally transported two children, one of whom was later adopted by Varlamova herself and her husband, Duma deputy Mironov. In addition, the first and last names of the deported children, as well as their places of birth, were changed.

This entire story is particularly cynical because Lantratova was awarded the Order 'For Merit to the Kherson Region' (1st Class) in 2022. It is no surprise that she appears on the lists of the Ukrainian Security Service and faces charges behind the scenes, and that sanctions against her have been imposed not only by Ukraine but also by the EU, the US, Japan, Switzerland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.



A 'Voin' branch in Luhansk. The drawing gives some insight into their priorities...

supplementary vocational education. Established on putin's orders in September 2022, one of its founders is S. Kiriyenka, an official from putin's inner circle.

The charter states that 'Voin' does not cooperate with foreign organizations. The center operates only in russia and

its occupied territories — in a total of 21 regions. 'Voin' claims to have trained more than 110 000 trainees of both genders, aged 14 to 35. An interesting coincidence: russia's unmanned aerial vehicle forces recruit contract soldiers of the same age group. Incidentally, drone ope-

rations are 'Voin's' top priority. Although first aid and self-defense, as well as weapons training and marksmanship, are also taught, these disciplines can be considered supplementary. Membership is voluntary, but the center's activities have a clear goal — the participants are being prepared for contract service during the courses.

However, training in the basics of drone operation will soon become mandatory in educational institutions. Effective November 28, 2024, a new subject for students in grades 8–11 was approved by order of the russian minister of education: 'Fundamentals of Security and Homeland Defense' (rus. *OBZR*). According to putin, this subject is intended to serve as the foundation for patriotic education and as a basis for students who plan to pursue a career in military service. The list of teaching aids includes, among other things: basic training drone kits, software-based drone flight simulators, an *FPV* flight simulator, and software for aerial racing.

Thus, schoolchildren and students in russia are being trained to work as drone operators, and educational institutions are being adapted for such activities. This is a fact.

Luhansk. Girls at a flight simulator. Do they and their parents ever think about where this path is leading?



"We weren't born just to make soup"

As rumors spread that the Starobilsk training complex might also have been adapted to train female drone operators, some bloggers began — as if by accident — to argue that women are unsuitable for operating drones.

The reasoning is simple: supposedly, they lack the necessary motor skills, have a different decision-making process, and so on. And a clarification: well, there may be women who operate drones, but they're a drop in the bucket.

And that's not true.

In fact, the first attempts to recruit women for this specific job in Russia have been known since 2023. An announcement about this appeared on Russian social media. During the journalistic investigation, it was possible to contact a recruiter going by the call sign 'Vesta,' who explained: "At first, we didn't have any women — only men. Now we've decided to form a platoon of female drone operators and a platoon of female snipers, because they're capable of doing that too. My task, as the platoon leader, is to prove that we're not just born for making soup and having children." It turned out that the drone operators and snipers would serve in the Donbas, in the 'Borz' battalion, which belongs to the private military company 'Redut.' It, in turn, is linked to the GRU — Russia's military intelligence agency.

Another report mentions that one of the first female operators, with the call sign 'Radistka,' who completed her training in 2023, has already flown about 3 000 missions, piloted several types of drones, and "has already earned enough to buy an apartment."

In late June 2025, a report emerged about the first 'Rosgvardia' drone operator working in a combat zone.

Gradually, the training of women and young women gained momentum and became commonplace.

For example, an article published in February 2026 describes a "unique women's unit" formed and trained in Smolensk at a special center established as part of the 'United Russia' project 'Zashchitniki.' The center was founded around mid-2024 and, according to



At the 'Voin' branch in Luhansk, drones are not only flown but also assembled.

reports, has trained a total of about 850 specialists. The women's cohort is the first such initiative, apparently linked to the emergence of unmanned forces. The course participants were recruited from various regions. "The women trained without days off or holidays, assembled drones, and, of course, honed their practical skills. In the end, they received state-recognized certificates," the author of the report notes with satisfaction.

This is not the only such case. Another report focuses on the city of Ivanovo, located near Moscow (the Russians have long nicknamed this former center of light industry the 'city of brides'), where *dro-novod* courses for women are also being organized. From the description, one can get a brief idea of the main guidelines of the training program.

The program has been approved by the Ministry of Defense. The age range is 18 to 40 years old. Women learn to assemble drones and configure their settings; they master drone control first using a simulator, and then at a training ground by performing practical tasks. In addition, the curriculum covers military regulations, individual military training skills, and the basics of tactical medicine.

Courses under this program, including those for women, are held at various organizations (for example, the 'Arkhangel' network for training unmanned aerial vehicle operators alone has at least

15 branches), but all female trainees receive standardized certification documents and are recruited to sign a contract.

Students or trainees?

Some sources have suggested that male and female students in Starobilsk either participated in the assembly of drones or took courses to become drone operators. Is this plausible?

Unfortunately, it is.

We managed to find a couple of posts on the social media accounts of students at Starobilsk Pedagogical University that indicate certain connections to the new wave of militarization and the proliferation of drones: one young woman posted material related to the Alabuga Special Economic Zone (Tatarstan), where drones are manufactured — including *Shahed*/*Geran*-type strike drones; coincidence or not, it can also be traced that she had been away in Tatarstan for about a month. Another young man's profile notes that he and his colleague completed courses in weapons handling and drone piloting. In addition, the college's account featured recruitment ads — calls to sign up for military service contracts.

Furthermore, there are several training centers for drone operators operating in the occupied Luhansk region itself: the military center of the 11th Separate



Drone training room. Luhansk.

Engineering Brigade, as well as the private centers 'Akhmat' and 'Nebesniy Voin.' Drone specialists are also trained at the Institute of Civil Defense at Luhansk State University, and a branch of the aforementioned organization 'Voin' is also involved in this work. Incidentally, the programs and development of this particular center are closely related to the issue we are examining.

'Voin' was founded in Luhansk in 2024. According to the center's deputy director, the main focus here is on unmanned aerial vehicles. There are more than two dozen instructors, most of whom have participated in combat operations. The center has good facilities — tactical training equipment, flight simulators, drones, and so on. Trainees range in age from 14 to 35. They are issued uniforms. The program is systematic and comprehensive: it begins with theory and an introduction to several types of drones, followed by virtual flights and flights with training drones. Later come route navigation, night flying, and mastering multi-drone tactics...

"Maksim is demonstrating his piloting skills. He got the hang of the simulator after just a few tries. He dreams of becoming an FPV drone operator. He recently turned eighteen. He wants to sign a contract and serve in the unmanned forces. His father, a border guard, encouraged him to take this

step." The same Maksim also appears in another article describing the militarized youth competition 'Zarnitsa.' These competitions took place during the soviet era but were later discontinued. In 2023, the competition was revived by one of the militarized youth organizations, 'Dvizhenie Pervykh' — a sort of putin's pioneers. Maksim and his team were sent to 'Zarnitsa,' which was taking place in Volgograd. As a drone operator, he had to demonstrate his skills in piloting FPV and Mavic drones. "We'll have to fly through a designated section within a set time, performing maneuvers. And the Mavic's task is to detect a target and drop an explosive," Maksim explained.

According to the center's deputy director, about 3 000 trainees have been trained here over the past couple of years. And this is just the beginning, because 'Voin' has signed agreements with all higher education institutions in the separatist LNR. "We'll also work with young people in frontline areas and house them at our center, since our capacity allows for it. We can accommodate 50 people at our base, who will participate in programs lasting 36 hours or longer," another center employee revealed.

It gets even more interesting when you compare a couple of details: 'Voin' positions itself as an additional vocational education organization, while Starobilsk

College, located in the old building, is a vocational education institution. What's more, there is no class schedule on the vocational college's website. It appears that classes have not been held in the old building since last fall. True, classes were held remotely — as evidenced by links on 'Zoom.' However, judging by photos of the college building, which has not yet been demolished, it does not appear to be abandoned — the grounds are well-maintained, and flags hang at the entrance. Perhaps some kind of activity took place here that they did not want to publicize?

The devil is in the details?

But despite all this, the kremlin maintains an unshakable position: the Ukrainian armed forces deliberately struck a civilian target, schoolchildren were killed, and an act of terrorism was carried out.

This version is so one-sidedly simplistic that it sounds almost cartoonish. Based on it, one can imagine the planning of the operation at the Ukrainian General Staff:

'...Mykola, why don't we go ahead and destroy, say, a dormitory? At night? With the children sleeping inside? We'll carry out a terrorist attack, and the international community will accuse us

of committing a war crime and a crime against humanity?...'

'Great idea, Taras! Let's get to work on this!'

Of course, the Ukrainian General Staff's response to Russia's accusations was dry and matter-of-fact: "The Ukrainian Armed Forces attack only infrastructure and facilities used for military purposes, strictly adhering to the norms of international humanitarian law, the laws and customs of war."

Why so laconic?

Were they supposed to reveal their intelligence methods and the agency involved?

Many people assume that the training complex — or part of it — was in fact being used for military purposes. And here there are two possible scenarios: either the 'students' were actually combatants, or the military used the students as human shields. The use of civilian facilities for military purposes or hiding behind civilians is already standard Russian practice, fully in line with the tenets of hybrid warfare...

But assumptions remain assumptions until they are proven, and Russia, as we can see, is reluctant to share actual evidence of the incident, instead presenting simulacra — facts whose meaning has been distorted and actions that have been staged.

To unravel the mystery of Starobilsk, we'll have to piece together the details bit by bit. Every little detail will be important here. Some of them have already been pointed out.

For example, in one of the videos, rescuers are pulling a body from the rubble. It is a young, athletic-looking man with a very short haircut; the frame shows military-style shorts and, likely, a rubber Esmarch tourniquet on his thigh. Official reports clearly avoid showing this scene — it was edited out during post-production.

Another episode isn't shown at all — it only briefly flashed across social media. The body is most likely being carried out of the vocational college building (the same one to which journalists were not allowed). It is not being carried by rescue workers or medical personnel, but by men dressed in semi-military attire and armed with AK assault rifles.

And how do we explain the fact that in one of the photos showing the interior of the vocational college, a metal detector gate is visible in the lobby? For what purpose has such a heavily secured checkpoint been installed at an educational institution?

Why are there double-decker metal beds — the kind typically used in barracks — in the dormitory of a pedagogical university or college? It appears that

the bunk beds do not meet the standards approved by the Russian Ministry of Education, and the room in which they are located is no larger than a double room. I wonder if an educational institution in a town near the front lines has become so popular that its dormitory is so overcrowded with future teachers?

Finally — why, with civilians, including children, dying almost every day, is the Starobilsk case presented by the Russian media as an exceptional one? What other deaths were commemorated with a minute of silence in the Kremlin itself, followed, for some reason, by three shouts of 'hoorah!'?...

And this is only a microscopic and superficial part of the investigation. A thorough collection of data and metadata, along with a multifaceted analysis of them, is needed.

The MH17 crash was investigated down to the smallest detail. It took a couple of years, and the more detailed conclusions were published nearly five years later. Participants in the international investigation interviewed a couple hundred witnesses, listened to 150 000 audio recordings, and reviewed half a million pieces of various video footage. The Starobilsk case may require even more effort and time. But, as Scripture says, "there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed." ■

The equipment at the training center shows that drone operators aren't being trained here to film weddings...



Photo credits: meduza.io, mk.ru, lug-info.ru, nestcentr.org, viory.video, infobae.com, tagesspiegel.de, hringbraut.is, news.gtrklnr.ru, pointer.cro-ncrv.nl, prudensi.com, vot-tak.tv, themoscowtimes.com, x.com

The June Uprising of 1941 shook all of Lithuania like a powerful explosion. It was an enthusiastic, widespread, and spontaneous attempt by the Lithuanian people to shake off soviet occupation and regain national independence. Although the Uprising was one of the most striking and dramatic episodes of World War II in Lithuania, it remains insufficiently researched and is still being studied by Lithuanian historians.



THE JUNE UPRISING THE NORTHEAST FIELD



ARŪNAS BUBNYS,
PH.D.

G:
T

There are many reasons why the June Uprising has not been sufficiently studied by historians. The uprising itself lasted only about a week; it coincided with the start of the Nazi-soviet War and was overshadowed by subsequent long-term processes and brutal events (the Nazi

and soviet occupations, the Holocaust, postwar deportations, the partisan war, etc.). Subsequent historical events, which lasted considerably longer, overshadowed memories of this heroic yet brief chapter in our recent history in the nation's collective memory. Memories of and respect for the June Uprising were kept alive primarily through the efforts of its participants who had fled to the West. In Lithuania, and conditions for researching the history of the June 1941 Uprising did not emerge until after the restoration of independence. To date, most Lithuanian historians have focused primarily on the formation and activities of the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF) in Berlin, as well as the LAF's program and ideological positions, often emphasizing the anti-Semitic elements in the organization's documents. The actions of the insurgents in Kaunas, the proclamation

of the Provisional Government of Lithuania, and its activities during the first weeks of the war and the Nazi occupation, as well as the fates of the uprising's key organizers and leaders, have been fairly well studied. One of the least-studied aspects of the uprising is the actions of the insurgents in the Lithuanian provinces — in the counties and districts. Professional historians have shown virtually no interest in this topic, leaving this work to history teachers, local historians, and other enthusiasts living in the regions who are interested in the history of their homeland. A notable exception is the collection of documents compiled by Dr. V. Brandišauskas, as well as individual volumes on the history of districts published by the 'Versmė' publishing house. The neglect of research on the June Uprising in the provinces is a misguided stance that must be corrected. Systematic

and consistent research on this topic would allow us to answer several very important questions, the answers to which we do not yet have. First and foremost, we would gain a concrete and comprehensive picture of the course of the uprising throughout Lithuania. Perhaps certain regional differences and specific characteristics would come to light, as the scale, intensity, and duration of the uprising varied across different counties and districts. On the other hand, patterns characteristic of all of Lithuania would become more apparent, confirming our intuitions and understanding of the uprising's universal and mass nature. Furthermore, we could determine at least an approximate number of participants in the uprising and the losses they suffered, as well as the achievements of the insurgents (towns captured, local government institutions reestablished, sabotage operations carried out, casualties inflicted on red army units and groups of soviet officials (red army soldiers and soviet activists killed, wounded, and taken prisoner). Other, little-studied aspects of the June Uprising also deserve attention: the formation and activities of the anti-soviet Lithuanian underground prior to the Nazi-soviet War, and the connections between local resistance groups and the underground leadership centers in Vilnius, Kaunas, and other major cities. Research is urgently needed on the motivations, social background, professions, and ages of the uprising's participants, as well as their involvement in the activities of organizations (such as the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union and the Young Lithuanians) and political parties during the era of independent Lithuania. Answers to these questions would help explain what kind of people joined resistance organizations and became members of the uprising, and for what reasons.

The purpose of this article is to reconstruct the course of the uprising in northeastern Lithuania. The article examines the activities of the insurgents (partisans) in three counties of northeastern Lithuania — Švenčionys, Rokiškis, and Zarasai. The territory of these counties and their division into parishes correspond to the actual situation in 1941. The article examines the following issues: the impact of soviet repressions on the formation and spread of the resistance movement; the

combat operations of the uprising (partisan) units and the casualties they suffered; the losses inflicted on the red army and soviet officials, the occupation of towns, their defense, and the restoration of local government institutions. The chronological scope of this article covers the period from the mass deportations to Siberia in June 1941 to the first days of July 1941.

The article's source base consists primarily of documents held in the Lithuanian Special Archives (LYA), the Lithuanian Central State Archives (LCVA), and the archives of the Lithuanian Genocide and Resistance Research Center (LGGRTC). At the LYA, the author of this article located and examined approximately 200 criminal case files of former uprising participants in the three counties mentioned. This figure alone reflects the scale of the uprising in the region under study, as soviet security forces managed to locate and convict only a portion of the former uprising participants in the postwar years. A significant number of former uprising participants were killed in partisan units during the postwar period or fled to the West as the soviets advanced. The criminal cases contain a wealth of information about the formation and activities of insurgent groups in specific localities, clashes with red army troops, and the losses sustained. In some cases, we find information about the activities of the anti-soviet underground prior to the Nazi-soviet War. Archival documents often supplement or confirm information published in scholarly literature and journalistic articles regarding the June 1941 uprising in northeastern Lithuania. Some information about the June Uprising has also survived in the LCVA collections; the LGGRTC archive holds approximately one thousand personal files of former participants in the June 1941 Uprising, compiled after 1997. These files contain documents that cannot be found in other archives: descriptions of the participants' lives and resistance activities, personal documents, witness statements confirming their participation in the uprising, and recommendations. A considerable number of articles and memoirs about the uprising in Eastern Lithuania were published in KARYS (WARRIOR), *'Naujoji Lietuva'*, and other newspapers during the years of German occupation. The author's work was greatly facilitated by valuable articles by

historian V. Striužas and regional historian V. Indrašius on the June 1941 uprising in the Švenčionys and Zarasai districts.

Švenčionys County

Throughout history, the political affiliation and ethnic composition of the Švenčionys region (Švenčionija) have changed frequently. From the very founding of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the XIII century, the Švenčionys region has been part of the Lithuanian state. This region experienced a particularly high number of changes and calamities in the first half of the XX century. After World War I (1918–1920), Lithuania, Poland, and soviet russia fought over Švenčionija. From October 1920 until mid-September 1939, the region was under Polish rule, and in late October 1939, part of Švenčionija returned to the Republic of Lithuania. According to unofficial data from the Statistics Board in 1941, the then-Švenčionys County had a population of 103 295: Lithuanians accounted for 76 percent, Poles for 13 percent, and Jews for 3.93 percent of the county's population. Despite centuries of Polonization and russification, Švenčionys County remained predominantly Lithuanian. In June 1940, after the soviets occupied Lithuania, the sovietization and terrorization of the region began. Communist terror reached its peak on the eve of the Nazi-soviet War, during the deportations of June 14, 1941. A total of 311 residents of Švenčionys County were deported to the depths of russia (the Altai Region, Yakutia, Komi, and the Tomsk Region). Most of the deportees were Lithuanians. The deportations in the town of Švenčionys were led by NKGB officer Abrasov.

The soviet authorities' coercion and terror fueled the desire of the region's patriotic residents to resist the communist regime. Well before the start of the Nazi-soviet War, former members of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, civil servants from the era of independent Lithuania who had been dismissed from their jobs, the most active students, and Lithuanian soldiers from soviet army units stationed in the county began to organize secretly in certain areas of Švenčionys County. The activities of the insurgents (who at the time usually referred to themselves as parti-



Švenčionys. Photographed on July 1, 1941. This building now houses the Nalšia Museum.

sans) in Švenčionys County were among the most intense in Lithuania. The ranks of the insurgents were greatly strengthened by Lithuanian soldiers from the red army (RA) stationed in Pabradė, the Pažeimenė training ground, and Švenčionėliai, who deserted en masse at the start of the war. They often joined the newly forming local partisan units, armed as they were, or formed independent combat units. The ranks of the insurgents were reinforced by professional soldiers, which gave the anti-soviet resistance considerable strength. According to the uprising plan drawn up by the LAF, Švenčionys County belonged to the Northeast Lithuania region (with its center in the Utena and Švenčionys counties) and was subordinate to the LAF headquarters in Vilnius. Prior to the Nazi-soviet War, the 179th Rifle Division of the RA 29th Territorial Rifle Corps was stationed at the Pabradė training ground. Most of its officers and soldiers were Lithuanians. When the war began, the division received orders to retreat to Russia. The Lithuanian soldiers did not want to leave their homeland and fight for the Soviet regime, which was foreign to them. When the opportunity arose, many attempted to desert. During the withdrawal, numerous armed clashes occurred between the Lithuanians and soldiers loyal to the so-

viets. Of the approximately 6 000 soldiers in the 179th Division, about 1 500–2 000 RA soldiers retreated to Russia. On June 24, 1941, Lithuanian soldiers stationed at the Pabradė training ground revolted and disarmed the loyal RA soldiers. Lt. Vytautas Jurevičius declared himself commandant of the revolting soldiers. Local Lithuanian partisans also joined the soldiers. On the morning of June 25, the 1st Company of the RA 259th Rifle Regiment, led by Capt. Povilas Bareišis, blocked the path of a Soviet unit attempting to retreat through Pabradė. After a fierce battle, the Lithuanian soldiers were ultimately forced to retreat. Two Lithuanian insurgents were killed in the battle. The Russians lost about 12 soldiers. The Soviets, having broken through, marched in the direction of Švenčionys. Insurgent Lithuanian soldiers from the surrounding areas began gathering in Pabradė. They formed the Pabradė Detachment, which consisted of four rifle companies, a mobile detachment, communications and logistics platoons, and other units.

The Pabradė Detachment also commanded resistance units from Pažeimenė and Joniškis. The detachment comprised several hundred uprising fighters. The Pabradė Detachment existed until July 25, 1941, maintaining order and guarding bridges,

the railroad, and capturing military equipment. Eighteen Lithuanian soldiers and two civilian partisans were killed in battles against the Soviets in the Pabradė area and in Pažeimenė. Those who died in Pabradė were buried in the old cemetery of Bajorėliai. In September 1998, a wayside chapel was erected in their memory.

Before the war, units of the 179th Division were stationed at **Pažeimenė**. Lithuanian soldiers began organizing there on June 24, 1941. They were led by Lt. Col. P. Staniulis. One infantry battalion, a heavy machine-gun company, and platoons of cyclists, signalmen, and scouts were formed. The rebelling soldiers arrested about 70 RA soldiers loyal to the Soviets. A few days later, the Pažeimenė insurgents joined the Pabradė Detachment.

Švenčionėliai District. During the war and the German occupation, Švenčionėliai (10 km northwest of Švenčionys) served as the district center and was the second-largest town in Švenčionys County. According to data from January 1, 1941, the then-Švenčionėliai District (which was soon abolished and incorporated into Švenčionys County) had a population of 50 374 (77.27 percent of whom were Lithuanians).

On the eve of the Nazi-soviet War, the Švenčionėliai training ground housed the base of the 619th Artillery Regiment of the RA 29th Territorial Rifle Corps and the summer school of the Vilnius Infantry School. When the war began, two battalions of the Infantry School were transferred to Vilnius.

A platoon of cadets, half of a *politruk* company, an artillery battery, and a supply company were left behind to guard the training ground.

On June 24, 1941, the soldiers left to guard the training ground received an order to move eastward (toward Belarus and Russia).

Instead of carrying out this order, a portion of the company led by General Staff Capt. Juozas Puknys turned north, seeking to join the Lithuanian uprising fighters who had begun operating in that region. In the village of Paluknis, the insurgent Lithuanian soldiers joined forces with local partisans. A detachment led by Capt. J. Puknys set up an ambush for the retreating RA troops between Lakes Labanoras and Baltas. During the clash, the unit's commander, Capt. J. Puknys, and cadet Julius Gričius were killed, and several other uprising fighters were wounded. Nevertheless, the insurgents managed to eliminate a group of 15 Soviet soldiers (3 officers, 2 *politruks*, and 10 soldiers).

On June 25, 1941, Lithuanians from among the insurgent RA soldiers organized the Švenčionėliai Defense Detachment (Lith. ŠAR). The ŠAR staff (then known as the partisan staff) was led by Ret. Maj. Kazimieras Veikutis (according to other sources, Maj. Petras Ličkus was the head of the ŠAR staff) and Lt. Col. Balys Svilas. Other members of staff included Vaclovas Raginis (commandant of the town of Švenčionėliai), Vincas Blažys (county governor), and Karolis Cicėnas (mayor of Švenčionėliai). According to the testimony of some witnesses, the ŠAR consisted of up to 600 fighters. According to historian Valdas Striužas, the unit comprised two infantry companies and one machine-gun company. Units in Antaliedė (commander Anicetas Urmonas), Kaltanėnai (commanded by Ret. Lt. Jonas



Capt. Juozas Puknys, 1909-1941.

Kvaraciejus), Krivasalis, Labanoras (commanded by Lt. Vincas Kačergius and NCO Pranas Snieška), Linkmenys (*KGB* reports indicate this unit had 65 members), Rėkučiai (commanded by Adomas Lapėnas), Saldutiškis (an independent unit was later formed here), Šiškiniai, and Vasiuliškė (commander Pranas Stankelis) were subordinate to ŠAR.

In the early days of the war, Lithuanian uprising units began operating in the town and district of Švenčionėliai. They were led by Capt. Jonas Kurpis. The Švenčionėliai uprising company had about 200 members. Most of them were local riflemen and Lithuanians who had deserted from the Soviet army. The partisans' headquarters was located in Butleir's House on Vilnius Street (according to other sources, in the building of the Lithuanian gymnasium on Mokykla Street). The insurgents armed themselves with weapons left behind at the Soviet army training ground. They disarmed small groups of retreating RA soldiers and engaged in combat with resisting Russian soldiers on several occasions.

Švenčionys County was one of the most important routes for the RA's retreat from Lithuania to the east. As a result, clashes between retreating RA units and the insurgents in this district were particularly frequent. As early as June 24, 1941, partisans in Švenčionėliai captured the town without resistance, but RA soldiers arriving by train forced the partisans to retreat into the surrounding forests. In the Dotėnėnai Forest (about 5–6 km south of Švenčionėliai), a group of about 400 deserting RA soldiers, Lithuanians, and civilian insurgents gathered. The insurgents armed themselves with weapons left behind in RA depots. In the early days of the uprising, Antanas Ulozas, who had been guarding the bridge over the Žeimena River, was killed. He was buried in the town cemetery. During the

German occupation, one of the streets in Švenčionėliai was named after A. Ulozas. On June 25 (according to other sources, June 27), the insurgents regained control of the town. They secured the railway station and the warehouses, water supply, military workshops, and other important facilities in the surrounding area. On June 25, the partisans fired upon retreating RA soldiers, killing a Soviet captain and taking a wounded senior lieutenant prisoner. According to the testimony of P. Dranginis, a former soldier of the 215th Rifle Regiment who participated in the battle, the firefight took place near the Švenčionys road; during the battle, two RA vehicles were destroyed and several RA soldiers were killed, while the insurgents seized Soviet weapons and other war spoils. Until July, the Švenčionėliai partisans clashed almost daily with retreating Soviet soldiers. On June 26, near the bridge, the insurgents again clashed with a detachment (about 60 men) of RA soldiers. The firefight lasted about two hours. According to the testimony of former insurgents, nine Russian soldiers were killed in this battle and one was taken prisoner. Two Lithuanian insurgents were also killed in the battle.

On June 27, in the vicinity of Švenčionėliai, Soviet forces surrounded a group of insurgents led by Lt. Col. J. Šlepečius. The insurgents were saved from annihilation by a partisan unit led by S. Urbonavičius and A. Šležas, which had rushed to the scene from Pabradė. During the battle, the Russians were scattered and several dozen RA soldiers were taken prisoner.

The captured Soviet soldiers were initially held in an empty warehouse on Vilnius Street in Švenčionėliai.

Clashes with retreating groups of RA soldiers continued until July. On June 28, the partisans fired on a column of RA trucks. Two wounded Soviet soldiers were taken prisoner; two men on the insurgents' side were also wounded. On June 30, partisans captured four Soviet soldiers. On the road to Kaltanėnai, a group of partisans intercepted a RA truck carrying an anti-tank gun and captured



Capt. Jonas Kurpis, 1894-1945.



Lithuanian soldiers of the RA 29th Territorial Rifle Corps who defected from the retreating soviet army.

five soviet soldiers. During the battle near Kaltanėnai, Mykolas Dubonis, a member of the uprising who was maintaining communication lines, was killed. He was buried in the Reškutėnai Cemetery. According to the testimony of participants in the uprising, another skirmish with RA troops took place in Švenčionėliai near the bridge over the river in late June 1941. Two Lithuanian partisans were killed during the battle. Soviet casualties are unknown, as the insurgents were forced to retreat. According to the testimony of participants in the uprising, the Švenčionėliai partisans took several dozen RA soldiers prisoner. When the Germans arrived, the prisoners were transported by train to Vilnius and transferred to a prisoner-of-war camp. According to other sources, the partisans of Švenčionėliai District captured as many as 432 soviet soldiers.

The first German military units (three armored vehicles) arrived in Švenčionėliai only on July 1, 1941. The German military

command assumed supreme authority in Švenčionys County. The town was already under the control of the uprising at that time, Lithuanian government bodies (the district municipality and police) had been reestablished, state property had been protected from destruction and looting, and the civilian population had been safeguarded from the mass terror perpetrated by the NKVD, the RA, and soviet party activists.

On July 6, 1941, soldiers of the former 29th Territorial Rifle Corps who had participated in the uprising, along with their weapons, ammunition, and families living in Švenčionėliai, departed for Vilnius by train. The group of insurgents was reportedly disbanded on July 10, 1941. Some of its members joined the police and self-defense battalions, while others returned to their former jobs and farms. J. Kurpis was summoned to Vilnius and appointed head of the Švenčionėliai-Švenčionys County by K. Kalendra, the

Vilnius Region Director of Internal Affairs. He held this position until July 26, 1941. At that time, the district of Švenčionėliai was abolished, and Švenčionėliai, as a municipality, was incorporated into Švenčionys County. During the uprising, nine Lithuanian insurgents (six soldiers and three civilians) were killed in battles in the town of Švenčionėliai and its surroundings. The following fallen were buried in the Švenčionėliai cemetery: Junior NCO Stasys Drupas, Junior NCO Kazys Matuzevičius, Pvt. Bronius Jakutis, Pvt. Jonas Kavaliauskas, Pvt. Kazimirskis, Pvt. Vincas Stokna, Ignas Sasnauskas, a staff member of the Vilnius Military Academy, and civilian partisans Antanas Ulozas and Kazys Verikas. In 1994, a gravestone monument was unveiled at the Švenčionėliai Cemetery in memory of the uprising participants.

Adutiškis. Soldiers were deserting en masse from the retreating Lithuanian units of the RA. Military personnel loyal to

the soviets, *politruks*, and NKVD agents attempted to pursue the retreating Lithuanians and restore order in the disorganized units. In the Myliai Forest near Švenčionys, the bolsheviks killed Capt. Adolfas Pilvelis of the 215th Rifle Regiment and five other Lithuanian soldiers. All of them were later buried in the Švenčionys cemetery. The Lithuanians who had deserted the RA joined forces with local partisans near Adučiškis. Near the village of Bernotai (Mielagėnai District), the partisans engaged in battle with russian soldiers. The partisans killed five russians, wounded one, disarmed and released ten. On June 29, 1941, two Adučiškis partisans — Feliksas Bartkevičius and Leonas Uogelė — were killed in a battle with the soviets. Another five Adučiškis insurgents went missing in action during fighting near the village of Krikonys. On June 24, refusing to retreat to russia, Lt. Col. Otonas Milaševičius shot himself. There are reports that on June 26–27, Lt. Petras Gavulis, Lt. Kęstutis Kazėnas, Lt. Jonas Navikevičius, and NCO Viktoras Bitaravičius were killed during clashes in the Adučiškis area. Their names are inscribed on the memorial plaque at the Adučiškis chapel.

Saldutiškis was one of the twelve district centers in Švenčionys County during the German occupation. In the early days of the Nazi-soviet War, Capt. Eugenijus Petrauskas, who had been in hiding in the Saldutiškis to avoid arrest (his parents had been deported to Siberia by the soviets on June 14, 1941), organized groups of insurgents (partisans). He commanded all the units operating in the district. The number of volunteers grew very rapidly, but at first they were severely lacking in weapons, which made it impossible to carry out large-scale combat operations. Within just a few days, the Saldutiškis group had over 80 members. The ranks of the uprising were reinforced by armed Lithuanian soldiers of the RA who had arrived from Pašaminė. The partisans cut the telegraph wires, dismantled bridges, and blocked the main roads with trees. On the morning of June 24, 1941, the insurgents captured Saldutiškis without resistance and established themselves in the former Riflemen's House. The Lithuanian flag was raised. Local communists and soviet activists fled in panic. The first armed clash

with RA soldiers took place on June 24 (according to other sources, on June 25). Partisans attacked a stationary train (other sources mention a railcar) carrying RA soldiers and soviet activists at the Saldutiškis railway station. During the fierce firefight, partisan Antanas Samsonas was wounded in the arm. On the soviet side, two soldiers were killed and three were taken prisoner. The town's doctor, Pleiskys (elsewhere referred to as Plieskys), provided medical assistance to both Samsonas and the wounded RA soldier.

During the first week of the war, partisan units often had to engage in combat with retreating RA soldiers, policemen, and soviet activists. On June 25, the insurgents in Linkmenys received word that four soviet trucks were approaching from Utena. The insurgents set up an ambush and fired heavily on the first truck to appear. According to the partisans, nine soviet soldiers were killed and a large number of weapons were seized. Partisan Petras Bieliauskas was killed in this battle. The remaining soviet trucks retreated toward Kirdeikiai. There, local participants in the uprising blocked their path. They seized one of the trucks. Pvt. Bronius Želnys was killed during the firefight.

Strong RA units were retreating through Saldutiškis District. This posed a great danger to the uprising groups operating in the district. German aircraft intensively bombed the retreating RA units and saved the Lithuanian partisans from imminent annihilation. Near the village of Pūčkoriškiai (4 km northwest of Saldutiškis), the insurgents repelled a soviet column and forced it to turn toward Tauragnai. The Lithuanian partisans seized a large amount of military equipment and weapons. Pvt. Lašinskas (buried in the Kaltanėnai Cemetery) and another unidentified insurgent were killed in these battles. In retaliation against the Lithuanian partisans, RA units set the town of Tauragnai on fire.

In the early days of the war, an uprising platoon was organized in the town of

Labanoras (12 km from Saldutiškis). It was initially, apparently, subordinate to the ŠAR. Its leadership remains unclear. Various sources indicate that the group was led by Lt. Vincas Kačergius, Lt. Jackūnas, NCO Pranas Snieška, Juozas Deveikis, and several others. The unit consisted of several dozen men. They ambushed retreating RA groups and carried out

arrests of communists and soviet activists. According to witnesses, the Labanoras partisans killed 8 soviet soldiers and 1 *politruk*. Unit members Andrius Gasiulis and Jurgis Bimba were killed in battles with the soviets.

On June 29, one of the last battles between the Saldutiškis Detachment partisans and the RA took place. Insurgents from Linkmenys attacked a column of soviet trucks near the village of Pažiezdris. Two local communists showed the

russians a route by which they could outflank the insurgents from behind. Due to the unexpected soviet assault, the partisans suffered significant losses in this battle. Soldiers Antanas Vaiciukonis, Juozas Parulis, and Stasys Talkačiauskas (all buried in the Margavonys Cemetery); Adomas Švogžlys, who was conducting a reconnaissance mission near the village of Salos, was killed, and platoon commander Lt. Kazys Gaižutis was wounded. German motorized units did not reach Saldutiškis until July 2, 1941. On that day, Stasys Matusevičius — arguably the last partisan of the Saldutiškis Detachment — was killed by a landmine due to carelessness.

According to the detachment commander, Capt. E. Petrauskas, a total of about 650 uprising participants fought in the platoons of the Saldutiškis Detachment. V. Striužas, a researcher of the history of the uprising in the Švenčionys region, believes that the unit consisted of about 500 men in total. A list of insurgents from the town of Saldutiškis in 1941, compiled by the KGB in 1976, contains the surnames of 56 individuals. It is likely no longer possible to determine the exact number of partisans. Few archival docu-



Capt. Eugenijus Petrauskas, 1905–1981.

ments have survived, and almost all of the participants in or witnesses to the uprising have already passed away. A dozen or so partisans from the Saldutiškis Detachment were killed in battles with the soviets.

Joniškis was the center of the district during the German occupation. In the early days of the war, a group of insurgents (partisans) was formed from former members of the local Riflemen's Union and Lithuanians who had defected from the RA. A few days later, the Joniškis uprising group joined the Pabradė partisan detachment. The Joniškis partisans were led by veterinarian Alfonsas Piliponis and Col. Blažys. The partisans' headquarters was located in the district municipality building. The Joniškis insurgent group had about 30–50 members. The Joniškis fighters had to engage in combat with strong retreating RA units. On June 28, the soviets attacked the partisans who had entrenched themselves in Joniškis. According to data compiled by V. Striužas, a tank and a machine-gun squad were sent from Pabradė to aid the insurgents, but these reinforcements did not arrive in Joniškis in time, and the local partisans were forced to retreat, suffering casualties. During the battle, 1st Sgt. Jonas Adomaitis, Cpl. Merkevičius, Pvt. Pranas Busius and Pvt. Dominykas Grigaliūnas, and civilian partisans Alfonsas Žvikevičius and Kostas Žuromskas were killed. All of them were

buried in the town cemetery. According to other sources, this battle took place on June 30. The partisans had taken up positions behind a stone fence at the Joniškis cemetery and fired on soviet soldiers traveling along the road. The soviets captured the town and freed the RA soldiers who had been detained there earlier. Reportedly, 5 russian soldiers and 7 Lithuanian insurgents were killed in the battle. According to other data, the partisans killed 13 RA soldiers.

Archival records indicate that a total of 17 Joniškis partisans were killed in clashes with the soviets. Among the dead was the squad leader, A. Piliponis, who accidentally detonated a grenade in July 1941. After his death, Pranas Grigalevičius took command of the Joniškis partisan platoon. Furthermore, on June 28, 1941, while retreating, the bolsheviks murdered three unarmed residents of the village of Dirvoniškiai in Joniškis District: Jonas Cijūnaitis (42), Ona Cijūnaitienė (46), and Antanas Cijūnaitis (44). According to V. Striužas, a researcher of the uprising, a total of at least 800–1 000 insurgent soldiers and civilians participated in the June 1941 uprising in the Švenčionys County. At least 137 insurgents from the Švenčionys region were killed in battles with the bolsheviks: 115 soldiers and 22 civilian partisans. In addition, the retreating soviet forces killed 11 civilian residents of Švenčionys County.

Rokiškis County

The Rokiškis County suffered greatly from soviet terror in 1940–1941. According to data from the Lithuanian Mutual Aid Information Bureau, during the deportations of June 1941, 824 people were deported from Rokiškis County deep into the soviet union (USSR) (411 men and 413 women). According to documents from the NKGB of the Lithuanian SSR, by June 19, 1941, 225 families comprising 811 people had been deported from Rokiškis County. The mass deportation of innocent people to Siberia instilled in the Lithuanian population not only fear but also feelings of hatred toward the communist regime, its officials, and its supporters. The bolder and more patriotic men were not prepared to surrender to their fate without a fight and began preparing for armed resistance even before the outbreak of the Nazi-soviet War.

P. Gladkov, People's Commissar of State Security of the Lithuanian SSR, noted in his Order No. 45 of June 21, 1941, that some of the 'hostile elements' who had not been deported had gone underground and formed armed 'bandit gangs' (future participants in the June 1941 uprising — author's note), which had already begun operating in the forests of the Marijampolė, Rokiškis, Šiauliai, and Utena counties. P. Gladkov ordered the county security departments and three regiment-sized

Participants of the Uprising escorting a captured soviet soldier. June 26, 1941.



units of the USSR border troops (border platoons 105, 106, and 107), stationed in Lithuania, to immediately eliminate the Lithuanian partisan detachments. When the war began, RA soldiers, NKVD officers, and communists retreating from Lithuania killed prisoners and civilians they suspected of being enemies in many parts of the country. Dozens of people were killed in nearly every county in Lithuania. During the first days of the war, the retreating bolsheviks killed approximately 1 100 people in Lithuania (not including Lithuanian insurgents killed in combat).

In Rokiškis County, between June 24 and 29, 1941, the soviets killed 47 residents (more were killed only in Šiauliai, Telšiai, Kaunas, and Ukmergė counties). On June 24, NKVD officers terrorized the residents of the Lašai Manor and shot Juozas Pumputis. On the same day, a temporary military field court in Rokiškis sentenced 23 detained residents of Rokiškis to death and announced that the death penalty would be carried out publicly in the town square. Only because they were frightened by the approaching German army did the bolsheviks fail to carry out their plans. Nevertheless, in the early days of the war,

they killed several civilians in the town of Rokiškis. Meanwhile, prisoners held in the Rokiškis prison took advantage of the chaos caused by an exploding ammunition depot to escape from the prison. One escapee, Lionginas Vaitkevičius, was captured by local soviet activists and brutally tortured to death in the Steponys Forest. In Juodupė District, on June 25–26, 1941, local communists brutally tortured and killed 13 local residents in the courtyard of the local executive committee. Their bodies were taken to the forest and buried in a gravel pit. At the start of the war, soviet army units were retreating through Rokiškis toward Daugavpils. The retreating soviets were frequently fired upon by squads and groups of Lithuanian insurgents. The German army occupied Rokiškis without a fight on June 27, 1941. In the early days of the nazi occupation, a Lithuanian district commandant's headquarters (commanded by Lt. Jonas Žukas) was established in Rokiškis, along with a security company subordinate to it. 21 soldiers served there. The majority of the company's soldiers were Lithuanian soldiers who had deserted from the RA. Former Lithuanian insurgents (partisans)

also joined the commandant's company. In total, about 120 soldiers served in the company. The company was commanded by Lt. Marijonas Petkūnas.

Juodupė. In Juodupė District, a group of Lithuanian insurgents organized itself in the very first days of the war (according to eyewitness accounts, the group began operating on June 24). The main organizer of the group was Antanas Kapėnas, who had worked as the principal of the Juodupė Elementary School before the war. On A. Kapėnas's initiative, a provisional district committee was established, which he himself led. Albinas Karaliūnas and Jonas Mažeika were also members of the committee. It is difficult to say who was the commander of the Juodupė group, as eyewitness accounts differ. The names most frequently mentioned are A. Kapėnas, Jonas Skruodys, and Adomas Vabolis. Initially, the unit was reportedly led by Lt. (elsewhere referred to as a captain) J. Skruodys, but he soon left for Onuškis, and A. Vabolis took command of the unit. The latter remained in command until approximately July 8, 1941, after which he was relieved of his duties as commander

Lithuanian political prisoners murdered by the soviets. June 24, 1941.





Rokiškis, Independence Square. Lithuanian insurgents greet soldiers from German advance reconnaissance units. Insurgents and German soldiers are standing on top of an *Sd.Kfz. 221* light armored vehicle. Photographed on June 27, 1941.

The German *Sd.Kfz. 221*
light armored vehicle used
for reconnaissance.

by a decision of the committee for the unauthorized execution of several soviet activists in the Vyžuonai Forest. Pranas Staigys was appointed platoon leader in place of A. Vabolis. Staigys served as commander for about another week until the unit was disbanded in mid-July. The unit's headquarters was located in the district municipality building. The unit initially consisted of a dozen or so men, later growing to about 50. A report prepared in 1973 by the Rokiškis District KGB branch lists the names of 54 members of the Juodupė uprising unit. After the unit was disbanded, some of its members joined the police or self-defense units. The provisional district committee also operated until mid-July 1941. The local uprising group was subordinate to the committee.

As in other Lithuanian parishes, the Juodupė partisans fired upon retreating RA and soviet activist units. One of the soviet activists described a clash with Lithuanian partisans near Juodupė as follows: "We arrived in Rokiškis. There, after joining their active members, we received weapons and set out toward Latvia; it was 3:00 p.m. on the 26th. After marching to the town of

Juodupė near the Latvian border, we again exchanged fire with German paratroopers (these were not German paratroopers, but Lithuanian insurgents — author's note), but apparently there were few of them there, as we quickly silenced them with our fire. Apparently, they had fled, since it is, of course, harder to catch them in the forest, but local residents claim that there were German paratroopers there. After that exchange of fire, we marched on immediately. One Jew from Rokiškis was wounded, but only slightly. [...] At the end of June 1941, a local resident, Petras Deksnys, encountered a group of RA soldiers retreating toward Juodupė on the road. He warned the soldiers about the Lithuanian partisans in the town. The russians then turned toward the village of Sodeliai. About half an hour later, a firefight broke out between the insurgents and the soviet soldiers. A German unit was called in from Rokiškis to assist the insurgents; together with the partisans, they killed eight RA soldiers. P. Deksnys reportedly saw the bodies of the killed soldiers near Juodupė. The first German units reached Juodupė on June 27, 1941, and there were no further



nys, encountered a group of RA soldiers retreating toward Juodupė on the road. He warned the soldiers about the Lithuanian partisans in the town. The russians then turned toward the village of Sodeliai. About half an hour later, a firefight broke out between the insurgents and the soviet soldiers. A German unit was called in from Rokiškis to assist the insurgents; together with the partisans, they killed eight RA soldiers. P. Deksnys reportedly saw the bodies of the killed soldiers near Juodupė. The first German units reached Juodupė on June 27, 1941, and there were no further

clashes between the Lithuanian insurgents and RA soldiers.

The people of **Kamajai** District also suffered greatly from bolshevik terror. During the June deportations, 35 people were deported from Kamajai District, most of them politically active farmers and intellectuals. Communist terror raged even more fiercely in the early days of the war. Retreating soviet activists and RA soldiers began setting buildings on fire, looting state and private property, and arresting and killing people. The communist authorities also attempted to carry out a mobilization of horses and carts, but the farmers, seeing the impending collapse of soviet rule, refused to comply with these orders. In Kamajai District, the retreating bolsheviks killed 10 Lithuanian insurgents or their supporters. A major impetus for the spread of the uprising came from the news of the restoration of the Lithuanian state, broadcast on Kaunas Radio, and the playing of the Lithuanian national anthem. Largely on the initiative of former members of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, groups of insurgents began to form, striving to prevent the bolsheviks from destroying property and killing people. In the town, the insurgents raised the Lithuanian tricolor and occupied government buildings. Kazys Šimulėnas, a former member of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union and a police officer, became the commander of Kamajai District insurgent group. On June 25, 1941, a RA unit was sent from Rokiškis to Kamajai to suppress the uprising. Gunfights broke out with the bolsheviks. During the fighting, the three Mielūnas brothers, Vladas Muralis, Pranas Pročkys, and other insurgents were killed. The Kamajai platoon had about 40–70 members. The unit was later reorganized into an auxiliary police unit and remained active until approximately September 1941. The unit's headquarters was located in the former building of the district executive committee. The German army marched through Kamajai on June 27, 1941. Even before the Germans arrived, local government institutions were being reestablished, and communists and soviet activists who had not managed to flee to russia were being arrested.

In the forests of the **Svėdasai** area,

the first group of insurgents formed very early on — during the June deportations (June 14–15). Even before the war, the group had clashed several times with *NKVD* troops combing the forests. Once the war began, the insurgents cut off telephone communications and paralyzed cooperation between soviet military units and government agencies. The insurgents also thwarted the announced mobilization of horses and carts by driving away the *komsomol* members who were distributing mobilization notices throughout the villages. Two *NKVD* trucks were sent from Rokiškis to assist the local communists, but the *NKVD* agents were unable to locate the partisans hiding in the forests. On the night of June 25–26, the first *Wehrmacht* units reached Svėdasai. The Germans wiped out the RA soldiers who were in the town. Some of the fleeing soviets were detained by local partisans. The insurgents seized the town's most important institutions and became the de facto rulers of Svėdasai, while the German soldiers left that same night to follow the retreating soviet army. The partisans established *LAF* headquarters in the town (commander Pranas Aleknavičius). The commander of the Svėdasai insurgent group was Albertas Nakutis, and his deputy was Antanas Mikuckis, who had lost his parents and sisters during the deportations. Guided by the announcements and instructions of the Provisional Government of Lithuania heard on the radio, activists and partisans restored order and peace in the town. Not only local riflemen but also intellectuals who had come from larger cities on vacation actively participated in the uprising. A total of 178 partisans were registered in the Svėdasai district.

The **Obeliai** insurgents began to take action on June 23. Anti-soviet leaflets were distributed in the surrounding areas, and tricolor flags were raised. The Obeliai insurgent unit was organized and led by Matas Kurklietis (killed in 1947 while serving in a partisan unit — author's note). About 50–70 men joined the group. Another uprising group was organized at the Obeliai railway station. This group was led by former police sergeant Jonas Vaitkus. This partisan unit had about 30 members. Members of both units engaged in combat with retreating RA soldiers,

policemen, and soviet party activists.

Soviet officials (including Jonas Maračinskas, the head of the Obeliai police) and activists from Obeliai fled on June 25. On their way to Latvia, they came under fire from Lithuanian insurgents. Here is how one soviet official described these events: "They were firing from the village of Rakališkis (on the left) and the forest (on the right), as well as from the cemetery — which I believe is on a hill by the main road — and from the village of Pakriauniai. Soon we encountered three RA buses: two were each equipped with a four-barreled anti-aircraft machine gun, and the third had a small cannon. We stopped them. They opened fire in both directions, and we rode our bicycles past the area under fire alongside them. There were three of us: two russians and me. In the ditches along the road lay the bodies of slain men, women, and children;



smashed carts lay scattered about [...]"

RA soldiers detained three insurgents in the village of Pakriai: Kostas Seibutis, Deksnys, and Petrauskas. After interrogation, K. Seibutis and Petrauskas were executed on the orders of the unit commander, while Deksnys was taken away by the soldiers. According to witness testimony, the insurgents fired upon the retreating bolsheviks in Obeliai itself, near the church. During this exchange of fire, 6 soviet soldiers, 1 policeman, and 2 soviet activists were killed.

On June 26, soviet policemen and activists (about 500 people) returned to Obeliai by truck. The partisans from Obeliai were forced to withdraw temporarily, leaving behind several RA soldiers and activists who had been shot. However, three hours later, German motorized units

arrived near the town, and the soviets fled to Rokiškis and from there to Latvia. On June 26, 1941, in the village of Pasubatė, right on the Latvian border, soviet activists captured two Lithuanian partisans and executed them. The bolsheviks also suffered losses. On the same day, June 26, border guard Aprosimas Kozlovas from the village of Armoniai in the Juodupė district was fatally wounded. According to the testimony of former soviet police representative A. Barauskas, three soviet police officers were also shot and killed in this firefight with the Lithuanian insurgents. After the armed clashes with the retreating bolsheviks ended, the partisans detained the remaining communists, members of the komsomol, and soviet activists. Most of those detained were handed over to the Rokiškis police.

Kriaunos. The people of Kriaunos District also actively participated in the uprising. Just before the war, the families of former local riflemen commander Petras Vartibavičius and teacher Jonas Lapšinskas were exiled from the town. Upon hearing the announcement of the Provisional Government of Lithuania on Kaunas Radio, the local Riflemen began to organize. They were led by Povilas Ilčiukas and Tomas Sabaliauskas. Within a few days, nearly 50 men had joined the unit. Although they lacked weapons, on June 24, 1941, the insurgents attacked and captured the town of Kriaunos. The partisans' headquarters was established in the post office building. The next day, two cars carrying soviet soldiers arrived in Kriaunos. A firefight ensued, during which three in-

Lithuanian insurgent soldiers — who had been incorporated into and later left the RA 29th Territorial Rifle Corps — are marching a column of soviet prisoners of war. The insurgents are wearing distinctive white armbands on their hats. Photographed in late June 1941.



surgeons were killed, and the others were forced to flee the town. The soviets held Kriaunos for only one day, but they managed to leave a bloody trail behind them. For no apparent reason, they executed the farmer Balys Palivonas and took G. Pupelis to Rokiškis, where they brutally murdered him. On June 26, the insurgents returned to Kriaunos and reestablished the local government institutions.

The residents of the Čedasai area (Panemunis District) suffered greatly from bolshevik terror during the early soviet period. The first arrests of local residents took place as early as 1940. During the deportations of June 14–16, 1941, the families of Kumpauskas, Kisielis, and Gervė, all teachers, and people of other professions were deported. Among the thirteen people tortured to death in Juodupė on June 24–25, 1941, were two residents of Čedasai: forester Jonas Mielūnas and merchant Vladas Kalpokas.

The residents of Čedasai were active — long before the Nazi-soviet war, local riflemen, members of the Young Lithuanians movement, and other politically active residents had begun to organize in secret.

They published and distributed anti-soviet leaflets, urged people to sabotage the obligations imposed by the soviet authorities, and spread information about the coming war and the restoration of an independent Lithuania. Members of the secret group in Čedasai included farmer Antanas Balčiūnas and teacher Stasys Sutkaitis from the village of Teklynė, as well as farmers Jonas Šedys, Jonas Mikšys, and Bronius Sukauskas from the village of Pavyžuonys. On June 14, 1941, J. Šedys was deported to Altai, while A. Balčiūnas was brutally murdered by soviet activists in Juodupė at the start of the war.

When the war began, a group of insurgents (partisans) began to organize in Čedasai. The main organizers of the unit were Antanas Karpavičius (who had served as commander of the Čedasai Riflemen's platoon during the years of independence) and Kazimieras Kalpokas, a teacher who had come from Žiobiškis. The unit had about 50–60 members. The unit's headquarters was located in the elementary school building. The insurgents elected K. Kalpokas as their unit commander. His brother, Vladas Kalpokas, had been killed

by soviet activists in Juodupė. The Čedasai insurgents were under the command of Panemunis District partisan leadership. The unit protected the town from attacks and arson, maintained order, and detained small groups of retreating RA soldiers as well as communists and soviet activists who had remained in the town and its surroundings. The German army marched through Čedasai on June 27. The Čedasai unit operated for about two months. In total, the partisans detained several dozen soviet activists and about 20–30 RA soldiers. All the soviet soldiers surrendered without any resistance. They were registered and then assigned to farmers in the Čedasai area to perform menial labor. It was not until the fall of 1943 that the Germans rounded them up in Rokiškis and transported some of them to Germany. Most of the detained soviet activists were interrogated and released after a few days. Others were sent to the Rokiškis prison. Some soviet activists were arrested for helping the bolsheviks carry out the deportations of local residents to Russia.

Zarasai County

Even before the Nazi-soviet War, groups of Lithuanian insurgents (partisans) began to organize in Zarasai County. In Antazavė District (village of Pailgis), men led by Antanas Streikus — a volunteer in the 1918–1922 War of Independence and a recipient of the Cross of Vytis — took to the woods as early as May 1941. A. Streikus' son, Juozas Streikus, encouraged by his father and other patriotic men, began writing and distributing anti-soviet leaflets as early as January 1941.

In June 1941, a significant number of politically active people were arrested by the NKVD and deported to Russia along with their families. From Degučiai District alone, the bolsheviks deported 52 people to Siberia. From Salakas District, the soviets

deported 40 Lithuanians and 33 Jewish rabbis who had fled from Poland. In total, 500 residents of Zarasai County were deported before the war.

Even before the war began, partisans in the Zarasai district maintained contact with the Kaunas LAF headquarters. Secret literature, instructions, and orders were brought from Kaunas by Capt. Afanasijus Kazanas (1898–1953), Ret. Capt. Juozas Kiesylis (spelled Kesylis in other documents), and others. The Kaunas headquarters sent Capt. Eduardas Počebutas and Lt. Vytautas Narbutas to Zarasai to organize the uprising. Once the war began, the partisans ceased hiding and began operating actively. In some areas, they succeeded in driving out the local soviet administration: in Aviliai on June 23;

in Antazavė, Dusetos, and Antalieptė on June 24. Skirmishes with RA troops, communists, and soviet officials retreating eastward were a daily occurrence.



Antanas Streikus (1897–1945). Volunteer in the 1918–1922 War of Independence, participant of the 1941 Uprising, Lithuanian partisan, killed in 1945 during a battle with the NKVD.

During the uprising, the partisans occupied many county towns, established temporary governing bodies, and maintained public order. The core of the insurgent groups was usually made up of local members of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union. After the soviets dissolved the it, a significant number of its members kept their weapons and ammunition and, as war approached, began to organize into secret anti-soviet organizations and groups.

A partisan group in the village of Šalinėnai (Antalieptė District) was formed even before the Nazi-soviet War. It was led by Petras Žemaitis. At the start of the war, the small Šalinėnai platoon operated with great courage and vigor — arresting remaining communists and soviet activists and disarming small groups of RA sol-

diers. On the evening of June 24, 1941, insurgents led by teacher Justinas Preibis (about 20 men) occupied the town of Salakas. Most of the employees of soviet institutions had already left the town. The next day, soviet soldiers arrived in Salakas and began firing indiscriminately. The insurgents returned fire and retreated into a nearby forest. That same day, the bolsheviks withdrew from Salakas, having first killed two civilian residents — a father and son named Bagdonas.

Antalieptė District insurgents had disarmed 40 RA soldiers and arrested about 50 soviet activists who had not managed to flee to russia by July 2, 1941. In **Dusetos**, a secret anti-soviet organization was formed as early as the winter of 1940–1941. It was led by Povilas Leleika. Several dozen people had joined the organization by the time the war began. Klemensas Žukauskas would bring anti-soviet leaflets from Zarasai, which were distributed among the organization's members. At the start of the war, the organization's members began an armed struggle. On June 25, partisans from the Dusetos platoon clashed twice with retreating RA soldiers and took eight russian soldiers prisoner. One firefight with RA soldiers took place in the Barauka Forest. During the battle, the insurgents killed two RA soldiers and took about 10 prisoner. The prisoners were brought to Dusetos and held in a cellar, and later transported to Zarasai. In total, during the uprising, the Dusetos partisan platoon captured and handed over to the Germans about 150 RA soldiers; in addition, they killed three soviet soldiers. Two insurgents from the Dusetos platoon were killed in the fighting.

On June 27, 1941, insurgents from the Pimpiai platoon clashed with a group of RA soldiers near the village of Gasių. The partisans took 16 russians prisoner and killed one. During the battle, insurgent Petras Stasiulionis was killed and Juozas Grikinis was wounded. J. Stasiulionis was given a solemn burial at the Dusetos Cemetery. In total, the Pimpiai insurgents took 41 RA soldiers prisoner. Among the insurgents from Degučiai District who distinguished themselves in battles against the soviets were Lionginas Vasalauskas, Petras Dambrava, and Antanas Mažeika. They captured several dozen RA soldiers

each and disarmed them. In this way, the partisans of this district were supplied with weapons.

When the war broke out, the unit led by A. Streikaus gathered in the Maniuliškiai Forest. On June 24, Lt. Antanas Kairiūnas, who had been on leave visiting his parents in the village of Volungiai, joined the unit. On the same day, the platoon led by A. Streikus and A. Kairiūnas (about 15 men) captured the district center Antazava without resistance. Soviet officials had already fled the town. On June 25, insurgents from A. Streikus' unit fired upon a red army vehicle near the Marimantas Mill (about 2 km from Antazavė) and took a wounded soviet colonel prisoner. The German army marched through Antazavė on June 26. The captured RA colonel was handed over to the Germans. A. Streikus' unit drove off to Aleksandravėlė (about 9 km from Antazavė) in the captured RA vehicle.

Jonas Misiūnas, a soviet activist who had fled Lithuania, also testified about the insurgents' activities in the Antazavė and Aleksandravėlė areas: "Lithuanian flags were displayed in the village of Aleksandravėlė and in some of the surrounding villages. In Aleksandravėlė, a light vehicle carrying a red army colonel, major, captain, and driver on their way to Zarasai was fired upon and damaged. They were armed and returned fire the entire time, and the captain, having received a horse from a peasant, rode to our district town for help. We received 30 armed men from a red army garrison stationed in Rokiškis; another 15 of our own armed men joined us, and we set off for Aleksandravėlė. [...] From the people's testimonies, we learned that after exchanging fire, they had retreated into a large forest located right behind the church. We did not return there again. All of this took place on June 25. The damage they caused was as follows: they cut the Obeliai-Aleksandravėlė telephone lines several times, and on the last day (June 26), there was no longer any communication, even though there were two members of the komsomol at the post office, armed with German rifles. [...] The fight against the saboteurs was led by members of the komsomol, party members, and policemen. In our area, the fight against the bandits was organized by police representatives, the chairman of the



AFANASIJUS KAZANAS (1898–1953)

When World War I broke out in 1915, he volunteered for the russian imperial army; from 1915 to 1917, he fought on the front lines. In 1917, he graduated from the 5th moscow Warrant Officer School. From 1918 to 1919, he fought against the russian bolsheviks in the Yudenich Army. Upon returning to Lithuania, he enlisted in the Lithuanian Armed Forces in 1920; in the fall of 1920, he fought against Polish troops near Sejny. After the USSR occupied Lithuania, he was discharged from the Armed Forces and returned to Zarasai with his family. During the anti-soviet June Uprising of 1941, he organized the Zarasai uprising unit, serving as its deputy commander and commander of the town's defense platoon. From 1943 onward, he fought on the Eastern Front. In 1945, he was taken prisoner by the soviet army; he was convicted and imprisoned in Vorkuta. In 1953, he was a member of the organizing committee of the Vorkuta political prisoners' uprising. He was killed on August 1, 1953, during the political prisoners' uprising at the Vorkuta camp.

executive committee, the party secretary, and others. It was led by police representative Jonas Marašincas from Kapai Street in the Obeliai suburb [...]. Other representatives were unsuitable for leadership and made mistakes while in command."

At the beginning of the war, a downed RA plane crashed in the field of P. Petravičius, a resident of the village of Kumpuoliai (Antazavė District). Local partisans captured the wounded pilot (according to other sources, two pilots were captured) and seized the equipment on board the plane. The pilot was taken to the Antazavė medical station. Partisans from the Kumpuoliai platoon (initially led by Jonas Nairys, later by Jonas Urvinis) captured a total of six RA soldiers. Five of the prisoners were reportedly handed over to the Germans, who then executed them (according to other sources, the insurgents carried out the executions themselves).

Clashes with RA soldiers hiding in the forests continued until as late as mid-July 1941. On July 12, partisans encountered two RA soldiers in the forests near the village of Gaidė. During the firefight, the partisan Jonas Karla and a Russian officer were killed. In July 1941, partisans from Baltriškiai set up an ambush near the Juozapava Manor. There, they ambushed a group of about 10 RA soldiers who had emerged from the forest.

During the firefight, two Russian soldiers were killed, another 4–5 were taken prisoner, and the rest managed to escape. The insurgents suffered no casualties.

In total, at least 10 insurgents from Zarasai County were killed in battles against the bolsheviks.

Zarasai was one of the most important routes used by RA and Soviet officials to withdraw from Lithuania. The Soviets traveling through Zarasai were retreating toward Daugavpils. On the evening of June 23, the highest-ranking officials of the Lithuanian SSR — J. Paleckis, A. Sniečkus, N. Pozdniakovas, M. Gedvilas, and others — arrived in Zarasai. When rumors spread that the Germans were already close, the leaders of Soviet Lithuania hurriedly retreated eastward the next morning, leaving thousands of rank-and-file communists and Soviet activists to their fate. As they retreated, the local bolsheviks still managed to inflict considerable harm

on the residents of Zarasai town and the county. The communist terror in Zarasai was led by Semion Kosolapov, deputy head of the Zarasai County NKGB, Vasily Kajevskis, chairman of the Zarasai District Executive Committee; Evsey Petrov, police commissioner; Nikolai Kovshov, first secretary of the Zarasai County communist party and other local figures.

On June 23, as they were retreating, the bolsheviks decided to set the town on fire. This crime was to be carried out by local komsomol members, who were given bottles of gasoline and kerosene. On the same day, in the courtyard of the Zarasai detention center, the bolsheviks executed three political prisoners — Lt. Col. Ignas Pašilis, Jonas Petniūnas, and Povilas Gabriusevičius. They were shot by the police's *politruk* E. Petrovas and policeman Juozas Tauklys. On June 24, NKVD troops returned to Zarasai and killed six more people, including political prisoner Lt. Juozas Chmieliauskas. In total, the retreating bolsheviks killed 20 civilian residents of the Zarasai district and burned down 239 residential homes in the town of Zarasai. In addition, before the war, 29 families (80 people) were deported from the town of Zarasai to Siberia.

Insurgents began operating in the town of Zarasai on June 24. An unknown insurgent positioned in the church tower opened fire with a machine gun against Soviet officials. This caused extreme panic among the latter and prevented the NKVD from executing the political prisoners being held in the detention center. About 20 detainees escaped from the detention center amid the commotion. It was only after independence was regained that it became known that the bolsheviks had been fired upon from the church tower by Capt. A. Kazanas and his son Igor Kazanas (1924–1943). On June 25, the bolsheviks returned to Zarasai and resumed terrorizing the local population. The red terror was brought to an end by German military units, which marched through Zarasai unopposed on June 26, 1941. There were almost no clashes between the Lithuanian insurgents and the German soldiers. Only in Antalieptė, on June 30, did the Germans disarm the local partisan unit.

The Zarasai partisan platoon (renamed as security battalion on July 2, 1941) was initially led by Lt. V. Narbutas. The tasks

of the security units were as follows: 1) to protect the property and lives of the population; 2) to isolate individuals posing a threat to the existing order; 3) to eliminate RA and Soviet activist units and groups remaining in the forests; 4) to protect key industrial facilities, roads, and bridges. From mid-July 1941, the Zarasai Security Platoon (later renamed the Zarasai National Security Detachment) was commanded by Capt. E. Počebutas.

In total, there were 26 (according to other sources, 21) uprising platoons operating in Zarasai County at the start of the war. The Aleksandravėlė insurgent unit (although Aleksandravėlė was located in Rokiškis County, its unit was under the command of the Zarasai partisan leadership), led by Antanas Streikus — a participant in the Struggle for Independence and a Knight of the Order of the Cross of Vytyis — had 16 partisans; Antalieptė (commander Alfonsas Norkus) — 19 partisans; Antazavė (commander Pranas Vaitoška, later Ret. Junior Lt. Antanas Kairevičius-Kairiūnas) — 21; Aviliai (commander Donatas Šukelis) — 11; Baibiai (commander Ret. NCO Jonas Stulgys) — 12; Bajorai (commander Stepas Steikūnas) — 14; Baltriškė (commander Ret. Junior NCO Juozas Zavadvakas) — 22; Degučiai (commander Ret. NCO Petras Dūdėnas) — 22; Dusetai (commander Ret. Junior NCO Jonas Lingė, later Junior Lt. Klemensas Žukauskas) — 20; Dūkštas (commander Ret. 1st Sgt. Petras Aidukas) — 18; Imbradas (commander Stasys Bikulčius, later Edvardas Stunžėnas) — 20; Kiviškiai (Imbradas District, commander Vladas Stunžėnas) — 10; Kumpuoliai (Antazavė District, commander Ret. Junior NCO Jonas Urvinis) — 8; Mukuliai (commander Vincas Juškėnas) — 14; Pimpiai (Dusetos District, Ret. Junior NCO Jonas Statulevičius) — 14; Raudinė (commander: Ret. Junior NCO Jonas Baravykas) — 19; Rimšė (commander Ret. 1st Sgt. Jonas Vasilevičius) — 18; Salakas (commander Kazys Ubonis, later Ret. Junior NCO Justinas Preibys) — 53; Smalvos (commander Ret. Junior NCO Kazys Stašiūnas) — 20; Stelmužė (commander Ret. Junior NCO Antanas Cičenėnas) — 22; Suviėkas (commander Jurgis Pučinskas) — 19; Šalinėnai (Antalieptė District, commander Petras Žemaitis) — 13; Šauliai (commander Ret. Junior

NCO Bronius Udras) — 15; Tabaras Platoon (commander Petras Kuosa) — 14; Turmantas (commander Antanas Streikus, later Jonas Tvarijonavičius) — 17; Zarasai (commander Ret. Capt. A. Kazanas) — 30. According to the lists of partisan platoon members, there were at least 450 partisans operating in Zarasai County.

The June 1941 uprising in northeastern Lithuania (in the Švenčionys, Rokiškis, and Zarasai counties) was particularly intense and widespread. The deportations of June 1941 and the massacres of civilians carried out by the soviets at the start of the war further intensified the people's hatred of the communist regime and their desire to take revenge on the occupiers and collaborators. The last soviet military units withdrew from northeastern Lithuania only at the end of June 1941. As a result, the insurgents' activities here lasted longer and were more intense than in other regions of Lithuania. For about a week, the insurgents in northeastern Lithuania had to operate in the zone of mass withdrawal of the RA and soviet officials. The most important soviet retreat routes to the east, toward Daugavpils and Polotsk, ran through this region. In some areas of this region, uprising groups began to form

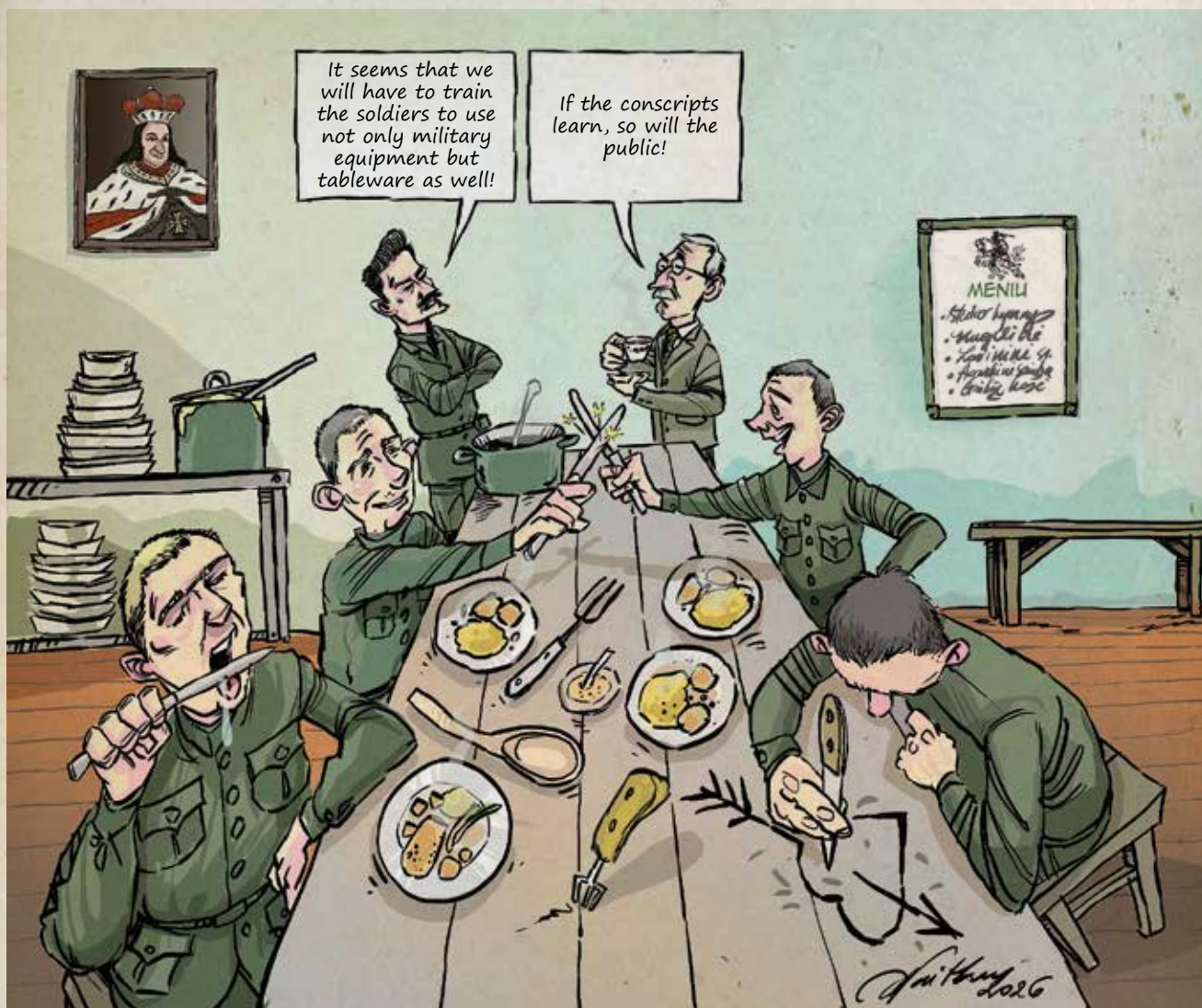
and operate during the deportations of June 1941. The majority of these groups were formed and began operations in the early days of the war, just a few days before the arrival of the German army. The organizers and members of the rebel groups were most often former members of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, officers and non-commissioned officers of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, police officers, municipal employees, teachers, and patriotic farmers. A key catalyst for the spread and intensification of the uprising was the news received via Kaunas radio regarding the formation of the Provisional Government of Lithuania and the restoration of Lithuanian independence. The insurgents' resolve was further strengthened by clear signs of panic and disarray among the occupying authorities (the hasty withdrawal of RA troops, soviet officials, and their supporters from Lithuania; the destruction of documents; the looting of material assets; and so on). A crucial factor in strengthening the uprising was the mass defection of Lithuanian soldiers from the RA 29th Territorial Rifle Corps, who broke ranks with the retreating soviet forces and joined the ranks of the insurgents. Lithuanian soldiers incorporated into the RA defected en masse, with

their weapons, to the side of the insurgents and formed large combat units — selection units. In the June Uprising in northeastern Lithuania (across three counties), approximately 1 500–2 000 partisans (including Lithuanian soldiers who had defected from the RA). The insurgents in northeastern Lithuania boldly engaged in open combat with RA units and armed detachments of soviet officials, seized district centers, and reestablished the government bodies that had operated during the period of independence. Several hundred Lithuanian insurgents were killed or wounded during the fighting. The insurgents inflicted significant losses on RA units and retreating soviet activists. More than a thousand RA soldiers were captured and disarmed. The approximate number of soviet soldiers killed and wounded is unknown, but it can be assumed that it was no less than the insurgents' losses. Even before the arrival of the German army, the insurgents had essentially liberated northeastern Lithuania from soviet occupation and taken power into their own hands for several days. It was not the insurgents' fault that Lithuania failed to restore its national independence. The soviet occupation that had been removed was replaced by a new one — the Nazi occupation. ■

A memorial complex at the Obeliai Cemetery (Rokiškis District), dedicated to honoring and commemorating those who died as participants in the June Uprising of 1941. Inscription on the monument: In honor of the partisans who fell in the struggle against the bolsheviks in 1941. For eternity, a Lithuanian will lay down his life for freedom.



Photo credits: from the private collections of collectors Gytis Daukas and Divonis Piličiauskas, as well as from online sources



It's Great to Eat with a Fork and Knife!

A statement in KARYS (WARRIOR) in 1924 reads: "<...> the food in our army is not bad; it just needs to be served in a more formal and attractive manner." This reveals an effort to improve the quality of food preparation and change the culture of its presentation. This was intended to shape new skills among soldiers, in the hope that these would spread to society at large through the conscription system. In the 1940s, the practice of eating with a fork and knife began to take hold. This contributed to maintaining hygiene, as well as to the spread of etiquette and culture.

A 1940 order issued by the Ministry of National Defense to the military stated: "<...> military units, as circumstances permit, should further refine the manner in which meals are served and eaten by soldiers. Provide each soldier with a knife, a fork, a bowl, and a plate. In addition, provide appropriate containers for sliced bread and place saltshakers on the tables."

In 1940, the magazine KARYS published concise instructions on how soldiers should eat using forks and knives. It was specified that in the unit's mess hall, the squad leader had to explain to young soldiers how to use a spoon, fork, and knife: "<...> hold the spoon in the right hand; use the knife only to cut meat or bread, but do not put it in your mouth. Eat calmly, without making noise; place leftovers in a designated container, but do not throw them under the table." The squad leader was required to eat alongside the young soldiers and be the last to take his food.

Thus, numerous published and archival documents attest to a significant change in soldiers' diets at the end of the 1930s.

Based on: Vytautas Jokubauskas, 'Gyvenimas ir mirtis Lietuvos kariuomenėje 1918-1940 m.', Klaipėda, 'KU Publishing House,' 2023, p. 310.