

CONTENTS

4

FEATURE STORY

Lithuanian Soldiers —
Basketball Champions

20

IMPORTANT MATTERS

Warsaw Warns

24

Just 20-30
Minutes

26

A New Chapter

28

ARSENAL

The Flamingos
Spread Their Wings

42

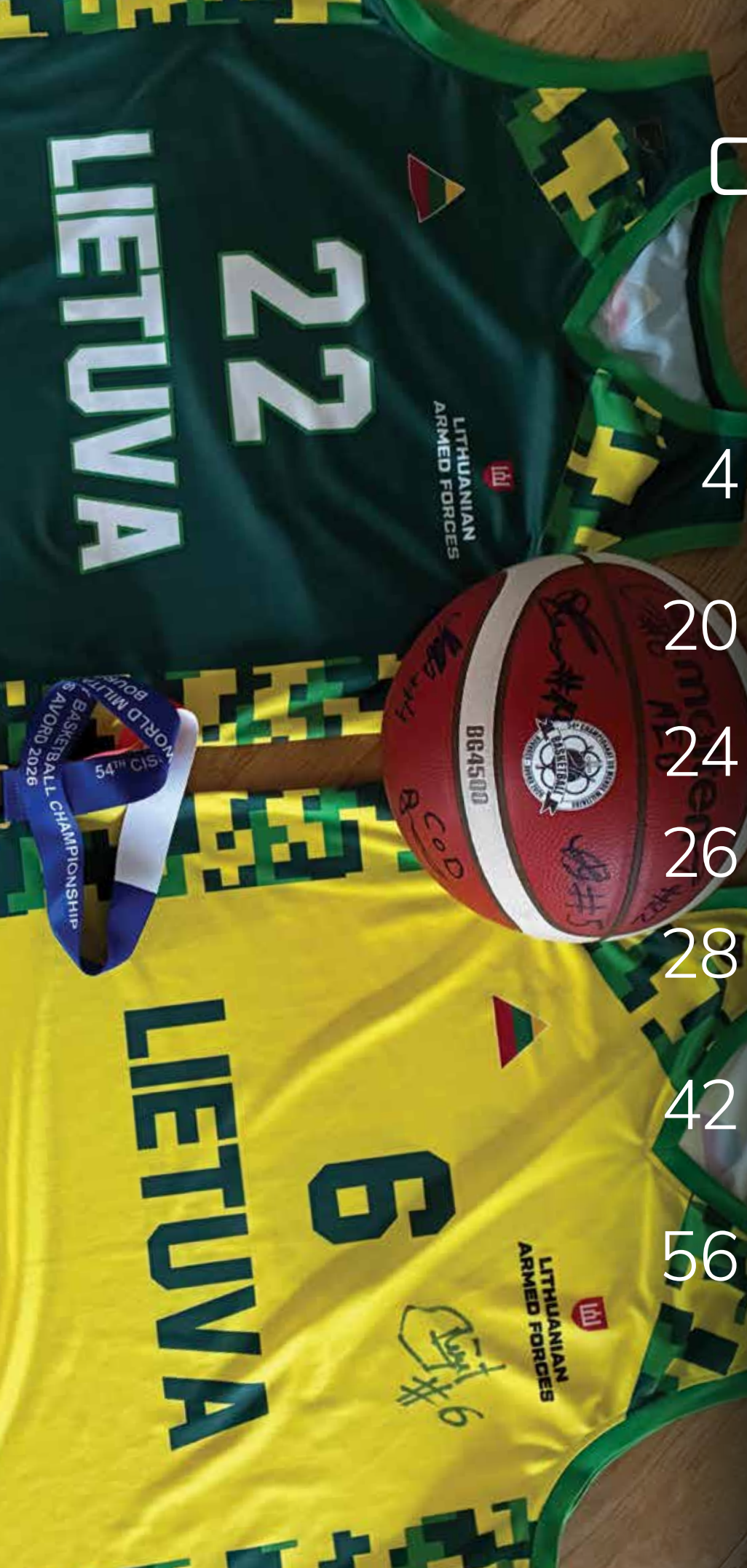
WILL TO RESIST

Forest Ants Against
the soviet Bear

56

WAR HISTORY MADE FUN

The Unproclaimed
Empire



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,

History, as we know, tends to repeat itself, and often the trends we observe today have already manifested themselves in one form or another in the past.

For a long time now, we have been observing and documenting the claims and intentions of Russia and its client regimes — particularly Belarus — to interpret and rewrite our country's history in their own way, denying both the distinct Baltic origins of Lithuania, the non-Slavic nature of our language, and our very statehood. The Belarusian strand of these efforts is now referred to as 'Litvinism,' whose architects undoubtedly lurk in Moscow and, drawing on the ramblings of the local chauvinist Dugin, craft instructions for their zealous executors.

But is this merely a recent narrative? Not long ago, we managed to uncover on the internet the writings of Lomonosov, a XVII-century 'scholar' from Russia who is still loudly celebrated there today; these were published in 1766, after his death. They state that "Lithuania, Zhmuidiya (meaning Žemaitija), and Podliahya (?) have been called Rus since time immemorial. (...) The Lithuanian language originated from the Slavic language..."

As already mentioned, the publication is dated 1766 — that is, even before Lithuania's incorporation into the Russian empire — but the historical and ideological groundwork, drawing on the 'authority' of the time, was already being laid. So how does today's Dugin differ from Lomonosov of the XVIII century? And is there any difference between the predatory appetite of XVIII-century Russia and the policies of the modern Kremlin?

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: oboronka.mezha.ua.

- 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-585

Photo credit: WARRIOR archive

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

LITHUANIA SOLDIERS – BASKETBALL

The Men's Basketball Team of Lithuanian Armed Forces won gold at the 2026 World Military Basketball Championship in France on July 4. This is a rare and hard-to-win championship title that our soldiers earned after a seven-year hiatus. Only three members of the previous golden team remain in this squad: team captain Pvt. Gintautas Matulis, head coach Col. Marius Kugauda, and team manager Col. Arturas Jasinskas. The new World Military Basketball Champions shared insights about the team, the difficult path to the title, and how their military service experience helps them win on the sports field.



N

CHAMPIONS

ILONA SKUJAITĖ

Col. M. Kugauda, a former basketball player with extensive experience in coaching, and the current head coach of the team, says that the new World Military Champion team from Lithuania is unique because of the age of its players. "If in 2019 the average age of basketball players on the team was about 26–28 years, then in the current team experience and youth have merged. Some basketball players are already approaching their forties, while others are just starting their sports careers. I am glad that the youth in our team got along very well



The unique composition of the golden team blends basketball players who are just starting their careers with those who are already finishing them.

with the older soldiers. For me, as a coach, the most important thing was to balance the team's game so that during the preparation and competition, the older players would gain and maintain excellent physical condition for the final competition. We managed to do that. In general, there was a very good and friendly atmosphere in the team, not only on the court but also off it," said Col. M. Kugauda.

The team captain, National Defence Volunteer Forces (NDVF) Pvt. G. Matulis, emphasized that the differences in the players' age and experience did not pose any problems: "There were five basketball players on our team who were not even born when I started my sports career. While playing, they asked for advice, and we gladly shared it. The joint work on the court really paid off — the results achieved prove that." One of the youngest debutants on the Lithuanian

Armed Forces basketball team, first-year cadet at the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania (LKA) Adrijus Totoris, said that he started playing basketball at school, and the conditions for sports at the academy are simply excellent. He goes to the gym to shoot hoops as soon as he finds any free time. After making his debut in the Vilnius Capital Basketball League, the guy was immediately noticed and received an invitation to join the Lithuanian Armed Forces team preparing for the World Military Basketball Championship.

"From the very beginning, I had no doubt that our team was extremely strong, because it included such basketball players as Jr. Pvt. Julius Kazakauskas, Cpl. Vytautas Šarakauskas, and Pvt. Gintautas Matulis. Just by reading the names, it was clear that this would be a special team. It was an honour for me to get to know them and play together in

such a high-level competition. Our team was truly very friendly, and the titled basketball players turned out to be quite ordinary and pleasant people," shared team captain Cdt. A. Totoris.

The team manager and Deputy Head of the Lithuanian Armed Forces Sports Club, Col. Arturas Jasinskas, emphasized an exceptional circumstance — the team included not only volunteers and cadets from the NDVF, but also professional service soldiers. This is a particularly significant fact, dispelling the myth that serving in the military cannot lead to high sporting results. One of the colonel's dreams is to see a conscript soldier at the next World Military Basketball Championship.

Ready in Seven Days

The Lithuanian Armed Forces team, which won the World Military Basket-

ball Championship, consists of both professional athletes who joined the military and active soldiers who play basketball in their free time. Since the team members serve in different units and live in different cities across Lithuania, bringing them together was a considerable challenge. Moreover, the team had only a week of joint training before leaving for the championship in Bourges, France.

The head coach of the national team, Col. M. Kugauda, recalls that the preparation demanded absolute focus: "We only had one week when we all gathered at the LKA, where an intensive training camp was organized for us. We practiced every day because the players, who came together from different clubs, urgently needed to be integrated into a single team. Some soldiers with less basketball experience had to work extra hours on specific elements of the game. Additionally, it was agreed that everyone would maintain their physical fitness individually prior to the camp, so all team members arrived perfectly prepared. In general, organizing a cohesive game for ten basketball players takes an immense amount of effort. Of course, I wish we could have trained more as a whole team, as I didn't have enough time to fully get to know and understand all the players, and we occasionally lacked discipline on the court. However, we gathered to fight and give our all, and the results speak for themselves — the World Military Basketball Championship proved that all our hard work paid off."

Col. M. Kugauda, who had previously led the Lithuanian Armed Forces team to a world championship gold title, had recently stepped away from coaching due to the specific demands of his military service. However, he returned to his passion



after receiving an offer from Col. A. Jasinskis. Accepting the challenge at the beginning of the season, he also took over as head coach of the 'Karys' team, competing in the Capital Basketball League. "Although our performance was quite average, for me, as a coach, it was an incredibly useful experience that allowed me to refresh my tactical knowledge. The most critical element in this role is the speed of decision-making on the court during games. If a coach doesn't have the opportunity to work through an entire season and only leads the team for a short period, that lack of time becomes the ultimate challenge," Col. M. Kugauda noted.



BASKET-BALL

CHAMPIONNAT DU MONDE MILITAIRE

28 JUIN AU 4 JUILLET 2026
LE PRADO & CREPS DE BOURGES



Toutes les informations
sur les matchs

The 54th World Military Basketball Championship ended in the French city of Bourges on July 4, 2026. A total of 228 military athletes from 13 countries competed in the tournament, which was organized by the International Military Sports Council (CISM). The Lithuanian Armed Forces team became champions in the men's tournament, while the Brazilian team triumphed in the women's competition. The host country, France, secured both silver medals.

Men's and women's tournament results

The Lithuanian Armed Forces men's team went undefeated throughout the tournament. In the quarterfinals, the Lithuanians defeated Canada 76–53, and in the semifinals, they beat Latvia 90–65. In the final match, played in the 'Palais des Sports du Prado' arena, the Lithuanian team defeated the French soldiers 87–79 and won the title of world champions. The bronze medals went to the Latvian team, which defeated Greece 94–86 in the third-place match. In the women's tournament, Brazil defeated France 98–74 to become champions, following a dominant 120–56 victory over Germany in the semifinals. Third place went to the United States, who defeated Germany 100–63 in the bronze medal match.

Achievements of the Lithuanian Armed Forces Team

The World Military Basketball Championship is one of the oldest military sports events, organized since the mid-XXth century. It is included in the program of the CISM World Military Summer Games, which began in 1995 in Rome, Italy, marking the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II and the ratification of the United Nations Charter. The championship demonstrates a high level of professionalism, as national teams are composed of professional players serving in military structures or volunteer forces. Among the historically strongest teams are the USA, Brazil, and Europe's premier basketball nations. The Lithuanian Armed Forces men's team holds an elite position among them, boasting a status as multiple-time champions and medalists. The tournament in France successfully continued the country's rich military sports traditions.

Final Championship Classification and Awards

The Brazilian team, considered the favorite in the men's tournament, lost to Latvia by a single point 83–84 in the quarterfinals, but later defeated Canada 97–49 to finish in 5th place. The Cypriot soldiers finished the tournament in 7th place, defeating Germany 86–79. In the women's consolation final, the Netherlands defeated Latvia 72–55 to secure 5th place. During the official closing ceremony, the President of CISM, Col. Nilton Gomes Rolim Filho, thanked the organizers for the high level of sportsmanship and military discipline. The prestigious 'Friendship through Sport' award and the 'Fair Play' trophy were presented to the Canadian delegation. At the end of the event, the CISM flag was handed over to the representatives of the United States. The 8th CISM World Summer Games will be held in Charlotte, North Carolina, and their program will include a basketball tournament.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Information credits: Lithuanian Armed Forces Sport Club



Starting five

When forming the core of the squad, head coach Col. M. Kugauda relied heavily on the skills, professionalism, and experience of his key players. "I know our veteran players very well — for instance, Pvt. V. Šarakauskas and our team captain, Pvt. G. Matulis, whom I used to share the court with as a teammate. I also view Jr. Pvt. Julius Kazakaus-

kas, a three-time National Basketball League MVP, as a vital addition who tremendously elevated our game. These and other highly experienced team members showed immense maturity throughout the tournament. Their leadership was absolutely critical, especially in helping the team stay composed and avoid burning out during those high-stakes opening matches," the coach emphasized.

The coach was also highly impressed by Pvt. Artūras Pelšas, whose physical form, despite his approaching forties, is simply enviable. "He is an exceptional point guard who flawlessly orchestrated our play on the court," Col. M. Kugauda noted. According to the head coach, Cpl. Almantas Liepuonis, also made a significant impact on the success, showcasing elite skills, explosive speed, and excellent use of post

The Lithuanian Armed Forces delegation marched proudly at the opening of the championship.





play tactics. Additionally, Jr. Pvt. Justas Nausėdas, who represents the 'Jurbarkas-Karys' team in the National Basketball League, delivered a stellar performance. The soldier stood out with his composure, physical strength, and made three-pointers, which repeatedly drove opponents to despair in the dying

seconds of the shot clock.

According to the head coach, the team's youth also made a significant contribution to the overall victory. Cdt. A. Totoris stood out as an exceptional sharpshooter. Although he still has plenty of room to grow, there is no doubt he will become an invaluable

asset to the Lithuanian Armed Forces team. A vital spark off the bench was provided by NDVF soldier Pvt. Tomas Sabaliauskas — a dynamic player capable of shifting the momentum of a game in a single play, and in one meeting even became the most valuable player of the match. Meanwhi-

The Lithuanian Armed Forces men's basketball team showcased an exceptional fighting spirit throughout the championship.





their second matchup. Despite being unfamiliar with their opponents' playstyle — and the fact that the Kenyan team featured several elite players who had recently committed to NCAA Basketball in the United States — Lithuania's tactical discipline and the energy of their younger players allowed them to comfortably control the game and celebrate a blowout win.

The Invisible Front

Assessing the performance at the World Military Basketball Championship in France, national team head coach Col. M. Kugauda admits that the final result may have seemed easy to achieve at first glance. The Lithuanian team managed to win all the matches, some of them by a solid margin, but in fact, it required a huge effort. According to him, the championship system was such that in order to avoid the strongest teams immediately after the group stage, it was necessary to win every match. Because if they had taken second place, they would have immediately had to

le, Pvt. Motiejus Maziliauskas, a player with immense potential, saved his best performance for the final. Jr. Pvt. Arnas Saulėnas and the rest of the team also delivered solid performances. "All the newcomers truly stepped up in our pursuit of gold. They played fierce defence, fought relentlessly for every loose ball, demonstrated incredible character, and integrated seamlessly into the team. Every single one of them played a part in winning this historic world championship title," Col. M. Kugauda emphasized.

Although the Lithuanians had very little time to build chemistry before the World Military Basketball Championship, the course of the tournament quickly revealed the true strength of the Lithuanian Armed Forces team. The opening match of the championship went exactly as planned, resulting in a convincing victory over a strong German team. The Lithuanians faced Kenya in





play against the winners of the other group.

Preparing for each match required meticulous effort from both the players and the coaching staff. To evaluate future opponents, Col. M. Kugauda relied on his assistant, Pvt. Mindaugas Barčaitis.

Using video analysis software, he helped identify the opponents' strengths and devise strategies to neutralize them.

In the next stages of the championship, the Lithuanians were most reluctant to meet the very strong teams of Latvia, Brazil, and Greece.

According to the head coach, the French military team also seemed tough — the French style of play was characterized by speed, as they avoided positional play and favoured lightning-fast attacks. It was precisely with these qualities that the French matched the tournament favourites, the Greeks, and later in the final, they stubbornly resisted the Lithuanians until the very last moment.

Team captain Pvt. G. Matulis, evaluating the World Military Basketball Championship, regretted that the extremely capable US Armed Forces team did not participate in it. However, the tournament did not lack highly skilled teams: several professionals played in the French and Greek national teams, while the Brazilian team featured capable basketball players who even have experience in world championships. "It is not easy to play with such strong teams, and in each match our goal was not only to win, but also to avoid injuries. Fortunately, everything worked out," the team captain did not hide his joy.

According to him, bringing together players of different styles and levels in the national team made it quite difficult

The French military team fought hard for the championship title until the last seconds.





According to the head coach of the national team, the perseverance of the Lithuanian basketball players and their ability to demonstrate their best qualities at the right time helped them win the championship.

for them to find the rhythm of the game in such a short time. Therefore, at the beginning of the tournament, the Lithuanian team had to face certain psychological barriers, and there were misunderstandings on the court. However, after the first match, the basketball players communicated extensively, actively analysed their mistakes, and managed to demonstrate their best basketball in the final stage.

The debut in the World Military

Basketball Championship in France left an indelible impression on Cdt. A. Totorius. The young athlete remembers how the number of spectators in the hall steadily increased as the team advanced toward the final. In the decisive battle for gold against the host French team, a huge crowd of local fans gathered. "Of course, such noisy support for the opponents had an effect, but maximum concentration on executing the coach's tasks





helped us withstand the pressure. Although there were no Lithuanian fans in the hall, we still felt great support from our homeland — we knew that friends and relatives were watching the match broadcasts online

and wishing success for us," said the cadet. When asked what memory from this championship would last the longest, the young basketball player had no doubt — it was the moment of victory in the final.

The Twists and Turns of the Final

The final match against the French national team is remembered by all the players and the head coach as the toughest test of the entire championship, especially since the Lithuanians had handled the Latvians quite easily in the semi-final. Before the decisive gold-medal match, the coaching staff had carefully analysed the French's game, and the plan worked perfectly in the first half — the Lithuanians completely controlled the court and led confidently. However, in the second half, the French began playing much more aggressively. Chaos ensued on the court, and the Lithuanian coach even received a technical foul. "In the third quarter, we had a lead of about 10 points, which then melted down to 6 as we fell slightly behind on defence. I saw the opponents

The Lithuanian Armed Forces basketball team is the world military champion.





Head coach Col. M. Kugauda led the Lithuanian Armed Forces basketball team to the golden finish for the second time.

becoming more aggressive, so I had to react. In modern basketball, a 6 or 10-point lead is never safe; it only offers a few seconds of breathing room, and the French kept us from pulling further away. Provoking the technical foul was a tactical move to halt their momentum, calm everyone down, and refocus our play," commented Col. M. Kugauda on those tense minutes.

The head coach emphasized that it is impossible to play perfectly all the time, in decisive moments, everything comes down to the right, lightning-fast strategic decisions and timely player substitutions. When the fourth quarter began, the Lithuanians held a fragile advantage, meaning everything had to start all over again. With just a minute left on the clock, the Lithuanian team's lead had shrunk to only 4 points, and the tension in the arena reached its peak. "I kept repeating to my players: no mistakes, stay focused on every single possession,

there are only 24 seconds left," said the head coach. His players demonstrated iron discipline and successfully secured the historic title, even though time on the court seemed to move at a snail's pace during those crucial moments.

However, the final score of 87:79 on the scoreboard after the final buzzer sealed a convincing victory for the Lithuanians. The most valuable player of the final was Jr. Pvt. J. Kazakauskas. The national team's debutant, Cdt. A. Totoris, admitted



that emotions were running high in a final of this level, but the team was guided through the toughest moments by a cool-headed coaching staff. The cadet recalled that even before the decisive games, the team had been emotionally prepared for the difficult moments they might face on the court: "The coach constantly told us that no matter how bad the score was, we must never lose our focus or give up. We had to remain united as a team and always maintain a cool head and composure. Of course, there was natural on-court nervousness, but the coach reacted to everything like a true professional. This helped us tremendously to withstand the pressure, cope with the anxiety, and ultimately achieve a great victory."

United as one

The award ceremony of the Military World Basketball Championship in France, with the Lithuanian national

anthem playing, left no member of our team indifferent. Perhaps the most titled representative of the team, a world and European championship medallist, Pvt. G. Matulis, revealed that every medal is extremely important to him: "Becoming champions is a tremendous achievement. Although the final was the most emotionally difficult match of the entire tournament, we managed not only to win but also to avoid injuries. It is a great honour for me that we all supported each other during the most difficult moments and won the title of World Military Basketball Champions. We won because we acted as one, and that brings us the greatest joy."

While evaluating this historic achievement, the team captain also emphasized that behind such stellar victories, there is always discipline, exhausting training, a rigorous diet, and immense responsibility. "The most important thing is responsibility to oneself and the team, discipli-

ne, and the realization that we all came here to fight for Lithuania — this thought helped us tremendously. We knew that we had to do our job until the very end, because we deeply wanted to win and return to our homeland not empty-handed. For us, this is the greatest reward and tribute to Lithuania on Independence Day," said Pvt. G. Matulis.

Col. M. Kugauda won his second World Military Basketball Championship gold medal as the team's head coach. He was thrilled with the achievement, recalling that during his own active playing career, this title had slipped through his and the entire team's fingers four times. When asked about this year's formula for success, the gold-medal-winning head coach emphasized the team's composition and the fact that he did not try to drastically change the players' playing style. Recognizing that everyone knew their role perfectly, he simply focused on maximizing each player's individual strengths.



Not only athletes, but also soldiers

The new World Military Basketball Champions have repeatedly emphasized that their historic victory was driven not only by their sporting prowess, but also by their military experience, which helped them forge the discipline and determination to never give up, even in the darkest moments. However, the soldiers and professional basketball players on the national team admitted that athletes often avoid serving in the Lithuanian Armed Forces due to various misconceptions and fears.

Recalling the start of his military career in 2007, team captain Pvt. G. Matulis noted that the military basketball team back then consisted primarily of volunteer soldiers — the very path he chose for himself. "When I started my basketball career, the team's coach at the time, Mindaugas Kildišius, suggested I join the armed forces, highlighting the incredible opportunities to attend elite

training camps and compete at a high level. I figured it was a chance worth taking. Honestly, I didn't even think about where it would lead. Yet here I am — nearly twenty years have flown by since I first put on the volunteer soldier's uniform, completed field exercises, and played basketball," Pvt. G. Matulis shared. "Granted, there were periods when playing for professional clubs or national teams left me with less time, but I always made an effort to attend drills and standby duties whenever possible. As a professional athlete, my own journey is proof that there is absolutely no reason to fear serving in the Lithuanian Armed Forces. It is entirely possible to seamlessly balance service with professional sports. The athletic facilities here are top-tier, and the military skills you acquire are invaluable for any citizen. In fact, many professional athletes from various sports currently serve, so I highly encourage both young men and women to consider this path."

One of the youngest debutants on the

military basketball team, LKA Cdt. A. Tororis, also confirmed that he successfully balances his studies, military service, and sports, noting that the latter brings a unique dynamic to his daily routine: "If it weren't for basketball, studying at the LKA might not be as engaging. Whenever I find a free moment, I always rush to the gym, because basketball has been a part of my life since childhood. The joy I experience on the court is my greatest motivation, and military discipline only helps me achieve my goals." The head coach of the gold-medal-winning team, Col. M. Kugauda, has no doubt that military experience, iron discipline, and a deep sense of responsibility were the critical factors that helped his team to win the world title. Additionally, Col. A. Jasinskas emphasized that sports benefit all military personnel by developing the physical endurance and willpower necessary for executing military tasks while strengthening overall team spirit. ■

The members of the Golden Team emphasize that military service and sports are a great combination.



Photo credits: Col. Arturas Jasinskas and The Military Sports Academy, France.



Historical Lithuanian Gold: Wuhan, 2019

At the 7th Military World Games in Wuhan, China, the Lithuanian men's basketball team wrote one of the most memorable chapters in the country's sports history. In the decisive showdown, the Lithuanians defeated a powerful US team 91–83 after a dramatic and hard-fought thriller and won the World Games gold medals.

The match got off to a tough start for the Lithuanians, with the Americans taking the opening quarter 20–14. However, in the second quarter, the Lithuanian warriors demonstrated an impressive offensive, winning the period 30–15 and taking over the initiative. Although the US team mounted a furious fourth-quarter comeback, winning the final frame by nine points, the Lithuanians who played the final minutes with nerves of steel, preserved their victorious advantage. In this historic tournament, the Lithuanian national team was represented by determined professional basketball players who brought honor to the country's military, masterfully balancing elite sports with their service. The team was coached by Col. Lt. Marius Kugauda, and five soldiers from the National Defense Volunteer Forces, two soldiers each from the General Stasys Raštikis Lithuanian Military School and the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas Staff Battalion, as well as soldiers from the Juozas Vitkus Engineering, Duke Vaidotas Infantry and General Romualdas Giedraitis Artillery Battalions.

Information credits: Lithuanian Armed Forces Sport Club





Warsaw warns

Russia has captured a large number of Ukrainian drones and may be planning to use them against NATO or to stage a false flag attack, Polish defense minister Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz said, adding to earlier warnings of a potential escalation.

The senior official's statement comes after more than a month of unusual public warnings by several Eastern European countries that Russia was planning some form of a provocation or hybrid attack, with





Fot.: Sebastian Indra / MSZ

government officials citing numerous pieces of intelligence that pointed them to this conclusion.

Poland, Lithuania and Latvia have been among the countries raising the alarm, some citing US intelligence that had been shared with them. The latest information, first shared by

Poland's defense minister, outlines a concrete threat vector for what was previously a more general warning of russian malicious intent. The threat appears to be taken seriously by the Eastern European capitals, and the Polish government prioritized the topic for discussion in security

committee meeting. Following the meeting, Kosiniak-Kamysz reiterated the specific warning.

In addition to drone incursions, he also said GPS jamming and various acts of sabotage may be on the table. The countries surrounding the Baltic Sea have been affected by russian ►►



GPS interference since the early days of the war, sometimes leading to airport closures and navigation problems. Sabotage, too, has featured, including the disabling of a rail line in eastern Poland last year.

Government officials also noted cyber warfare as a possible avenue for Russian actions against NATO countries. In late June, Latvian

intelligence first told 'Fox News' they had detected Russian preparations for a hybrid attack that would fall short of the threshold for open war. The attack might include "missiles, drones or other actions designed to send a signal: stop supporting Ukraine, or you will have your own problems," 'Fox News Digital' quoted Latvian intelligence as saying.

Later, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said he had been receiving warnings about a Russian test of NATO resolve and possible attack on Polish soil from allied intelligence agencies for weeks, adding in a press conference that "the coming months may truly be critical." Polish publication 'Onet' had previously reported from a source close to Polish president Karol



Nawrocki that the US had shared concrete warnings of hostile russian actions with the government in Warsaw. Latvian and Lithuanian leaders warned specifically of "limited kinetic operations" targeting critical infrastructure.

The kremlin's press spokesperson Peskov dismissed this as "scare stories". Some officials have warned that

russia may also be inclined to stage a false flag attack on its own territory to give it a pretense to escalate the war in Ukraine or expand it to include strikes on NATO countries. Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski warned of such a scenario in late June, saying at the time that "I expect a false flag attack on russian territory, to which Putin 'will respond.'"

"The russians are planning something again; we have credible information," Sikorski told the press on July 9.

Similar public messaging — including the selective sharing of high-level intelligence by Western capitals — preceded the 2022 russian invasion of Ukraine. At the time, the Biden administration took the unprecedented step of declassifying and sharing with the public a large number of previously secret intelligence signals that pointed toward russia preparing for a wholesale invasion of its western neighbor. Some officials and analysts have suggested the open sharing of information delayed the start of the invasion by several weeks. Sikorski, the Polish foreign minister, said on July 9 that he hoped the current sharing of public warnings would similarly deter russia from following through on its plans.

However, no primary intelligence beyond the verbal statements made by high-level figures has been publicly shared so far by the Western countries now raising the alarm. Russia has previously found ways to redirect Ukrainian drones that were launched by Kyiv to fall on NATO territory rather than reaching their intended targets of russian military facilities, industry and oil storage facilities. The Baltic States and Finland have had several instances of misguided Ukrainian-launched drones striking their territories, including an oil storage facility in Latvia — an incident that led to two high-level resignations there, including of the prime minister.

Those cases have been publicly attributed to russian electronic warfare and defensive signal jamming redirecting drones already in flight. Russia launching captured drones at the West would be a marked escalation from that precedent.

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





Just 20-30 minutes

Russian recruits arriving on the front lines in Ukraine survive an estimated 20 to 30 minutes before they are killed or wounded, Central Intelligence Agency Director John Ratcliffe said, marking the first time a senior American intelligence official has confirmed how deadly the war has become for Moscow. The assessment comes as Ukraine's battlefield technology has stalled Russia's advance along the front and drawn foreign partners ready to spend billions of dollars in deals with its defense industry.

European and Ukrainian officials have said for months that Russian casualty rates have climbed to record levels, with Ukraine's top general telling NATO allies in May that Russia loses at least 1,000 soldiers a day. "Our intelligence is consistent with some of the open-source repor-

ting you may have seen in Ukraine," Ratcliffe said at the Defense and Innovation Summit in Pennsylvania. "The average life expectancy of a Russian recruit right now, arriving on the battlefield in Ukraine, is estimated to be between 20 and 30 minutes. That's because AI-powered drones have gotten to be such specialized, low-cost killing machines," he added.



Ratcliffe's confirmation shows how decisively emerging technology can shape a war — and why the US cannot afford to fall behind. The Russia-to-Ukraine casualty ratio reached nearly 8-to-1 in the first half of 2026, up from roughly 2-to-1 or 3-to-1 for most of the war, as AI-powered drones expanded across the front, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

More than 2 million soldiers on both sides have been killed or wounded since Russia's February 2022 invasion, with Russia bearing 1.4 million of those casualties, the CSIS researchers found, including as many as 450,000

dead — the highest battlefield death toll suffered by any major power since World War II.

"The takeaway is that the mastery of these emerging technologies is every bit as important as military strength," Ratcliffe said during the summit. "That's why an inferior force, four and a half years later, has held off the superior force of Russia."

Ratcliffe said the US needs to take the lessons learned on the battlefield in Ukraine seriously.

"The pace of their advance has stopped as Ukraine's mastery of emerging technologies and, in this case, drone warfare, asymmetric warfare, is such a great equalizer, and

shows why we have to be leading on this in all respects for us to maintain our place in the global marketplace," he said.

His remarks came as Washington and its European allies race to fund Ukraine's drone programs and lock in access to the technology behind them. Before that, the European Union and Ukraine signed a drone-production deal in Kyiv worth over \$6 billion, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that progress had been made on a package of multibillion dollar deals with the US.

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

Confirmed KIA Russian generals

LIEUTENANT GENERALS



Alexander
Otroshchenko



Fanil Sarvarov



Yaroslav Moskalik



Igor Kirillov



Oleg Tsokov

MAJOR GENERALS



Vladimir Frolov



Vladimir Zavadsky



Sergei Goryachev



Mikhail Gudkov



Pavel Klimenko



Roman Kutuzov



Andrei Sukhovetsky



Andrei Golovatsky

(POLICE, RETIRED)



Kanamat Botashev

(RETIRED)



Sergei Dubinsky

(EX-GENERAL)



A New Chapter

July 11–16, soldiers of the Land Forces (LF) of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, in commemoration of Lithuanian Land Forces Day, organized a nearly 400-kilometer march from Klaipėda to Trakai, during which two march flags were carried without interruption — day and night — as they were passed from one LF unit to another.

The march concluded with a ceremonial parade in the courtyard of Trakai Island Castle, during which the handover ceremony for the LF marching flags took place. The ceremony was attended by the Chief of Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, Gen. Raimundas Vaikšnoras; Minister of National Defense Robertas Kaunas; generals from allied nations; defense attachés; and soldiers from the Lithuanian Armed Forces and allied nations.

"Today the march comes to an end.

But service does not end. Because service is not a path from one point to another. Service is a daily choice," said LF Commander Brig. Gen. Nerijus Stankevičius during the ceremonial parade.

He also emphasized that the most important meaning of this march was not the distance covered, but the service itself and the people who give

it meaning. According to the brigadier general, at no moment during the march were the flags left alone — they were accompanied the entire way by soldiers, who passed them from hand to hand. This unbroken chain served as a living reminder that Lithuania's defense rests on its people, their mutual trust, and their shared determination to serve the nation.

The LF marching flag, featuring the



yellow Pillars of Gediminas on a red background, was presented to the Chief of Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, Gen. R. Vaikšnoras. From now on, it serves as the Lithuanian Armed Forces' marching flag.

During the ceremony, Minister of National Defense Robertas Kaunas presented the new LF marching flag to the Commander of the Lithuanian Land Forces. It features crossed swords and a shield against a green background.

Lithuanian Land Forces Day is celebrated annually to honor the LF and their service. The marching flag handover ceremony, which took place during this year's commemoration, marked a new phase in the LF's tradition — their former marching flag became the Lithuanian Armed Forces' marching flag, and the LF were presented with the new marching flag.

Information credit: Lithuanian Armed Forces
Photo credit: Cpl. Žana Ruseckaitė



A flamingo is shown in flight, its wings spread wide, revealing a mix of pink, orange, and black feathers. The bird is positioned in the upper half of the frame, flying towards the right. The background is a clear blue sky with some white clouds visible at the bottom right corner.

THE FLA SPREAD THE

The word '*flamingo*' is increasingly being heard in the media — not in relation to ornithology, but to reports of the war in Ukraine. No longer just a beautiful pink bird, *Flamingo* is now the weapon that Putin's Russia fears and hates... What is this weapon? Who created it and what makes it special?



FLAMINGOS ON THEIR WINGS

DARIUS SUTKUS



As announced, the manufacturer of *Flamingo* is a non-governmental Ukrainian company 'Fire Point', founded shortly after the large-scale Russian invasion. A complete newcomer to the business, whose current owners had no connection with the production of weapons until then. The closest person in this field can be considered only the current chief designer of the company, Denys Shtilerman. By education, he is a physicist, and he was interested in model aircraft purely as a hobby. Other faces of 'Fire Point' are Yehor Skalyha, who worked in the film

industry, and architect Iryna Terekh, who ran her own decorative concrete products business.

After Russia invaded Ukraine, D. Shtilerman, like many other citizens, expressed support for the defenders of Ukraine. Among other things, he thought that drones would be a good support for the soldiers. "I started buying drones with my own money but quickly realized the market supply was so low that there was almost nothing available. What was being sold was offered at crazy prices. Therefore, in November 2022, we decided to make our own drone that could fly a fifty-kilogram load over a distance of about 800 kilometers, and most importantly, cost no more than 60 000 US dollars."

That's how the long-range unmanned aerial vehicle with an internal combustion engine, the *FP-1*, was born.

The project developed in terms of both quality and quantity. As of 2024, the improved *FP-1* strike drones could already cover a range of up to 1 600 kilometers and were being produced in about thirty well-classified workshops scattered throughout the country.



FP-5 Flamingo. Rear view, clearly showing the large dimensions of the rocket.

"We started making drones and realized that we were doing it well," the designer continues. "Gradually, the idea matured: what if we jumped from propeller systems to rocket propulsion?"

The relevance of the idea was driven

by several key factors that emerged during this war.

First, Ukrainian propeller-driven drones are highly effective over long ranges, effectively destroying enemy infrastructure while overcoming its 'un-

'Fire Point' Core team: Yehor Skalyha, Iryna Terekh, Denys Shtilerman.





The *Strizh*, an obsolete turbojet drone, was also operated by the Ukrainian Armed Forces for a period of time.

rivalled' radio-jamming and air defense barriers. However, turbojet and ballistic missiles would serve as an even more powerful trump card, restraining imperial russonazi ambitions.

Second: after Ukraine regained its independence, no one showed significant interest in developing a local missile industry. And relying on Western help means, in part, voluntarily tying our own hands. We already know how it worked: well, dear Ukrainians, we will give you missiles, but you cannot use them to hit targets in russia itself...

This meant only one thing: someone had to start producing missiles domestically, thereby bypassing restrictions and gaining an even greater advantage over the aggressor.

Project origins

The project gained real momentum once Oleksandr Kryvokon got involved. Who is this man? Oleksandr Kryvokon is a long-time employee of the 'Antonov' aviation company and the head of Kharkiv Aviation Factory. His proposal

was very specific: 'Fire Point' is going to engage in rocket technology? Well, the factory's warehouses are stocked with a lot of starting rocket engines, and here are the drawings of the device for which they were intended.

That aircraft was the *Tu-141 Strizh*, built back in the soviet union years (According to the NATO classification — ADV-2).

What kind of strange machine is the *Strizh*? It is a long-range unmanned reconnaissance aircraft manufactured at the Kharkiv Aviation Factory. This large, fighter-like flying machine powered by a turbojet engine lacked landing gear — but it did not need a runway to accelerate. Weighing over 5.3 tons, the monster took off directly from a specialized trailer launcher. A solid-fuel booster provided the necessary takeoff speed, after which the *Strizh* flew using its turbojet engine, reaching a maximum speed of 1 100 km/h. Its landing was as simple as its takeoff: after photographing the designated area, the aircraft slowed down and deployed a parachute to land on the ground.

These reconnaissance aircraft were used by the soviet Air Forces between 1979 and 1989. The systems were primarily deployed along the western border of the soviet union. Later, many decommissioned *Tu-141s* were repurposed as aerial targets.

Therefore, all that remains is to revive the old blueprints and bring this vintage exoticism back to life, while naturally adapting it to modern realities.

In their own way

However, 'Fire Point' rejected this option, considering it a product of the last century. While restoration is possible, it is technologically impractical and unprofitable. "I looked at it and realized, it would take forever to produce such a thing," D. Shtilerman recalled. "It is all... well, entirely aluminum and riveted."

Let's think about it: if the flying machine is not a reconnaissance drone but a strike weapon with a one-way ticket, why complicate its production by increasing costs, and wasting resources — especially when the country is operating in war mode?"



According to the developers, the rocket's name was inspired by its pink nose.

Therefore, instead of copying the aluminum monster, 'Fire Point' decided to take a different approach: it would be simpler, faster, and cheaper to build the aircraft out of fiberglass. This material is not inferior to metal in strength, but it is lighter. When dealing with a one-way strike drone, this weight reduction means it can carry more fuel or a heavier warhead — which is a major advantage.

The development process of the missile also departed from the bureaucratically orthodox model. The initial concept was simply to build something that could fly, and then, through testing, mold that initial model into a functional system. Fortunately, the company was not constrained by the rigid requirements typical of a large corporation — such as schedules, agreements, and coordination. As an example, it is worth mentioning that the missiles-related state design bureau, 'Luch', must submit an application in September 2025 to secure funding for 2027.

The developers noted that the initial phase was the most challenging, when they had to create an aerodynamic model and understand how the missile would behave in reality. Once a suitable design was found, they manufactured

several full-scale prototypes, enabling test flights to identify areas for further optimization.

Initially, the idea was to develop a cruise missile with deployable wings that could be transported in a compact container. However, this concept was abandoned in favor of cost-efficiency. Let that fixed six-meter wingspan be sufficient if it saves hundreds of man-hours and thousands of hryvnias.

The product was unveiled on August 17, 2025. The following day, that time Minister of Defence of Ukraine Denys Shmyhal confirmed the news about the missile, describing it as an exceptionally powerful and long-range weapon.

Assigning a Name

But the product still had no name. Can the nomenclature index *FP-5* be equated with a name worthy of a cruise missile?

Real tests of the rocket began in the fall of 2025. According to the team, it took less than ten test flights to achieve the desired result. It seems that during one of them, the spontaneous naming of the missile took place.

And it all happened like this: if we

believe the designer's version, the front section of the rocket — which housed a 'black box' instead of a warhead during testing — was painted bright orange to make it easier to locate. However, when the usual paint eventually ran out, the front was painted with whatever pink paint was readily available.

Next came the associations... Pink and flying — what? A *flamingo*, of course!

Of course, it is quite possible that this story is a marketing legend specially created by the manufacturers. In any case, a missile is just a flying tube and will not advertise itself. Consequently, the name *Flamingo* stuck to it. And today, they do not necessarily have to be bright and beautiful.

"They say *flamingos* are pink because they eat shrimp. Ours will be black because their food will be russian oil refineries," says one of the company's employees, Iryna Terekh.

Final touches

In February 2026, the turbojet bird, which had already learned to fly well, passed its final state exam. The *Flamingo* made the right impression on the customers, so it was finally decided to mass-produce them. 'Fire Point' has



This was a deliberate publicity stunt, with the rocket being made public for political reasons.

been offered a contract worth approximately \$1 billion (USD). This amount represents about one-tenth of the Ukraine's Military acquisition budget.

The cruise missile was designed and built in a record time of about nine months. Of course, the initial version is not final; it will be constantly improved

depending on the circumstances.

It is possible that the *Flamingo* would have remained shrouded in secrecy for a longer time; it seems more logical. Imagine this: the Russia's strategic targets suddenly come under attack by unidentified aircraft, and for some time, no one understands what they are or how they

manage to cover such long distances.

However, a more likely scenario is that it was more convenient for the Ukraine to immediately reveal its turbojet missile for political reasons. One of the possible motives — Donald Trump's skeptical phrase that Ukraine "has no cards" in this war. Therefore, a *Flamingo* holding

The final flight tests of the *Flamingo* were conducted under real-world conditions.





A ton of explosives, the *Flamingo's* warhead utilized heavy aviation bombs.

an ace was painted, as if by accident, on one *FP-5* shown to the media.

D. Trump heard. His response was as follows: "It is very hard, if not impossible, to win a war without attacking an invader's country. It's like a great team in sports that has a fantastic defense, but is not allowed to play offense. <...> Exciting times are coming!!!"

The President of Ukraine confirmed during the tests that a long-range strike missile will soon be available, with mass production set for February 2026 at the latest. Real footage of the test launch was also shown, instead of computer animation.

What kind of bird is this?

The mass of the missile ready for launch is reportedly about six tons. For comparison, the mass of the US-made Tomahawk cruise missile with its booster motor is two tons. This makes the six-ton *Flamingo* a true heavyweight among products in its class. How does this affect its combat characteristics?

Most of the rocket's body consists of lightweight composite materials, while the majority of its mass is fuel. For someone familiar with mathematics, it is easy to calculate the volume of the *FP-5* body, estimate the approximate fuel capacity, determine the turbojet's consumption, and draw the necessary conclusions. It is mentioned that this cruise missile is designed for up to four hours of flight, so its 3 000 km maximum range does not seem like an empty claim or a marketing ploy.

Ukrainians position the *Flamingo* as a strategic missile. This classification, along with the missile's long range, suggests that it will be assigned priority targets. Consequently, the *Flamingo's* warhead must be powerful enough. After all, a missile does not fly a couple of thousand kilometers just to blow a few sheets off some 'Uralvagonzavod' tank factory roof.

In fact, the *Flamingo's* benefit (or harm — that's a matter of perspective) coefficient is very adequate for both its purpose and the amount of fuel burned. The most important parcel that the *FP-5* delivers to the specified addressee

weighs up to 1 150 kg. For comparison: the weight of the same American *Tomahawk* conventional warhead is 450 kg.

Everything becomes clear when there is something to compare it to. Let's just remember: in 2004, an unexploded 500 kg aerial bomb was found in Kaunas city, Aleksotas District. The explosive was located at a depth of two meters. Deminers from the Colonel Juozas Vitkus Engineer Battalion called in covered it with sandbags, but residents within a 300-meter radius were still evacuated. In the event of an explosion, the shockwave from this type of high-explosive bomb can shatter window panes up to 1 km away.

An explosion equivalent to one ton of TNT usually completely flattens concrete structures within a 20-meter radius. Brick walls or oil tanks within a 50-meter radius are destroyed, while structures further away are left more or less in ruins. It is not for nothing that heavy aerial bombs were nicknamed 'blockbusters' during World War II.

Speaking of bombs? And it is not without reason, as the *Flamingo* does not have a purpose-built warhead. The

designers took a different approach, choosing a simple yet effective solution: the same aerial bomb can be placed inside the missile's nose cone. Based on publicly available photos of the missiles with their nose sections removed, these appear to be American bombs. They are likely either *BLU-117* blast-fragmentation bomb weighing around 900 kg, or *BLU-109/B*, known as 'bunker busters' of a similar weight, which are capable of penetrating several meters of concrete fortifications before exploding inside.

However, it cannot be ruled out that they are not the only and indispensable filling of the *Flamingo*. The Ukraine also has plenty of soviet-era aircraft bombs left over, which could be perfectly suited for an honorable mission: to be transported over a considerable distance to destroy key military-industrial complex objects or logistical hubs. Or, as we see now, to let oil storage facilities and processing plants go up in smoke.

About the Engine

Who transports a one-ton explosive charge to its target?

As previously mentioned, this missile is launched from a special launch platform, so there is no need for an aircraft or a runway. Before launch, refueling the missile takes about half an hour. The initial impulse for the *Flamingo*'s rapid ascent is provided by a solid-fuel booster engine. After breaking away from the launcher, the missile climbs sharply; the booster is then jettisoned, and upon reaching its designated altitude, the *Flamingo* continues its flight powered by a turbojet engine.

A turbojet engine is a complex device. Does 'Fire Point' manufacture them itself? No, it is not necessary at all. The heart of the aircraft is the *AI-25TL* engine, developed back in 1966 by The Zaporizhzhia 'Progress' Design Bureau, and production began a year later. The

AI-25TL is a name that says little to a non-specialist. However, it is known for being used in such classic aircraft as the *Jak-40* or the Czech-made *L-39 Albatros*, which, by the way, were also flown by our Air Force pilots.

In the forgotten corners of the aircraft factory, 'Fire Point' found a few *AI-25TL* engines (the exact number was not disclosed) that had not yet expired. In principle, they were no longer suitable for installation in piloted aircraft — unless intended for a kamikaze squadron. However, if an engine's lifespan is nearly exhausted, it will likely still run for a few more hours. And that is exactly enough for a *Flamingo*!

But what will happen when there are no more obsolete or refurbished *AI-25* in stock?

This will not be a problem. Engines of this type already exist and will continue to be produced. In 2021, the Turkish company 'Baykar Makina', already

Turbojet AI-25. Ukraine has a sufficient supply of them, both for its own needs and for export.



famous for its *Bayraktar*, introduced a promising model of its turbojet drone, the *MIUS*, powered by the Ukrainian-made *AI-25* engine.

Furthermore, nothing stands still; there are other similar modifications of Ukrainian-made turbojet engines. For example, the *AI-322* (an improved version of the *AI-222*), is produced by 'Ivchenko-Progress'. These engines are used in *Jak-130* aircraft. Additionally, they are purchased by the Chinese company 'Hongdu', which installs them in its *L-15* trainer aircraft.

And if there are enough engines for export, there will certainly be enough for the Ukrainians themselves.

Missile Control

The on-board computer is the brain of the rocket, controlling its flight. To ensure smooth operation, two complementary systems are integrated into it. Let's examine each of them.

The principle of operation of the inertial control system is quite simple. The target coordinates and flight route data are entered into the rocket's on-board computer. The flight can then proceed entirely in automatic mode. The control system processes data from sensors that record acceleration and other parameters to correct the flight path. However, during autonomous

flight, small errors gradually accumulate, causing the rocket to drift off course. This problem is solved by installing an additional satellite positioning system (GPS) module. With its help, the rocket's 'brain' accurately orients itself in space and adjusts the flight.

So, *Flamingo* has both systems built in, allowing them to operate interchangeably. GPS control is more accurate, but it is sensitive to interference. Following Ukrainian drone strikes, Russia began jamming GPS satellite signals. However, even if the satellite guidance system is blinded, the missile can fly through the jamming zone by temporarily using inertial guidance.

This problem can be solved even more simply: you just need to know where air defense electronic jamming equipment is operating, and plot a route for the missile to fly around those areas.

Avoiding interference is easier than you might think. The Russians often behave like a superpower that others must respect simply because of its size. In fact, when it comes to air defense, a huge territory is precisely what works against them. It is physically impossible to cover such a vast area with a dense air defense dome. Consequently, high concentrations of air defense assets are limited to just a few regions. First and foremost is the capital of this self-proclaimed empire: Moscow and

its surroundings. Other areas densely packed with electronic warfare equipment include the Kaliningrad enclave, the occupied Crimean Peninsula, and the active front line in Ukraine.

The aviation engineer Konstantin Krivolap explains the successful flights of the *FP-5* and the survivability of the missile by several factors: "Theoretically, if the missile crosses the border and avoids Moscow Region, practically no obstacles remain. Even if the missile is detected and its trajectory is determined, there are simply no means available to neutralize it. Furthermore, I believe that the *Flamingo* incorporates design solutions that allow it to fly extremely low. The development work to improve the missile was focused on this specific capability. As a result, the Russians simply cannot see it."

In fact, the *FP-5* is constantly being improved. The chief designer emphasized the importance of improving the navigation system: "We are constantly doing this. And as soon as we have maps with an altitude error of about 1 m in our hands, we will be able to use TERCOM (Terrain Contour Matching). This system navigates using terrain contours, allowing you to fly without any GPS signal."

For now, other methods have to be used to ensure flight accuracy. However, the precision of the *FP-5* is visibly

The Russia's anti-missile capabilities are focused in its western region, though their overall effectiveness is limited.



COMPARISON OF CRUISE MISSILES

BGM-109 TOMAHAWK, USA:

Type: Surface-to-Surface (can also be launched from warships or submarines)

Maximum operational range: up to 2 500 km

Maximum speed: 920 km/h

Warhead Weight: 450 kg (conventional; can also carry a nuclear warhead)

Price: around 4 million US dollars



KALIBR (VERSION 3M-14), RUSSIA:

Type: Surface-to-Surface

Maximum operational range: up to 2 500 km

Maximum speed: 850 km/h

Warhead Weight: 450 kg (conventional; can also carry a nuclear warhead)

Price: around 2 million US dollars (export price – about 6.5 million)



FP-5 FLAMINGO, UKRAINE:

Type: Surface-to-Surface

Maximum operational range: up to 3 000 km

Maximum speed: 950 km/h

Warhead Weight: 1 150 kg (conventional)

Price: 0,5-0,6 million US dollars



improving. To put this into perspective: while the designers' specifications permit a maximum tolerance of up to 14 meters, the missile missed by about 100 meters during its first combat mission due to interference, bad weather, or technical glitches. Yet, just six months later, it struck the factory at Cheboksary with an accuracy of under 10 meters.

Combat application

The first *Flamingo* raid, conducted in August 30, 2025, looks quite modest. Three missiles launched by Ukrainians were directed at the occupied Crimea. As is now known, their target was the reconnaissance complex, belonging to Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), located right on the seashore, near Armiansk settlement. Judging by open sources, two cruise missiles reached the target. One of them hit the main building, while the other hit the shoreline about a hundred meters from the facility.

At first glance, this does not seem like a good result. But considering that the explosions leave craters about fifteen meters in diameter and the huge amount of soil thrown out, it becomes clear that the insufficient accuracy is compensated by the enormous power of the blast.

In November 13, 2025, Command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine reported that oil refineries and military facilities were destroyed at the occupied Crimea and Russian territory. They noted that, in addition to other strike weapons, *FP-5* missiles were also used in this operation.

In early February 2026, a *FP-5* was targeted at the missile test range of 'Kapustin Yar', located in Astrakhan region, severely damaging one of the hangars. It is possible that this hangar was used to assemble technical components for the *Oreshnik* missile.

A few days later, on February 12, *Flamingo* was launched toward the Volgograd region. A large explosives arsenal located near Kotluban settlement was fired upon, and an ammunition depot with an area of approximately 1 200 square meters was hit. Judging by satellite photos, the damage was

extensive. The detonation itself could be heard from a great distance.

On February 21, another important military-industrial complex facility was targeted, the Votkinsk plant in Udmurtia. The plating and stamping facility was destroyed.

At first glance, it might seem insignificant. Somewhere in the wetlands, some parts won't be made anymore. However, that facility manufactured components used to produce *Jars*, *Bulava* and *Iskander* missiles. Therefore, the factory in that area was a vital element of the Russian military-industrial complex. Or at least, it used to be.

After the attack, a breach of more than 700 square meters and extensive scorch marks are visible on the roof of the building, indicating that one large workshop was completely destroyed and another nearby was severely damaged. It is estimated that their reconstruction, even at the fastest pace, would take at least six months.

Even Aleksandr Brechalov, the Governor of Udmurtia, spoke about the losses suffered — a significant detail, because such incidents are usually either kept quiet or discussed very su-

perficially. Interestingly, there is a small inaccuracy in the A. Brechalov version: the factory was definitely not attacked by drones as stated, because no Ukrainian propeller-driven drone could ever cover such a distance. Everything became clear at a press conference organized by 'Fire Point', where it was announced that the FP-5 had covered its longest distance yet — about 1 700 km!

And the fireworks didn't end there. In May, Cheboksary city (Chuvashia) was attacked several times by *Flamingo*. The city is home to many military-industrial plants, the shelling of which The President of Ukraine sarcastically described as "long-range sanctions." The missiles flew about one and a half thousand kilometers. However, in this case, it is not the distance that matters, but the goals achieved. For example,



Attack on FSB reconnaissance complex. The direct hit on the building and the crater on the shoreline are clearly visible.



the 'Progress' plant in Cheboksary produces navigation units — satellite receivers and antennas — used in *Shahed* drones and other cruise and ballistic missiles. Which, as we know, are used to massively bombard cities in Ukraine.

On June 27, five *Flamingos* flew to the Federal Scientific and Production Center 'Titan-Barikady', in Volgograd. This was a clear return visit after Russia launched attack on Ukraine with *Iskander* missiles manufactured there. In addition, *Jars* and *Topol-M* missile launchers and *Msta-S* self-propelled howitzer tubes are made here. At least three large workshops were destroyed.

"And this is not the end... Wait for the continuation of the seasonal migration of *flamingos*," commented Ukrainian 'ornithologists' from the 'Fire Point'.

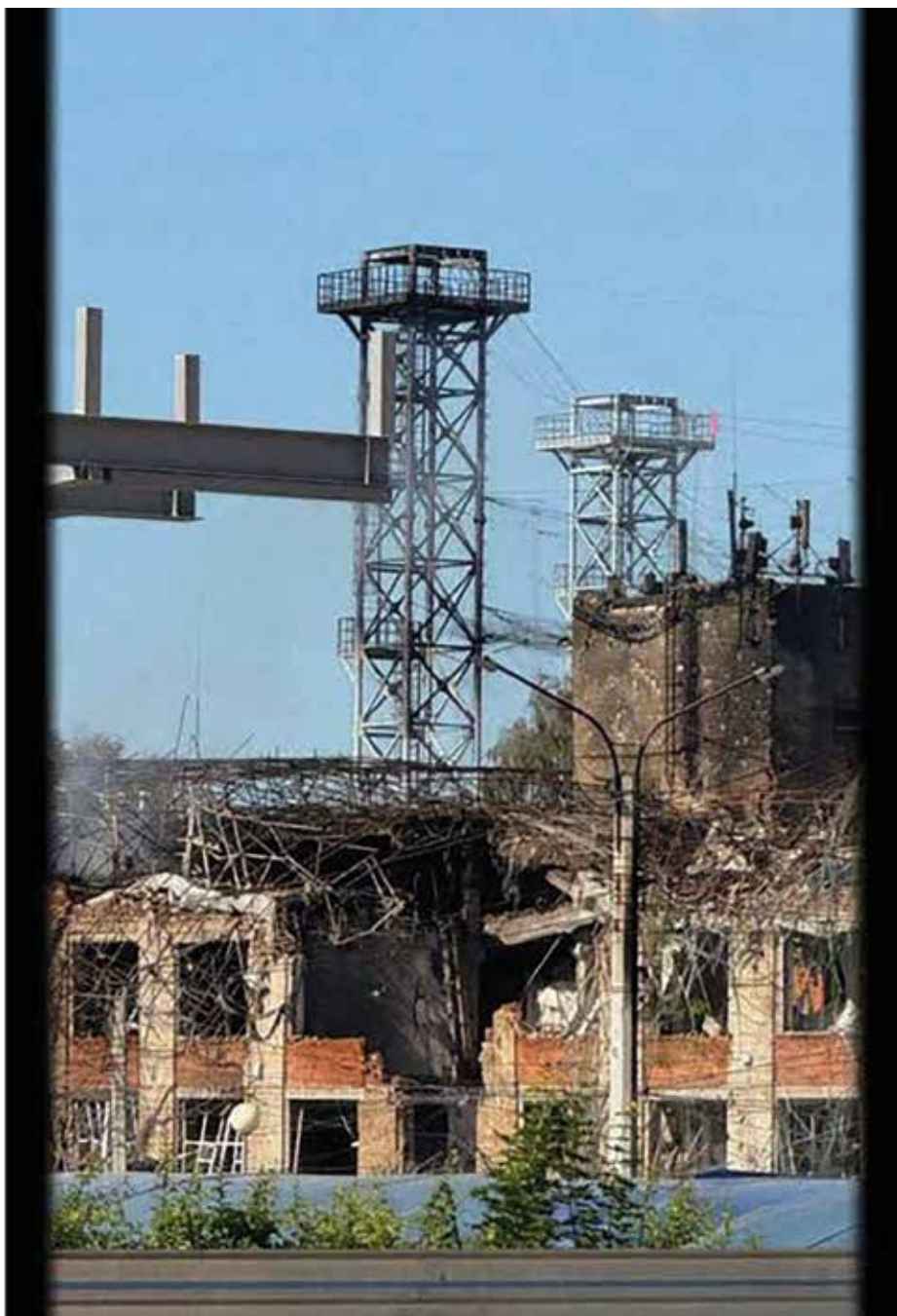
Scale of production

Ukraine already produces these missiles, which are both cost-effective and efficient. Their flight range is such that they can reach objects further than Ural. Consequently, about 80 percent of all personnel at the Russian military-industrial plants no longer feel safe in their workplaces.

But another important factor is that there must be enough *Flamingos*. Therefore, the main question after the missile has passed tests and seen its first operational use is whether the country will be able to sustain their uninterrupted production.

In August 2025, the agency AP reported that 'Fire Point' was producing one missile per day. The manufacturers have stated that this figure is slightly higher — about 50 per month.

In February 2026, Russia once again struck the Ukrainian grounds with its own drones and missiles. During this massive attack, the factory where the *Flamingos* were assembled sustained damage. The President of Ukraine spoke quite frankly: "We had technical problems. One of our production lines was destroyed by missiles. Now I can talk about it, because production has already been moved elsewhere and partially resumed. Work continues."



The missile strike on one of the factories in Cheboksary. The building was protected with anti-drone net barriers, but that proved ineffective.

One of Russia's more recent attempts to "destruct facilities where *Flamingos* are produced with precision strikes" occurred on the night of July 2. The quotation marks are not used here by chance; about 20 high-rise residential buildings were destroyed during the attack, and at least a dozen civilians were killed.

And what about rocket production? Will it stop? Hardly.

Flamingo production has been distributed across separate locations for some time, with certain operations moved abroad. The planned production volume has increased, as 'Fire Point' aims to scale up to 200 missiles per month. This means only one thing: the aggressor country will finally realize that this game is no longer played at just one end of the field.

The scale models of the ballistic missiles *FP-7* and *FP-9*. The real length of the first — 7,25 m, second — 9,5 m.



Near-term prospects

It is clear that Ukraine will not limit itself to cruise missile. 'Fire Point' has been discussing about ballistic missile projects for some time. The *FP-7* short-range ballistic missile will be capable of reaching targets up to 300 km away and is expected to be deployed this year.

"It is similar in its characteristics to *ATACMS*, but costs two to three times less. Furthermore, its use is completely unrestricted — for every *ATACMS* strike on russian territory, we need permission. In this case, no permissions are required; we just use it wherever it is needed," D. Shtilerman explains.

His next project is the *FP-9*, which can carry a warhead weighing up to 800 kg and fly up to 850 km. Such a range ensures that residents of the gleaming 'moscow-city' can no longer dismiss the conflict as a distant and abstract 'Special Operation'. Where people might be dying while they live in comfort and carry on undisturbed. The ballistic *FP-9*, as the designer delicately put it, could significantly alter the mind-set of both the general population and the country's highest political echelon.

In addition, 'Fire Point' stated that its missiles could serve not only to Ukraine interests. This aligns with its proposed 'Freya' project — a concept for Europe's joint anti-missile shield. The Ukrainian manufacturer can contribute to this initiative with target missiles, the *FP-7.X* anti-missile systems currently undergoing testing, and a control system components. This air defense complex could be realized in the coming years. Priced under 1 million USD — making it cheaper than American *Patriot* in its class — the anti-missile system would be capable of intercepting ballistic missiles as early as 2027. Consequently, the Ukrainian company would contribute not only to domestic defense but also to international security, thereby shaping the broader geostrategic landscape. ■

UKRAINIAN MISSILE INDUSTRY

This sector was well-developed in Ukraine during the soviet era, with numerous military enterprises operating here. After regaining independence, Ukraine retained its production capacity and skilled specialists. The missile industry continued to develop independently, backed by technical expertise from design bureaus like 'Pivdenne', 'Pivdenmash' and 'Luch'. However, progress was hampered because missiles were not a priority for a long time, and production relied heavily on imported components, including those from russia. Despite these obstacles, the country integrated *Vilcha* guided missile into its arsenal in 2018, followed by the *Neptun* anti-ship cruise missile in 2021, just months before the russian invasion. Meanwhile, the *Sapsan* short-range ballistic missile project stalled due to insufficient funding. The events of 2022 forced a fresh look at this sector. Although russia deliberately targeted facilities linked to the missile industry, Ukraine successfully adapted its existing missile arsenal to repel the aggression. The most notable instances involved Ukraine's land-based strikes against russia's naval forces at the Black Sea; additionally, *Neptun* missiles were modified and adapted to strike ground targets. The ability to effectively execute missile strikes depended heavily on the assistance of foreign partners. While the *Storm Shadow/Scalp-EG* cruise missiles and *ATACMS* ballistic missiles provided critical support, their deployment was constrained by political obligations. Furthermore, the situation surrounding the promised but undelivered *Taurus* missiles demonstrated to Ukrainians the vital need to prioritize the country's domestic missile industry.

The development of new missiles has intensified since late 2023. This ambitious initiative was vividly described by the 'Fire Point' chief designer: "You work when a gun is pointed at you..."

The start of *Neptun*. The flagship *Moskva* was sunk with this type of rocket.

FOREST ANTS THE SO



In a recent issue of WARRIOR (No. 3, 2026), we wrote about foreign fighters who, in the postwar years, chose to join the Lithuanian partisans and fought alongside Lithuanians against

the soviet occupation. Continuing this theme, we present our readers with the extraordinary story of one of them: German soldier Adelbert Lohr.

S AGAINST SOVIET BEAR



In the fall of 1944, Adelbert Lohr's fate unexpectedly became intertwined with that of Lithuania. As the German forces withdrew from Lithuania, he refused to surrender to the Soviets and went into hiding in Lithuania for nearly five years. There, he shared the daily lives of local residents and Lithuanian partisans, and later joined the armed anti-Soviet resistance himself. In 1949, he was arrested, sentenced to 25 years in a labor camp, and deported to Siberia. A. Lohr did not return to Germany until 1955. However, his connection with Lithuania did not end there. On the contrary — Lithuania remained an important part of his life for nearly five more decades, until his death.

Adelbert Lohr was born in 1921 in

Neufrach, Germany. On February 4, 1941, he was drafted into the *Wehrmacht*; a few months later, his unit was sent to the Eastern Front. His service was not easy. A. Lohr suffered from frostbite, then was seriously wounded and spent a long time recovering. After recovering, he was sent back to the front in the summer of 1944, this time to Lithuania, where the German army was already being pushed westward by the advancing Red Army.

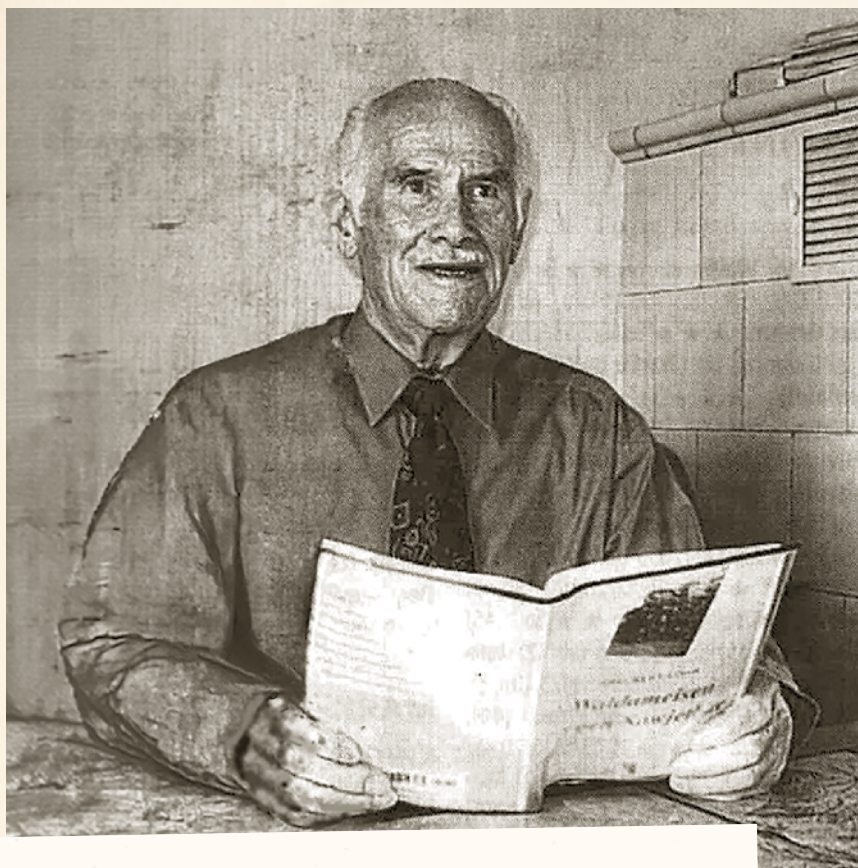
The Soviet offensive, which began on October 7, 1944, broke through the German defenses in Lithuania within a few days. A. Lohr's unit was cut off from the rest of the *Wehrmacht* troops. A small group of German soldiers decided not to surrender and to try to break through to the West. They moved only at night and

hid in the forests and on farms during the day, hoping to reach their comrades. However, as the front continued to shift westward, it became clear that this would no longer be possible. The group scattered, and Adelbert Lohr, aided by ordinary farmers, remained in hiding in Lithuania.

This decision was dangerous not only for him. Every family that sheltered a German soldier or helped the partisans risked being arrested, deported, or even killed. The NKVD conducted raids in the villages, searching for men in hiding and supporters of the partisans. At that time, thousands of Lithuanian men were evading forced conscription into the Red Army.

Living among Lithuanians, A. Lohr learned Lithuanian and soon found out about the Lithuanian partisan units operating

Adelbert Lohr, the author of the memoir.

Sutikimas

Galima mano knyga Miško Skruzdė prieš Sovietų Lokį
išversti į lietuvių kalbą.
Vokietis su Lietuvos Partizanois.

Einwilligung

Ich erlaube mein Buch "Waldameise gegen Sowjetbär"
in litauische Sprache zu übersetzen
Als Deutscher unter litauischen Partisanen.

Adelbert Lohr

in the forests. Realizing that his presence endangered the people who had taken him in, Adelbert decided to flee to the forest and join the partisans.

Among their ranks, he took part in battles against the MGB, constantly changed hiding places, learned the art of conspiracy, and witnessed firsthand the complex struggle of the Lithuanian partisans. For nearly five years, Lithuania ceased to be a foreign country to him and became a place where he lived, fought, and was forced to constantly protect his

own life and that of the people who had taken him in.

In the spring of 1949, A. Lohr's time in hiding came to an end. After being betrayed, he fell into an MGB ambush, was seriously wounded, and arrested. He was later sentenced to 25 years of forced hard labor in camps. He did not serve his entire sentence and returned to Germany in 1955.

It would seem that his connection with Lithuania should have ended there. However, that was not the case.

Upon returning to Germany, Adelbert Lohr started a family, had four children, and became actively involved in his community. Yet he never forgot the people who had helped him survive during the postwar years. In Lithuania, he was known by the Lithuanian name Jurgis, and his connection with the people who had saved his life remained unbroken even decades later.

After the Berlin Wall fell and Lithuania regained its independence, A. Lohr was once again able to freely reconnect with the people he had known during the post-war years. In 1993, he visited Lithuania for the first time after many years. He spent several weeks there, visiting the family that had hidden him during the war and eventually welcomed him as if he were their own son. After this trip, his correspondence with the people in Lithuania intensified even further. In 1997, during another visit to Lithuania, Adelbert met with Leonas Laurinskas-Liūtas, with whom he had once fought in the same partisan unit. He visited former bunkers and battle sites, met with surviving comrades, and learned the fates of many of them.

This trip inspired him to write down his memories. In 1998, his memoir, 'Forest Ants Against the soviet Bear: A German Among Lithuanian Partisans,' was published in Germany. Adelbert's family recounted that at that time, his greatest wish was to return to Lithuania once more. He fulfilled this wish in 2002, when he made his final trip to our country by car.

A. Lohr was amazed by people's memory. Many of the Lithuanians he met had suffered greatly themselves — quite a few had been exiled to Siberia — yet their hospitality, according to Adelbert, remained as sincere as it had been five decades earlier.

After his last trip, A. Lohr realized he would never return to Lithuania. Soon after, his health began to deteriorate rapidly. A cerebral hemorrhage in 2005 changed his life forever. Until his death in 2012, his family cared for him at home.

Adelbert Lohr's memoirs are important today not only as the life story of a single individual. They also serve as a unique testimony about the Lithuania's WAR AFTER THE WAR, offering a perspective on this complex historical era through the eyes of a foreigner who himself became a participant in the partisan resistance.

Author's note

After returning home in 1955, I was constantly asked by relatives and the public to write down my experiences during those terrible years of war for future generations. This was particularly relevant because letters were secretly arriving from Lithuania, some of which were sent from the camps. These letters sparked great public interest and gave rise to all sorts of speculation and theo-

ries. However, it was only after a visit to Lithuania in 1993 — and after hearing the request to tell my story many times — that I decided to undertake this work.

With this book, I wanted to thank the people of Lithuania — after all, by making sacrifices and risking their own freedom, they helped me, a foreigner, in my struggle against a brutal system. I also want to thank my friends who endured five long years of resistance alongside me — always hoping in vain for help from

abroad. Even in the horrific Siberian labor camps, it was mostly Lithuanians who eased my suffering, because although there were people of many nationalities there, there were very few Germans.

Thus, tormented from within by constantly recurring memories, I decided to put my experiences down on paper.

In creating this work, I would like to thank everyone who helped me: especially my loved ones, who actively participated and were patient, and Mr. Gerhard Müller for his valuable help and advice.

Adelbert Lohr at the non-commissioned officers' school in Düren. Photographed in May 1944.

Salem-Neufrach, June 1998



The Path of Battle

I received my draft notice for the German armed forces on February 4, 1941 — and this date would prove time and again to be the defining day of my fate. After a brief infantry training period, on May 15, 1941, I was sent to Poland to serve in a field unit. On June 1 — at midnight, to be precise — the fateful road to the east began. No one told us the destination of our 'journey,' but we all guessed it. The orders were simple — march at night, hide during the day. And so we marched through East Prussia toward Suwałki, all the way to the Russian border. On June 20, we received the order to attack Russia. At 3:05 a.m., the offensive began across the entire front. We advanced toward Białystok, and later continued through Minsk, Vitebsk, Smolensk, Vyazma, Staraya Russa, and Shatsk — always in the central section — until we finally stood about 20–25 km from Moscow.

Our unit — the 5th Division, J.R. 14 — despite the arrival of reinforcements, had dwindled from 180 to 15 men. Our losses due to constant battles with tanks and infantry, as well as from illnesses, especially frostbite, were enormous. In mid-December, I also suffered frostbite on my feet and developed an infection in my left foot. As a result, I was taken to a hospital in Warsaw.

Once I had recovered, I was reassigned to my reserve unit, and in July 1942, I was assigned to a newly formed Bavarian division. With that division, we advanced southward — toward the Caucasus. After the disaster at Stalingrad, the Soviets reached the Sea of Azov and cut us off

in the south. We defended the so-called Kuban bridgehead; we were well entrenched in our positions, and our supplies were brought in via Crimea and the Kerch Peninsula. At that time, there were two volunteers in our machine-gun unit — Caucasian assistants from Maykop and Tbilisi. We called them Grigory and Igor; I picked up a little russian from them, which came in very handy later on. The soviets were making every effort to eliminate this bridgehead. During these battles, on May 5, 1943, I was seriously wounded by a grenade from a tank — seventeen pieces of shrapnel pierced my body from my head and back down to my right arm and left leg.

From there, we were flown to Dnipropetrovsk in a good old *Junkers Ju 52* aircraft. An ambulance took us to a military hospital in Zaporizhzhia. In early June, we returned to Warsaw on

a medical evacuation train. At the end of July, I was granted a convalescent leave that lasted until the end of August; after that, I had to return to a reserve unit in Czechoslovakia, where I was assigned to a company for convalescing soldiers. Since I was deemed fit for service only in my home country (German: *G.V.H., Garnisonsverwendungsfähig*), I was transferred to a training company, where I remained an instructor until April 1944. Finally, I was sent to the military non-commissioned officers' school in Düren, in the Rhine region, and later, already as a senior private and a prospective non-commissioned officer, I was assigned to a newly formed unit in Saxony.

To Lithuania

In August 1944, we were once again moving toward the front, this time with

the 1094th Regiment: to Lithuania. Our forces were already withdrawing from there after heavy fighting. We entrenched our positions in Raseiniai. At first, everything was relatively calm, except for the irritating sounds of soviet artillery. It was not until October 7 that the soviets launched a major offensive along the entire front. From 6 a.m. to 3 p.m., the russians shelled us with various types of weaponry. Around that time, with a large number of tanks and infantry, the russians stormed and broke through our neighboring positions on the left. We saw a heavy machine-gun crew surrender to the soviets with their hands raised.

We were powerless against the soviet tanks — we lacked anti-tank guns and artillery. Later, some of the tanks turned west and then attacked our positions from the rear. We could only retreat to the right, toward the south.



A typical mid-XXth-century Lithuanian rural barn. Such barns were usually located some distance from residential buildings; they offered a good vantage point for observing the surroundings and provided a place to retreat, making them a favorite resting spot for partisans.



When darkness fell, complete chaos ensued — the soviets continued their attack and we were trapped; there was no longer any effective leadership in the unit. By the afternoon, however, we managed to regroup into a larger unit of 60 soldiers and two officers. At first, we tried to retreat cautiously under cover of darkness. But then our own artillery, having obtained ammunition from somewhere, began firing into our sector. We had three wounded. Thus, fire from our own artillery confirmed to us that our position was now considered the enemy's rear. That night, our officers decided to break through the russian front, which, as far as we could tell, was about five to seven kilometers west of us.

At first, a 14-man reconnaissance group was sent out to assess the situation. The rest of us hid at the edge of the forest. After about two hours, we heard intense gunfire. This was probably our reconnaissance group. In any case, not a single man returned. The attempt to force a breakthrough through the russian front had failed. Having lost our leadership, we agreed to continue moving in small groups.

At first, there were just the two of us, but soon Fred Herr, Hans Keipke, and another friend joined us; they knew me from non-commissioned officers' school. And so we became a unit of five men moving quietly toward the West. Through forests and across fields. And in the distance, the rumble of tanks and cannons could be heard faintly. The soviets were clearly doing everything they could to advance toward the West as quickly as possible. It became clear that they had succeeded in breaking through the German front.

On the first night, we advanced only a few kilometers. At dawn, we hid in a Lithuanian farmer's barn. When we saw the farmer himself the next morning, at first we didn't dare show ourselves to him. We were well hidden in the hay; we had left our weapons in the forest, though I had kept my pistol. In any case, we were tormented by hunger, as we hadn't eaten anything in the last few days due to the chaos. Crawling out of the hay, I appeared before the farmer, who was terribly frightened at first. I asked for food in russian.

Fortunately, the farmer was much more

inclined to interact with the Germans than with the russians. We received plenty of food. In general, the Lithuanians certainly weren't happy about the russians' return to their country — they remembered the soviet occupation of 1940 all too well.

After dark, we continued moving roughly westward. The nights were cloudy, the stars were invisible, and it was hard to find our way. A few times we got lost, as it seemed at the time, in vast forests. But, little by little, we pressed on toward the West. Even at night, we had to be very careful — especially when crossing roads. The russians were everywhere.

During the day, we would hide in the barns of farmers living in remote areas. The farmers usually gave us something to eat, even though they themselves were suffering greatly during the war. But there was always a piece of bread and a glass of milk set aside for us. It wasn't until three weeks later, however, that we met a farmer who invited us inside. His farm was large, so the soviets considered him a capitalist (*kulak*) and persecuted him accordingly. The farmer told me in russian that he knew a trustworthy man who spoke German, and he went to fetch him.

We waited anxiously. Would he turn us in to the soviets? Although it didn't seem likely, who knows? Fortunately, he returned with a young student who spoke German, and the student explained the overall situation to us. It turned out that the soviets had already advanced as far as Klaipėda and were standing at the border

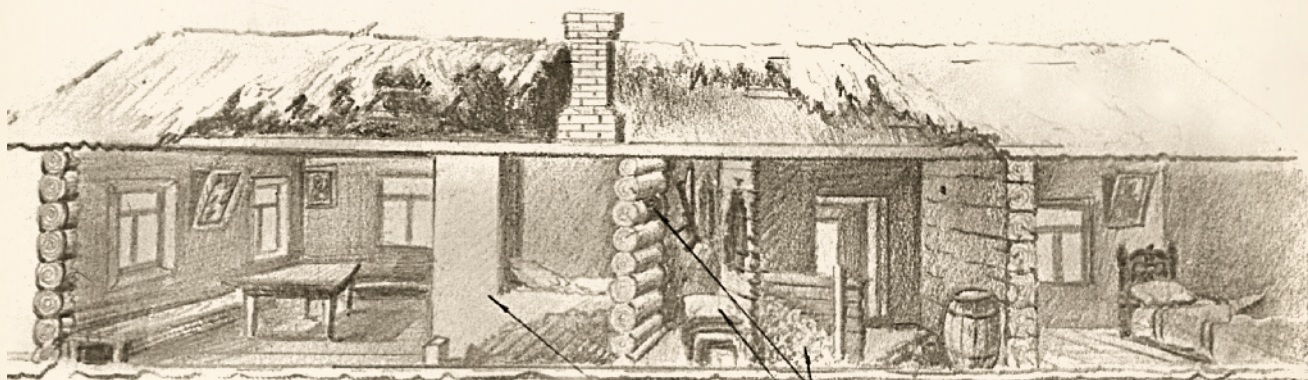
of East Prussia. We expressed to him our hope of breaking through the front line. But how could we cross the Nemunas? How were we supposed to get past that wide and heavily guarded river barrier? The student categorically advised us to abandon this plan. He insisted that we should hide out with farmers until winter passed and the situation became clearer. It was already the end of October...

That night we slept once again in the barn of Steponas Gajauskas (that was

The farmer Steponas offered to let me stay with him because I understood a little Russian. His family consisted of four children — two girls, Stasė and Elena, and two boys, Jozefas (Juozas) and Johanas (Jonas), all of school age. However, due to the Soviet army and the general chaos at the time, they weren't attending school. So there was no way all five of us could stay with the farmer. In the end, my companions decided that I would stay behind alone, while they would continue

the houses; the isolated farmsteads were far apart from one another. I couldn't tell where the village began and where it ended. In Germany, it's completely different. In the countryside and villages, there was no electric light or running water; only a hand-pumped well in the yard. All the houses were wooden and thatched. In Germany at that time, everything was different.

For the first week, I slept in a storage



A hiding place between two walls in a private home. Illustration from a KGB training manual.

the farmer's name), and the next day we spent a long time discussing what to do next. What were the chances of crossing the front line? And even if we succeeded, would we reach German units ready for battle? Or would we be crushed by the meat grinder of the approaching end of the war? On the other hand, we wondered whether it was possible to spend the entire winter behind enemy lines, hiding with farmers. The farmer Steponas said that in such a case, if we wanted to voluntarily surrender to Russian captivity, he knew a good Russian commandant to whom he could take us. After a brief discussion, we rejected this proposal — based on everything we knew about Soviet captivity, none of us wanted to end up there voluntarily.

So, for the time being, we decided to hide at the Gajauskas' home; they were friendly toward us, the German soldiers — after the brutal Soviet occupation of 1940–1941, Germans were welcomed throughout Lithuania as liberators. When the Soviets re-entered Lithuania in 1944, many people fled from them to the West.

their journey. I was skeptical about this — if any of them were caught and harshly interrogated using NKVD methods, they would know where to find me.

But after dark, my friends set out on their journey anyway — heading west, toward Germany. I wanted to walk another stretch of the road with them. After about four kilometers, we found a solitary barn that seemed like a good place to spend the day. We talked for a long time, and then I said goodbye. My friends tried to stop me, thinking I wouldn't be able to find my way back anyway.

Alone

In fact, that's exactly what happened — I got lost a few times, but I'd memorized several landmarks, so at dawn I found my way back to the hospitable farmhouse.

A strange, dangerous, and unusual life began. No one — not even the neighbors — was supposed to know that I was staying with Gajauskas. In Lithuania, every farmer lived on his own land. Cultivated fields stretched out around

shed. This quickly became dangerous, because the Soviet security forces (NKVD) began searching for people who had served in the police or other state institutions during the German occupation. The Russians were also hunting down those who had been active citizens during the period of Lithuanian independence, that is, before 1940.

First and foremost, it was important for me to get rid of my uniform. However, the farmer's clothes were too big for me, and his sons' were too small. A few days later, a neighbor — a very good acquaintance of the farmer — showed up; I took the risk of meeting with him. This man offered me civilian clothes, but in exchange he wanted my pistol. I had no other choice; after all, in my situation, civilian clothes were more important than a weapon. If anyone had seen me in uniform, they would have noticed me immediately, and that's always dangerous. In fact, my stay at Gajauskas' place became more and more complicated every day, because, naturally, he was growing increasingly afraid. He knew full well what would happen to him

and his entire family if the soviets found me there.

While I was still able to sleep in the storage room at night, I didn't even notice that there was a hiding place there. It consisted of two partitions — a real one and a fake one. The real wall was on the side of the stove. The fake wall was on the side of the storage room. After about six weeks, the farmer Steponas showed me the hiding place and insisted that from then on I sleep only there. He claimed that this would be safer for both me and the whole family.

Access to the hiding place was complicated — first, I had to climb a ladder from the house's entryway up to the attic. There were three floorboards there that could be lifted to allow access to the hiding place. The hiding place was cramped — about 70 cm wide and about 1.5 meters deep. The farmer used to store grain there. A little straw and a blanket were placed on top of the grain, and I was given another blanket to cover myself with. I had no choice. So I spent many nights in this hiding place.

During Christmas — that is, on Christmas Eve 1944 — I was allowed to spend the day in the room. However, the child-

ren had to keep watch by the windows, in case neighbors or the russians came. Steponas, however, was firmly convinced that they would not come.

Until the night of February 4, 1945, I spent my nights in a hiding place between two walls, and my days in a cold barn. I already had a Lithuanian name — Jurgis.

"Jurgis, if you want to stay with me, from now on you'll have to hide half a kilometer from the house, in a potato pit. The kids will bring you food." He was worried about the ever-growing threat. The NKVD was constantly conducting searches in the area. Of course, I wasn't thrilled with this proposal, but I had no other choice! Where else could I go? The country was still foreign to me; I hardly understood the language, even though it had been a long time since I'd heard a single German word.

Late in the afternoon, Steponas loaded two bundles of straw, a sack of potatoes, a shovel, and a down blanket onto the sled. We set off toward my new 'home.' When I saw it, I was terrified. It was a round pit covered with logs and straw. To get down inside, I had to crawl through a narrow opening. It was about one meter deep

down to the potatoes. We threw some straw over the potatoes, laid down two quilts, and my cellar was ready. Steponas and the children went back home. I was left alone. I hid underground like a mole. I couldn't allow myself to think too much, because I probably would have gone mad. At first, I slept only briefly and was alert all the time. Still, it was quite warm under the heavy, old down blanket.

A few days later, I spoke with Steponas:

"Jurgis, how are things going for you?"

"Well, considering the circumstances, not too bad, but my toes are constantly freezing."

He didn't say a word in reply, just muttered, "Good evening!"

However, the next evening, when his children brought food, they slipped a hot brick wrapped in a rag into my hole. It was a wonderful feeling to warm my feet for at least a few hours. I really missed being able to move around, since I could only lie there. I missed all the comforts of civilization — I wore the same underwear for weeks, could only wash myself when meltwater pooled in the ditch, and could only relieve myself at night, about 100 meters down the slope; during the

Bunker-hideouts were built not only in forests or on farmsteads, but also in the middle of fields. The photo shows the site of such a bunker, discovered by the KGB in 1953 in southern Lithuania.





Lithuanian farmer families living in isolated farmsteads scattered throughout the forest edges were the main supporters and helpers of the partisans.

day, I had to urinate into a can inside my cave.

After about a week, I was terrified because an unfamiliar man approached my hiding place. My heart literally sank to my heels. But then the dark figure addressed me in German, and I recognized the young man — the student — who had advised us to hide at the farmer's place until the war ended. Now he had brought me some bread and a Lithuanian-German dictionary. Of course, a German-Lithuanian dictionary would have been better, but this one would do. From then on, I learned about twenty Lithuanian words a day. Despite this pleasant diversion,

the days — and especially the nights — seemed endlessly long to me.

Countless thoughts would cross my mind, especially about my uncertain future. This uncertainty was very hard to bear. I lived as if every day were my last, with no prospects for the future. Every morning I would hear the sound of the bell from the little church. I always knew when it was 6:00 a.m. In the evenings, I would hear the bell again, calling people to evening prayer. Tears would often well up in my eyes. In my current situation, I was completely dependent on the goodwill of the locals. They were devout Catholics and, fortunately, also very sympathetic

toward the Germans. To pray, they would kneel by their windows and gaze out at the fields. In the summer, they would walk to church barefoot, carrying their shoes in their hands and putting them on only at the church door, even though some had to walk many kilometers. I, too, would have gladly gone to church, but I had been strictly warned not to do so. The risk of being spotted was simply too great. For days, weeks, and months, I was alone. All I could do was think about the past — about the time when I was still at home in my homeland — and about the years that followed, when I was at war on the front lines. Oh Lord, those were diffi-



cult years, filled with the most dangerous situations and sacrifice.

The climate in Lithuania is harsher than in Germany. February was still very cold, and it didn't warm up much until mid-March. And I was still living in a potato pit. I don't think anyone could have even imagined that someone could live in a potato pit, especially at that time of year. With respect to the soviets, I felt safe, especially at night. They didn't go anywhere at night — they stayed at their base in the town of Upyna, which was ten kilometers away. It would later become clear to me why they stayed in the town at night.

Gradually, the harshness of winter eased, and it got a little warmer. On days with western winds, the roar of bombs and artillery could still be heard in nearby East Prussia. There, the war raged on senselessly and mercilessly. The soviet army was pushing deeper and deeper into German territory. One could expect that the war would soon come to an end. And indeed, on May 8, 1945, the German army was finally forced to surrender. Germany had been defeated; German cities had been reduced to piles of rubble; the inhabitants could rely only on the mercy of fate; and millions of soldiers were suffering in prisoner-of-war camps. In Lithuania, however, life had grown even worse. The occupying forces continued to expand and, for many years, made themselves at home. My own situation, however, remained virtually unchanged — I still had to continue hiding from the soviets. The future was even more uncertain.

Around that time, my period of hiding with the farmer Steponas Gajauskas also came to an end. One evening, Steponas told me that the danger to him and his entire family was simply too great. "Jurgis, free us from these fears and find shelter with another farmer!"

I was so shaken that I didn't know what to say. Despite everything, I had to be grateful to the farmer for taking care of me for so long. What a burden and what dangers the family had taken on for the sake of a stranger like me! Their wish for me to leave was completely understandable. He and his wife clearly felt sorry for me, and their four children looked at me with sad eyes. They all spontaneously hugged me, as if I were a member of the family. Then I turned around and, with heavy steps, plunged into the darkness. But soon the night no longer seemed so dark. I walked in the direction I'd been told. Suddenly, I heard a dog barking — I was close. After a few steps, I saw the farmer's house, just as Steponas had described it.

A woman opened the door. I greeted her in Lithuanian: "Good evening!" Then a man appeared as well. They asked me what I wanted, and I tried to answer as best I could. They quickly realized I was German, became very friendly, and let me into the living room.

The family had a lot of questions. I answered as best I could. After that, they offered me something to eat. Eventually, the whole family gathered — four men and two women. They seemed surprised when I asked if I could spend the night there; at first they probably thought I just wanted a bite to eat.

Later, one of the men said I could sleep on the hay with their youngest son, Jonas. A few days later, I found out why Jonas slept on the hay instead of in the house. He, too, had to hide from the soviets... Perhaps that's why I was sort of accepted into the Kudinskai family. I started going out into the fields, wearing Lithuanian clothes sewn from homespun cloth — from a distance, it was impossible to tell whether I was a local or a stranger. But I still had to be careful. Especially of the *stribai* — Lithuanians who had sold out to the russians. They were more dangerous than the russians — they knew the language, the terrain, and the people. Lithuanians feared them more than they did the russians or the NKVD.

In mid-July 1945, russian soldiers appeared everywhere, searching the fields for landmines left behind from the war. I had to go into hiding again. I avoided the farmers' homesteads, but I would still meet them, talk with them, and they would feed me; at night I would sleep in pastures surrounded by thickets.

After some time, while talking with a farmer's son, I was entrusted with a secret and given a proposal. It turned out that one of his relatives was also in hiding because he was wanted by the NKVD. And there are many such people. Because of this, they joined forces and formed the so-called 'Green Army' — that is, a partisan army that made the green forests of Lithuania their home. Their goal was to survive and fight for Lithuania's freedom. He suggested to me:

"Jurgis, join this army — you can't live like this forever; take up arms again!"

"No," I replied, "I've had enough of firearms; I don't want anything to do with them anymore," and that was my sincere opinion.

On the other hand, I could understand the peasants' fear; after all, I had to hide from the russians, and my hosts were also in great danger. The Gajauskai family



had been hiding me for about half a year, and the Kudinskai family for four months already. They themselves had mentioned several times that Lithuanian partisans had gathered in the forests, that they knew all the safest places, and that I would be safest among them.

A week later, the commander of a small group of partisans came to us at night. He, too, tried to convince me that it would be better to go with him than to hide with the peasants, putting everyone in danger. He also brought me a German automatic rifle, which I took into my hands, albeit somewhat reluctantly. After a long discussion, I agreed to join the partisans. I thanked everyone for their hospitality, help, and courage. Everyone hugged me and wished me all the best. And, most importantly, a quick return home to Germany. I said goodbye with a heavy heart and stepped out into the dark night once more. This time, I was accompanied by a Lithuanian partisan leader.

I must emphasize — and I cannot find words to adequately express my gratitude — what the people of Lithuania did to save me. They truly risked their homes, their land, their freedom, and even their

lives — all for a stranger. If the Soviets had found me, they would certainly have faced imprisonment in Russia — most likely in Siberia.

A Partisan

Antanas knew every road and path and could find his way perfectly in the dark. After about an hour, we reached the house; they let us in. Antanas talked with the residents for a long time, and then we returned to the barn together. Neither of us could fall asleep, and we were still very tired in the morning, so we stayed in the same shelter; the people brought us food, and we talked for a long time. It was then that I actually learned his name. He also told me that he knew another German soldier who was also in hiding. This surprised me greatly.

Toward evening, we continued our journey. After a while, we reached the house where the German was supposed to be. It was night, as always. Antanas knocked, and a young man opened the door. In the dim light of the kerosene lamps, a German soldier was sitting at the table. It was Fred! My friend Fred Herr from the

non-commissioned officers' school, with whom we had begun our march to break through the front line. Of course, our joy was immense. Now, after ten months, I could finally speak my native language freely. Antanas and I persuaded Fred to come along with us. He had been living with the same family for ten months, and it was clear that his hosts were completely worn out from the constant danger and tension. They lived in a very small home with a tiny attic — just an elderly mother, her son, and her daughter. The Soviets didn't even suspect that such a poor family could be hiding and feeding anyone else, let alone a class enemy.

That very night, the three of us continued our journey. After three days, we stayed with a farmer. Fred got a rifle there. The rifle was Russian, which was just fine, because we had more ammunition for Russian weapons than for German ones. Antanas, like me, had a German automatic rifle. A little later, two more Lithuanians joined us, who were also armed with automatic rifles. One of them was Leonhard Laurentius (Leonas Laurinskas-Liūtas), whom I met again many years later in a free Lithuania.

After a few more weeks, Antanas supplied both of us with russian automatic rifles and 72 rounds of ammunition each. Although all five of us were now well-armed, we didn't need to get involved in any firefights at that time.

Our group wasn't always together; sometimes one, sometimes both Lithuanians traveled alone; only Fred and I always stayed with Antanas. It was easier for us with him because, thanks to his service in the police, he knew the region and its people well and could assess them accurately. On the other hand, it was harder for a group of five people to travel unnoticed, hide, or get food.

One day we were hiding at the edge of the forest and watching a lone man. We couldn't recognize him from a distance. We let him get closer, and then we called out to him from behind. Startled, he turned around and stopped. He was a German soldier from the Courland Army. He told us that he had come here from Latvia and wanted to return to his hometown in East Prussia. We warned him that the soviets had concentrated strong forces in East Prussia and had also brought in many new settlers there. However, he did

not change his plan; he was determined to return home, and 70 km separated him from the border. He stayed with us for a short while, then continued his perilous journey. Did he reach his destination? We never found out. However, my encounter with this solitary fellow traveler later proved to be very beneficial.

How I would have loved to walk home myself. Neither a week nor months nor the long journey to southern Germany would have deterred me, but crossing russian-occupied East Prussia, through Poland and then through the soviet-occupied zone was simply unrealistic. Besides, we didn't know what our homes would look like after the catastrophic war, or how the Western powers would treat the deserting soldiers — after all, we later learned that they had handed over thousands of German soldiers to the soviets.

One night, the time came when we had to fight for our meager freedom and lives. Antanas, Fred, and I visited Antanas' relatives — the Kudinskai family, who had taken care of me for a long time. In a small room, Fred and I enjoyed the warmth of a little stove. Antanas was sitting on the

bed, talking to his uncle Kudinkas in the darkness of the room. Suddenly, a dog began to bark. Antanas' uncle said it was probably Steponas, who had gone over to a neighbor's house, but just to be safe, he went out and opened the door. Then everything happened very quickly.

The uncle spun around on his heel and whispered excitedly, "Antanas, the NKVD are coming in!" Antanas raised his automatic rifle, loaded it, and we took up our positions and waited. We were armed and could not expect mercy. There's nowhere to run; we have only a slim chance against our deadly enemies — if we manage to take advantage of the element of surprise. The soviets burst in noisily; one NKVD officer tries to illuminate the room with a flashlight and falls under a hail of gunfire. The NKVD officers didn't expect this; Antanas kicks the window out. All three of us scramble through that small opening into the open. We scatter in different directions. I run across a potato field, the leaves rustling noisily beneath my feet. The soviets are firing at me from behind. Bullets whistle over my head — fortunately, I'm in a blind spot. After 400 meters, I realize they're not

An illustration from a KGB training album. A caption in russian indicates that the soviet soldiers' actions were inadequate, and as a result, they were killed by partisans inside the house.





In remote, hard-to-reach areas — most often on islands in marshes — the partisans did not build underground bunkers, but rather small, well-camouflaged above-ground huts.

chasing me, so I stop and listen. Behind me, I hear the NKVD officers beating the men of the Kudinskai family and shouting, "Who was here?" I stand there for a while, take a deep breath, then continue on, but I have to be especially careful, because there might be even more russians in this area.

Two kilometers away, with great difficulty, I found a small house and knocked very cautiously on the window. A young man who lived there opened the door and recognized me immediately. Later, in a small barn, I lay down on the hay so that I could keep an eye on the road half a kilometer away. I hoped that sooner or later Antanas and Fred would come here too. Around 3:00 p.m., I saw a horse-drawn cart on the road, followed by five or six people and a few cows. These must have been the unfortunate peasants who had taken us in that night and were now heading toward a grim fate — russian labor camps. After another quarter of an hour, I heard gunshots.

The next day, as news here spread instantly from mouth to mouth, we learned of those people's fate — the farmers' son had decided to escape, and it was he whom the soviets had shot at. Fortunately, he escaped unharmed. Unfortunately, a terrible fate befell the Kudinskai family. I was very sad, the Kudinskai family had

given me shelter many times.

I was overjoyed when, on the third night, Antanas and Fred turned up safe and sound. We talked for a long time. Antanas, seeing how badly his uncle's family had suffered, felt deeply depressed. He vowed that once soviet oppression ended, he would give the Kudinskai family 10 hectares of his land — a quarter of his property — as compensation. But when would that oppression end? The soviet bear still held everything firmly in its claws, and without foreign help, we alone could not drive that bear away...

After a while, we said goodbye to our brave hosts, thanked them, and slipped back out into the eerie but, for us, safe night.

During the day, the forest was our home; at night, we would sneak up to farmers' houses. We were always able



to get something to eat, but people, understandably, were always very afraid and therefore preferred to see us leaving rather than arriving.

Antanas had his own network of contacts everywhere. He would let us know what was happening — whether there were russians nearby or not. After the shootout at the Kudinskai farm, soviet persecution intensified significantly. A reward of 50 000 rubles was offered for information about our group. At the time, that was an extraordinarily large sum, especially considering that the average monthly salary was about 100 rubles. This amount tempted people to betray us. Fortunately, Antanas had his own contacts everywhere and quickly received information about what was happening and whether the russians were nearby or not. Besides, he knew the people well.

As the winter of 1945–1946 approached, we had to figure out how to survive it. We decided to build a small, well-camouflaged above-ground bunker deep in the forest. Antanas had another cousin named Pranas Maselskis; he lived near the forest and was to help carry out the plan. At night, he hauled the necessary materials into the forest in a horse-drawn cart. We chose a secluded spot deep in the forest for the bunker. However, even here, Russian soldiers were prowling the forest edges, so we didn't feel completely safe.

We built a small, 2x3-meter above-ground bunker — a little hut. Once the work was finished, we decided to step back for a week — we wanted to wait and make sure we hadn't been spotted during construction. Our caution turned out to be entirely justified. When we returned a week later, we found the bunker completely burned down. We learned from local residents that a battalion of about 300 Russian soldiers had been combing the forest and, upon seeing the hut, began firing at it with machine guns and then set it on fire. Fortunately, we had anticipated this possibility and

remained cautious — against an enemy force of incomparably greater strength, we would not have stood a chance. After this misfortune, with winter approaching, we were once again left without a roof over our heads. The question arose: how long would all this go on, and how would it end?

Our situation was getting worse and worse; villagers kept reporting that our enemies were appearing here and there, searching for us. A large bounty had been placed on our heads because, as it turned out, we had killed four NKVD officers in the firefight at the Kudinskai farm. The intense anger on the Soviet side and the large bounty were the main factors driving the intensive search for us and the attempts to eliminate us.

Meanwhile, Christmas was approaching, and our worries grew along with the increasing cold and the onset of snowfall, since our movements could now be betrayed by footprints left in the snow.

And so Christmas Eve 1945 arrived. Antanas, Fred, and I stopped at a secluded farmstead. During the war, all the buildings had been burned down; only the barn remained, where a lone woman lived with a horse, a cow, and five sheep.

Antanas knocked, and the woman's voice asked fearfully, "Who's out there?" Antanas said something reassuring, and the woman opened the barn door because she knew our commander well.

After resting for a while, Antanas stood up and muttered as he left, "I'll bring you something!" Our hearts sank a little; we could see that the farther he went, the more nervous he became, and we felt like a burden to him. We quietly thought he wouldn't come back. But at the same time, we didn't want to believe it — he, twice our age, was like a father to us and genuinely cared for us. And indeed, after about an hour, he returned and proudly handed us a small bottle of vodka and a piece of white bread. Such was our Christmas Eve in 1945: in a humble little barn, just like Mary and Joseph nearly 2 000 years ago. A little vodka to numb the pain, a little bread and straw, and the warmth of the barn. The woman's situation was no better. She lay on a cot raised about half a meter off the ground, and five sheep were resting beneath it...

Prepared by Dalius Žygelis
and Imantas Tamošauskas
Continued in other issues of WARRIOR





Drawing by Ramūnas Vaitkus

The Unproclaimed Empire

What can be said about the old Lithuanian state when comparing it to the political entities referred to as "empires" in contemporary imperiology and international relations theory?

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) was an empire because, in the second half of the XIV century, it became the largest state in Europe. As such, until its baptism in 1387, it did not recognize any international or inter-state jurisdiction superior to its own — that is, it was fully sovereign. As the last bastion of paganism in Europe, it remained outside the boundaries of all inter-state communities existing at the time, and was thus condemned to imperial isolation. Upon becoming a member of the Western Christian inter-state community, it recognized the authority of that community's universal powers — the Pope and the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. At the same time, until the Union of Lublin in 1569, it retained *de facto* sovereignty in terms of conducting independent domestic and foreign policies.

The most important factor regarding the GDL's imperial status is that the upper echelon of its feudal nobility — which, in terms of political sociology, can be described as the "ruling elite of the GDL" — was almost exclusively of ethnic Lithuanian origin in the XV century. Although not all 47 nobles of the GDL who participated in the famous heraldic adaptation at Horodko in 1413 belonged to the "core governing group" of the Lithuanian ruling elite, which constantly accompanied Vytautas and participated in concluding international treaties, there was not a single Ruthenian noble among them. During Vytautas' reign, Ruthenian Orthodox nobles were simply absent from the upper echelons of the GDL's ruling elite or its inner circle, and Švitrigaila's attempt to rely on them was one of the causes of the 1432 coup d'état.

It was not until the XVI century that more representatives from Orthodox Slavic lands began to enter its ranks. The best-known example is the career of Konstantinas Ostrogiškis, a military commander of the GDL. However, his case — as an Orthodox Christian who emphasized and defended his Orthodox and Ruthenian identity — was rather unique. This is how his contemporaries perceived it as well; many of them complained that this violated the old 'order of Vytautas' time, which allowed only Lithuanian Catholics to hold the highest offices of state."

Thus, the higher a group or social class was in the social and political hierarchy, the larger the relative proportion of its members of ethnic Lithuanian origin. Given this fact, the quantitative dominance of Slavs in the GDL — the main argument of those who view the GDL as an East Slavic state — actually implies the opposite. The defining characteristic of empires is not merely the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of their populations, but the distinction of the politically dominant ethnic group within the population as a whole.

Based on: Zenonas Norkus, 'Nepasiskelbusioji imperija', *Aidai*, 2009, (pp. 256, 383).