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Dear WARRIOR readers,

Those who had the opportunity to watch the military parade in Kyiv at the end of August, marking the 35th anniversary of Ukraine's independence, probably felt as though they were in the film 'Star Wars' — particularly, for example, in the second instalment of this sci-fi saga, entitled 'The Clone Wars'.

Swarms of 'Madiar's Birds' cut through the skies above the Ukrainian capital in orderly formations, whilst the *Magura* and *Sea Baby* vessels sailed down the Dnipro River, and autonomous self-propelled vehicles that evacuate wounded soldiers and transport weapons and ammunition rolled along Khreshchatyk.

All this stood in stark contrast to the gigantomanic display of iron — the conventional weaponry which the kremlin leader loves to flaunt — on russia's so-called 'victory day' — a celebration which, admittedly, they were afraid to mark on a 'grand scale' this year. Presumably because of the same 'Madiar's Birds'...

As the war in Ukraine enters its unprecedented thirteenth year, one cannot help but be heartened that explosions are finally echoing and fires are breaking out on the aggressor's own territory, and that moscow's 'golden cage', it turns out, is not quite so impenetrable from the air. And the sooner Ukraine's ballistic missiles reach the red square, the easier the whole civilised world will be able to breathe a sigh of relief.

Sincerely,
Darius Varanavičius
Chief Editor

WARRIOR

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

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In the spring of 2024, the Ministry of National Defence introduced a new concept allowing military commandant's offices to operate not only after mobilization is declared, but also to prepare for defence during peacetime, marking a new chapter for these structures. Col. Danas Mockūnas, head of the Military Commandant's Offices Command established on March 1, 2025, shares insights on transitioning from paper plans to a renewed rearguard defence.

THE COMMANDANT'

ILONA SKUJAITĖ

*T*he origins of the Lithuania's military commandants are tied to the Independence War of 1918–1920, a period when the State of Lithuania and its Armed Forces were being reestablished. At the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919, the country was in great danger — it was attacked by enemies from multiple sides simultaneously: red army had occupied nearly half of the country's territory, seeking to impose their rule, the bermontians were rampant in the north, Poland was encroaching on the Lithuanian lands in the south, and criminal gangs were rampant everywhere.

On February 7, 1919, the Provisional Government of Lithuania approved The Law on Special State Protection, and on February 13, it declared martial law in Seinai, Kaunas, Alytus, Vilkaviškis, Marijampolė, Kėdainiai and Kaišiadorys counties where the country's volunteers were already fighting the enemy. In these counties, city and district military commandants' offices began to be established, with the commandants of key front-line towns usually being

appointed commanders of the larger military units stationed there.

As historian Vytautas Lesčius emphasized in his works, the primary function of military commandant's offices at that time was to oversee mobilization, discipline, and the maintenance of order. Mobilization included the conscription of recruits, as well as the registration of reserve soldiers and equipment for the needs of the Armed Forces; consequently, military commandants became the highest-ranking officials within their areas of operation. They were subordinate to the minister of national defence, and within military operation zones, also to the commanders of units deployed at the front.

Historian Dr. Modestas Kuodys reveals in his research that The Law on Special State Protection granted additional special powers to wartime commandants, such as the right to regulate the movement of labour, specialists, and material resources, as well as trade relations and other social affairs within the county. These officials could also prohibit meetings and other activities of various organizations at their discretion, censor the press, or shut down publications entirely. The commandant executed his authority by issuing public orders that were mandatory for everyone, with strict sanctions imposed for their failure to comply. Ultimately, during wartime, a commandant could restrict an individual's freedoms and rights solely based on the assumption that the person might pose a threat to the state, its armed forces, or public order.

According to historians who have studied this period, a military commandant's office at the beginning of 1919 could have consisted of approximately 7 officers, 2 military officials, 283 soldiers, 42 horses, and 24 carriages. The exact structure of these commandant's offices and their personnel numbers were not regulated until 1920. Following the War of Independence, the military commandants' offices became a permanent structure responsible for managing territorial defence and conscription, remaining operational until the soviet occupation of 1940.

The First Commandant's Office in



The situation in Vilnius at the end of 1918 was extremely turbulent. Following the departure of the German forces, city residents began publishing numerous propaganda newspapers in various languages, while Polish and bolshevik organizations operated actively in the city, recruiting volunteers for their respective armies. Historian V. Lesčius emphasized in his works that Lithuanians at the time lacked weapons, volunteers, and funds. Consequently, on December 13, 1918, only an initial-stage commandant's office was established, headed by Officer Aleksandras Jackevičius. On December 24, the first Vilnius City Commandant's Office was organized from its core staff and 32 soldiers stationed in the capital, who were drawn from the 1st Infantry Regiment. Liudas Gira, was appointed as its commandant, with Officer Kazys Škirpa serving as his assistant.

The Commandant's Office was located in the former military administration (*Militärverwaltung*) building on St. Jurgis Street, and the following day, its first order was issued. Under this directive, all security institutions were transferred to the commandant's jurisdiction, with their heads required to report daily on their activities. By December 26, after receiving 5 000 marks from the Ministry of National Defence, the office began accepting volunteers into the newly formed companies and machine gun detachment, while also appointing instructors and military doctors. Archival data collected by historian V. Lesčius show that the Ministry of National Defence spared no expense for the Vilnius Commandant's Office: it was allocated 50 000 marks on December 29, 1918; 30 000 marks on January 1, 1919; and

Vilnius and the Tricolour on the Gediminas Castle Tower



80 000 marks on January 3. Bedding, clothing, and other inventory were also supplied.

At the same time, an appeal titled 'To the Citizens of Vilnius' was created and signed — an act that historians consider a highly significant step taken by K. Škirpa and Juozas Pajaujis. In it, residents of Vilnius from various nationalities, along with people from the surrounding areas, were invited to join the volunteer regiments. 'This appeal was quickly distributed by schoolchildren throughout the city, and Pajaujis and I read it aloud to a large gathering of the Vilnius Lithuanian Community at the city theatre. The audience gave the reviving Lithuanian Armed Forces a big and sincere ovation, and as they fell silent, they sang the National Anthem', wrote K. Škirpa himself in his memoirs 'The Call for Volunteers' published in Chicago.

As the documents testify, people from various social classes in Vilnius became volunteers, including university and high school students, young intellectuals, and workers. Approximately 500 men and 4 women signed up to volunteer. Unfortunately, they lacked the clothing and weapons needed to defend against the impending new occupation, forcing the leadership of the commandant's office to send some of the volunteers home.

On December 31, when L. Gira fell ill, K. Škirpa assumed the commandant's duties. That same day, the German forces began withdrawing from Vilnius, and on January 1, they left the central part of the city and lowered their flag from the Gediminas Castle Tower. K. Škirpa, accompanied by Adjutant Petras Gužas and a detachment of soldiers, then rushed to the castle hill and raised the Lithuanian Tricolor on the Tower. The group led by K. Škirpa comprised military official Jonas Nistelis, Adjutant P. Gužas, and the soldiers: Albinas Rauba, Romualdas Marcalis, Pranas Plauska, Jonas Norvila, Mikas Slyvauskas, Vincas Steponavičius and Stasys Butkus. The Tricolor flag-raising ceremony was marked by a brief speech from K. Škirpa and an honorary salute. Later, K. Škirpa described the event in his memoirs: 'This moment was one of the most profound in my life. Once the flag-raising ceremony concluded, the officers and soldiers embraced and kissed each other with joy, like true sons of a single mother'.

Unfortunately, the Lithuanian flag flew for only a few days. In the opening days of the new year, Vilnius was invaded by the bolsheviks. Lacking the necessary strength to repel them, the Vilnius Commandant's Office evacuated the capital on January 5 and arrived to Kaunas the

following day. It was the soldiers of this original Vilnius Commandant's Office who formed the core of the future Kaunas commandant's office. Officer Juozas Mikuckis, was appointed as its commandant, with K. Škirpa serving as his deputy.

On January 6, 1919, the bolsheviks, who had seized Vilnius, tore two stripes, yellow and green, from the flag, leaving only the red one. To remember and honour the feat of these first volunteers, following the restoration of Lithuania's Independence, Lithuanian Flag Day is celebrated annually on January 1, marked by a solemn flag-raising ceremony at the Gediminas Castle Tower. By tradition, the retired flag is transferred each year for safekeeping to one of the Lithuanian schools, that has distinguished itself in the education of citizenship and the preservation of historical memory.

Information credit: Vytautas Lesčius. 'The Military Commandant's Offices of Lithuanian Cities and Counties in the Years 1918–1920', Military Archive, T. 15 (1998), 117–143.





Established on March 1, 2025, the Military Commandant's Offices Command strengthens the coordination of rear structures. Its objectives is to effectively manage regional military operations, ensuring cooperation with local municipalities and a rapid response to emerging threats.

The Revival of Military Commandants' Offices

Following the restoration of the State of Lithuania, commandant's offices were among the first military structures tasked with overseeing the withdrawal of soviet forces from Lithuania's territory. Established in 1991, they were later reorganized into territorial defence units of the Volunteer National Defence Service. Subsequent legal acts regulating the national defence system designated these commandant's offices as structures responsible for organizing mobilization during wartime.

A core turning point occurred in 2024, when a new peacetime commandant's offices structure was established under the Military Conscription and Recruitment Service of the Lithuanian Armed Forces (MCRS). In early June 2024, Col. D. Mockūnas, was appointed project manager for this initiative, with MCRS Director Arūnas Balčiūnas serving as his deputy. A dedicated working group was also formed, comprising soldiers of Lithuanian Armed Forces, members of the Lithuanian

Riflemen's Union, and civilian employees. The project aimed to build the commandant's offices structure on the foundation of the MCRS. Alongside institutional changes, citizens were urged to volunteer for these units, and a 10-day Basic Course Programme for Commandant Soldiers was developed. By 2024, 162 soldiers had successfully graduated from this program.

The then Chief of Defence of the Republic of Lithuania Gen. Valdemaras Rupšys emphasized that smooth rear-guard operations are essential for an effective defence. Integrating military commandant units into this system will allow manoeuvre units of Lithuanian Armed Forces to focus entirely on their primary objectives. According to him, military commandants operating in the rear at the municipal level will not only help repel enemy forces during wartime but will also perform other functions vital to the state. Citizens registered in these commandant units who have acquired military skills will defend their local towns or districts. Their responsibilities will include protecting critical infrastructure, establishing and maintaining checkpoints,

enforcing curfews, assisting in property requisitioning, monitoring their surroundings, countering illegal armed groups, and executing other state-assigned tasks.

To strengthen the coordination among rear-guard structures, the Military Commandant's Offices Command was established on March 1, 2025. As a new structural unit of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, it is designed to ensure public security and order, while coordinating cooperation with civilian institutions, municipalities, and other organizations during states of emergency, wartime, or mobilization. The primary objective of the Command is to effectively manage regional military operations, ensuring a seamless flow of information and a rapid response to emerging threats.

One of the core principles of the Military Commandant's Offices Command is close cooperation with local municipalities. This involves coordinating joint actions, sharing critical information, and making collective decisions to ensure public safety. Strengthening this interaction enhances preparedness for potential wartime or mobilization, while

increasing the resilience and readiness of local communities to resist threats. During peacetime, commandant's offices operate with minimal personnel, typically with only a single military commandant assigned to a municipality. Therefore they do not participate in emergency consequence management operations.

Structure and mobilization process

The Military Commandant's Offices Command consists of the Headquarters, the Conscription and Recruitment Service, the Training Center, six regional military commandant's offices operating in the main cities of the country: Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, Panevėžys and Alytus, and 43 municipal military commandant's offices. Each of them is responsible for the security of its region or municipality, the organization of military conscription

and mobilization, and the strengthening of interaction between civil and military authorities.

The MCRS, operating within the Command, is responsible for organizing, administering, and recruiting Armed Forces personnel. The service maintains a consistent registry of conscripts, reservists and personnel, manages enlistment into military service, and provides consultations on conscription issues.

Personnel (reservist) mobilization is carried out by setting up conscription points at each municipal military commandant's office, alongside conscription centers at the six regional military commandants. Military medical sub-commissions operate under these centers. Healthy reservists are assigned to units directly at the conscription points, while those with health concerns are referred to the conscription centers for further medical examination and a final decision.

Military units also submit their annual

mobilization requirements for assets, which are then compiled into a mobilization catalogue detailing what property is to be requisitioned and from whom. The director of the municipal administration is responsible for enforcing these mobilization measures. Upon the declaration of mobilization, military units apply to the military commandant's office based on this catalogue. The commandant's office verifies the data and forwards it to the municipal administration director, who issues an order for the temporary seizure or requisition of the assets. Representatives from the military units, military commandants, the municipal administration (or authorized personnel), and the asset owners then formalize the documentation and execute the transfer. If additional needs arise, the military commandant's office collaborates with the municipal administration to locate the required assets or service providers and manage the mobilization process.

The Military Commandant's Offices Command consists of the Headquarters, the Conscription and Recruitment Service, the Training Center, six regional and 43 municipal military commandant's offices.



First Battles and Casualties:

The Commandant's Offices of Kėdainiai and Panevėžys

The Panevėžys commandant's office was formed on December 28, 1918, headed by Officer Jonas Variakojis. At the time, German forces were preparing to abandon the city, while local bolsheviks actively operated in anticipation of the red army. On January 8, the bolsheviks occupied the city; the security unit organized by J. Variakojis was too weak to defend it and was forced to retreat toward the town of Kėdainiai. However, after recruiting volunteers along the way, the unit reached Kėdainiai with 100 fighters. Strengthened and prepared, it launched an attack on the bolshevik-occupied areas of Ramygala, Krekenava and Pociūnėliai.

Around the same time, on December 31, 1918, the Kėdainiai Commandant's Office was established, headed by Officer Juozas Šarauskas. Just days later, on January 6, 1919, the commandant's security detachment was formed in barracks handed over by the Germans. Proclamations were distributed throughout local villages, urging citizens to join the newly forming military units. Among the volunteers who answered the call was Povilas Lukšys.

On February 2, the unit engaged in its first major firefight with the bolsheviks. Having exhausted their ammunition, the soldiers were forced to retreat. On February 8, during a clash with the bolsheviks near the village of Taučiūnai, P. Lukšys was killed, becoming the first volunteer to fall in the Wars of Independence. Later, the soldiers of this commandant's office fought against both the bolsheviks and the bermontians.

J. Variakojis, as the Commander of the Panevėžys Commandant's Office (later transformed into the 4th Infantry Lithuanian King Mindaugas Regiment) and the mobilizer of volunteers in this region, holds a significant place in this military unit's history. J. Variakojis began his volunteer service in the newly established Lithuanian Armed Forces on December 28, 1918, upon his appointment as Panevėžys Commandant. He was entrusted with the vital task of organizing local volunteer mobilization and forming a regional security unit. On March 22, 1919, this unit served as the foundation for a separate Panevėžys battalion, with J. Variakojis appointed as its commander. By October 25 of the same year, the battalion was reorganized into the 4th Infantry Regiment, and the officer officially assumed command on November 1.

Leading this unit, J. Variakojis participated in all major military operations against the bolsheviks near Kėdainiai, Ukmergė, Panevėžys, Kupiškis, Ilūkstė and other areas. From October 7, 1919, to January 3, 1920, the regiment under his command fought the bermontians near Meškuičiai and Šiauliai. Subsequently, from January 3 to April 23, 1920, the unit took part in operations near Jašiūnai, Stasylos, Skėteriai, Musninkai and Širvintos, along the Polish front. After the unit was officially designated the 4th Infantry Lithuanian King Mindaugas Regiment, J. Variakojis was once again confirmed as its commander on February 4.

Jonas Variakojis



Information credit: Vytautas Lesčius. 'The Military Commandant's Offices of Lithuanian Cities and Counties in the Years 1918–1920', Military Archive, T. 15 (1998), 117–143.

From Paperwork to Strengthening Rear defence

Colonel, what are the primary peacetime tasks of the Military Commandant's Offices Command under your leadership?

The primary peacetime task is the conscription of citizens into military service. Located in Vilnius, the MCRS coordinates recruitment and conscription into the Lithuanian Armed Forces, resolves service deferments, and processes selection methods. Conscription and recruitment branches also operate within the regional military commandant's offices; while they are not an integral part of the MCRS, they follow the service director's instructions regarding recruitment and conscription, while remaining under the command of the military commandant for all other duties.

The second function involves coordinating with local municipalities. In cooperation with them, specific operational plans have

already been established and are periodically updated. These plans outline the respective responsibilities of the commandant's offices and municipalities during a crisis, as well as upon the declaration of mobilization or martial law. Furthermore, we regularly meet with leaders and representatives from local businesses, industry, non-governmental organizations, and state entities, including those managing infrastructure that is particularly important (critical) for the state or the military. We coordinate wartime actions with them to ensure seamless cooperation and mutual assistance. Finally, we engage in public outreach by participating in community events, ceremonies, and meetings to familiarize the public with military service pathways, encouraging citizens to enlist as conscripts or volunteers, join the commandant's offices or the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, or apply to the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania.

Additionally, one of the most vital tasks of the military commandant's offices is to prepare soldiers assigned to other service in reserve. Officially, this activity

is designated as 'other reserve service', as the military's personnel reserve is structured into several distinct categories. The active reserve comprises individuals who have served within the last 15 years, while those who served prior to this period form the ready reserve. Conscripts who have not undergone military training for specific reasons are placed in the unprepared reserve. This category includes conscripts aged 18 to 60 who lack military readiness, alongside reserve soldiers up to age 65. Registration within commandant's units enables these individuals to fulfil their other reserve service requirements. Furthermore, women who have completed military service are categorized as reserve soldiers, and medical specialists are automatically included in the reserve, regardless of their prior training status.

How would the operations of commandants' offices change in times of war?

Upon the declaration of martial law

Col. Danas Mockūnas emphasizes that the primary goal at present is to further strengthen and expand Lithuania's network of commandant's offices, ensuring the seamless training of soldiers for other reserve service.





Individuals assigned to military commandant's offices first complete a 12-day basic training course, during which they learn weapon handling, patrolling, convoy operations, and perform other essential operational duties.

and the transition to wartime operations, the commandant assumes all legally prescribed authorities. One of the primary functions of wartime commandants' offices is personnel mobilization — specifically, the conscription of citizens into the armed forces. While this activity

is carried out on a smaller scale during peacetime, its scope expands significantly during wartime.

In times of crisis or war, the commandant may introduce a curfew, restricting public movement and unauthorized presence in public spaces. The commandant

also coordinates operations with civilian institutions, primarily municipalities. If a municipal administration becomes incapacitated, the district commandant's office temporarily steps in to ensure that the population's basic needs are met. Although this is not a primary function



of the military commandant's office, contingency plans are in place for such a scenario.

Military commandants also participate in property requisitioning and the mobilization of services for military needs. By law, the director of the municipal administration is responsible for securing the necessary property or services, while commandants provide operational support and mediate between the municipality and military units. Leveraging their deep knowledge of the local area and its capabilities, commandants help organize and transfer necessary support to combat units more quickly.

Another critical function of commandants' offices during wartime is territorial defence and rear area security. Enforcing curfews and conducting patrols help deter enemy reconnaissance or sabotage while preventing crime. During conflicts, looting often breaks out as residents evacuate. Therefore, commandant's personnel guard vital military and municipal facilities to prevent saboteurs from disrupting local government and



causing chaos. They also secure critical infrastructure — such as water, heating, and electricity supply — or support its protection, while patrolling alongside the police to maintain public order. Finally, in the event of enemy airborne landings or the infiltration of sabotage groups in the

rear, the commandant organizes search and neutralization operations.

In peacetime, commandant's offices operate with minimal, the most necessary core personnel. However, upon the declaration of mobilization, they are reinforced by other reserve service

There is no age limit to join the military commandant's offices. Currently, the oldest volunteer serving is 77 years old.





Soldiers in the other reserve service are recalled for refresher training annually to maintain and reinforce the skills acquired during the basic course.

soldiers and commandancy riflemen from the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, while any remaining missing personnel would be called up from the active reserve.

What impact did the Military Commandant's Offices Command, established nearly a year ago, have on strengthening rear defence?

It was necessary to start with the establishment of the Command and regional military commandants' offices because the full-time commandants basically did not exist during peacetime. Instead, these duties fell on part-time personnel who already held other positions in the Lithuanian Armed Forces or the defence system. It was extremely challenging for them; for instance, an instructor at the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy also had to manage additional commandant duties. Due to their heavy workload, these secondary responsibilities often took a backseat.

Once established, the Command not only assumed responsibility for conscription and recruitment but also began setting up Lithuania's regional commandant's offices — initially launching six main branches, followed by municipal



expansion. The Command coordinates all assigned operations and oversees the training of reserve soldiers.

What is the current structure of the units subordinate to the Military Commandant's Offices Command?

The structure of the Military Commandant's Offices Command consists of a central headquarters and six regional military commandants, covering 60 municipalities. It is true that commandant's offices are not

established in small municipalities, for example, Kalvarija, Birštonas, Pagėgiai, Rietavas or Neringa. In the event of war, only a municipality deputy commandant and a commandant's squad would operate locally, while the main commandant would be appointed from a neighboring, larger municipality. For instance, the Pagėgiai municipality is overseen by the Tauragė district military commandant's office, and a deputy commandant would similarly deploy to Birštonas, near Prienai. This

Flag of the Military Commandant's Offices Command

On May 26th, during a solemn ceremony held in Vilnius, Military Commandant's Offices Command of the Lithuanian Armed Forces was presented with a combat flag. This symbolic event highlights the continuity of the historical Lithuanian military traditions and underscores the country's readiness to act during mobilization or wartime. The flag of the Military Commandant's Offices Command was designed in accordance with historical traditions by military advisor and artist Nerijus Treinys. Featured in the center of the flag's obverse is Vytis (The Knight) — a symbol of the fight for freedom, national independence, and the defence of the Homeland. Embroidered in the center of the reverse is the emblem of the Military Commandant's Offices Command: a golden herald's horn above crossed spears, symbolizing a call to defend the state, civic responsibility, and society's readiness to act as one. 'The Columns of Gediminas' (the historic symbols) are depicted in all four corners of the flag signify the continuity, strength, and historical heritage of the Lithuania's statehood. The upper part of the flag features the motto "HONOR TO DEFEND!" inscribed in gold letters, emphasizing the essence of service, responsibility, and loyalty to our state. "Today, military commandants are becoming a structure where people of different generations, professions, and backgrounds meet — from teachers, architects, and builders to public figures. They are united not by a shared profession or physical fitness, but by the decision to contribute to the defence of the state. We witnessed the same spirit during the interwar Independence battles and partisan resistance, when the state was defended not by an isolated group, but by society

as a whole. We see this in Ukraine today: the military is strong because a society stands behind it, prepared for collective defence', said the Chief of Defence of the Republic of Lithuania Gen. Raimundas Vaikšnoras. The war in Ukraine has shown that interaction between the military, local government, and civil institutions must be developed during peacetime, without waiting for an active military threat. The responsibilities of military commandants include conscripting citizens for military service, managing personnel staffing of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, protecting critical infrastructure, ensuring public security, facilitating civil-military cooperation, and coordinating rear operations and support. 'Over the course of more than a year, we have trained 1 500 commandant soldiers and 2 500 commandancy riflemen. This year, we will invite 3 000 citizens to basic and refresher training courses, and we will increase the ranks of commandancy riflemen to 3 500. Commandant soldiers and riflemen represent the very essence of total defence — from protecting facilities and managing mobilization to organizing evacuations and maintaining public order. Our society is becoming increasingly civic-minded; each of you is here of your own free will, consciously contributing to deterring the enemy and ensuring peace', the Minister of National Defence, Robertas Kaunas, said at the ceremony.

"The flag presented to the Military Commandant's Offices Command today is more than a symbol. It is a badge of honour for service, a commitment to act decisively, mobilize society, and be where it is needed most. It is a bridge between the volunteers who built the state of Lithuania and the soldiers who protect it today," said the Commander of the Military Commandant's Offices Command, Col. Danas Mockūnas.

Information credit: Ministry of National Defence.





structural framework was chosen to manage infrastructure and resources more efficiently.

Furthermore, it must be emphasized that a regional military commandant is responsible not only for their designated region — the boundaries of which align with the territorial jurisdictions of the National Defence Volunteer

Forces (NDVF) units — but also serves as the military commandant for both that specific city and its surrounding district. For instance, the Vilnius regional military commandant simultaneously functions as both, Vilnius city and Vilnius district commandant, meaning their headquarters must effectively execute a triple mandate.

Does the Military Commandant's Offices already have sufficient staff and infrastructure?

Currently, we have the minimum necessary personnel in the commandant's offices to maintain essential functions. Of course, we would like more, but we understand the existing restrictions — currently, a

Currently, the number of soldiers who have completed the commandant's office basic training course is rapidly approaching 2 000.





Golden herald's horn above crossed spears on the flag of the Military Commandant's Offices Command, symbolizes a call to defend the state, civic responsibility, and society's readiness to act as one.

division and a light infantry brigade 'Aukštaitija' are being formed in the Lithuanian Armed Forces, and there are simply no more people in our country. Unfortunately, the birth rate is not increasing either. The situation is different due to infrastructure — in some municipalities, our commandant's offices are located together with the NDVF units, in others we rent premises.

Are People Willing to Register at Commandant's Offices?

In the regions, there are a few more challenges, because in small towns there is simply a lack of population and the choice is limited. In major cities — Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda — the situation is quite good, because there is no shortage of people willing to register there.

Who is most interested in this service?

There is no age limit for other reserve service soldiers, the primary requirement is meeting basic medical standards, which are not overly strict. Applicants wishing to join the reserve undergo an initial medical check at civilian institutions to secure a weapons license. Following this, military doctors perform a final assessment. If approved, candidates are accepted into the basic training course.

The age of those registering varies widely, with the oldest person to start service at the commandant's office is 77 years old. The average age of registered citizens ranges from 40 to 60, meaning that alongside younger participants, there is a strong presence of the older generation.

The educational background of those attending is also very diverse: ordinary

workers and professors serve shoulder to shoulder. We also have a number of well-known public figures, distinguished sports personalities, opinion leaders, and representatives of the scientific community.

Do women also attend the courses, or men are still in the majority?

We absolutely have women participating. Of the 1 741 people who have completed the basic training course so far, 218 are women — representing roughly 13 percent. In some basic training courses, they make up as much as a third of the group, so the number of women is certainly significant.

How is the training for the participants going?

First, individuals registered at the Commandant's Offices, to perform

other reserve service, are sent to a basic training course. Admittedly, in 2024, when the project was in its initial stage and the Military Commandant's Offices Command had not yet been established, NDVF assisted us with the training. However, since 2025, the Military Commandant's Offices Command Training Center has been operating in Marijampolė, organizing the 12-day basic course.

During the course, soldiers receive all fundamental knowledge: they learn weapon handling and develop tactical skills necessary for military operations,

such as vehicle and personnel checks or convoy management. Upon completing this course, soldiers possess basic, essential skills and are subsequently invited to refresher training. Over 1 500 personnel have already completed this training, a number that grows continuously with each new wave of graduates.

We also conduct exercises and cooperate closely with the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, as in the event of war, commandancy riflemen will become subordinate to the commandant's offices.

You are the first Commander of the Military Commandant's Offices Command. In what direction will this system be further developed?

The primary vision and immediate goal are to further strengthen and expand the network of commandant's offices. We must ensure the seamless training of other reserve service personnel and foster effective interaction with municipalities and partner institutions, guaranteeing that all planned operational tasks are executed without disruption when necessary.



The future vision is purposefully driving toward the establishment of the Territorial Defence Forces to ensure that all rear units are managed under a unified command. This is the shared vision of the Lithuanian Armed Forces leadership. The current operational landscape is as follows: while our division and NATO allies fight on the front line, the National Defence Volunteer Forces, military commandant's offices, Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, Military Police, Public Security Service, State Border Guard Service, and other entities operate in the rear. Consequently, plans are

under consideration to place all these organizations under a single commander. This unity of command is essential to prevent independent, uncoordinated actions — for instance, to avoid scenarios where a commandant orders the defence of a bridge while volunteers intend to demolish it. Unified command and control will ensure joint, synchronized operations across all rear area forces.

What are your immediate plans, and what results would you like to achieve in staffing the commandant's offices?

All of Lithuania is stepping up to join the Military Commandant's Offices: men and women, youth and seniors, laborers and professors alike.

Within a couple of years, our goal is to have 3 000 trained personnel in the other reserve service. Currently, we stand at 1 741 trained soldiers, so I am confident that we will reach 2 000 in the near future, and subsequently 3 000. This buildup will provide excellent support for organizing commandant services across municipalities in the event of war or mobilization.

Although the institution of military commandant's offices in Lithuania is not new, a qualitatively new chapter is beginning. What previously existed only on paper and was meant to be implemented solely upon mobilization is now becoming a reality. I am proud to embark on this new stage with an outstanding team that shows no hesitation in assuming these newly assigned functions.

I want to extend my gratitude to our personnel and soldiers working in the commandant's offices. These same individuals handle both conscription and active-duty training while simultaneously preparing reserve soldiers. As a result, their current workload is significantly heavier than before, when their responsibilities were limited solely to administering military conscription.

I am equally grateful to and respectful of the soldiers in other reserve service — men and women who willingly sacrifice their personal and family time. Rather than enjoying weekends with their loved ones, they report for duty and train for the defence of the country. ■

Photo credits: Sgt Spc Karolis Kavolėlis, Pvt. Džiugas Švaikauskas, Military Commandant's Offices Command, Ministry of National Defence.



'Plunderers and thieves caught in the act will be shot on the spot without trial. By order of the Commandant'.

Povilas Plechavičė



Weeks Away from Combat

Ukraine's latest domestically-made ballistic missile will be ready for combat by the end of next month, the country's biggest defense company said, providing Kyiv with a new offensive option to combat what Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy calls Russia's "ballistic terror."

The president discussed the missile shortage as he repeated his call to allies to help bridge the gap in Ukraine's air defenses and weapons production capabilities during his annual speech commemorating 35 years of Ukrainian independence.

"A solution to Putin's ballistic terror must be found, and this gamble of his must not pay off," he said.

Dubbed a lower-cost analogue of the US-made ATACMS, 'Fire Point's' *FP-7* ballistic missile can strike targets up to 300 kilometers away, depending on the size of its warhead, which can weigh up to 150 kilograms according to company representatives.

The missile was previously expected to be combat-ready no earlier than the end of 2026. Its accelerated debut comes as Kyiv seeks solutions to its shortage of ballistic interceptors and it doubles down on its "long-range sanctions" campaign of strikes on oil refineries and missile launchers across Russian territory.

"The *FP-7* is currently undergoing

final tests in order to also receive certification and proceed to combat trials. So we expect its first combat use at the end of September," CEO of 'Fire Point' Iryna Terekh said at the DALO Industry Days arms show in Denmark, according to 'UNN'. "We are ready for this; not much preparation remains," she said.

Producing ballistic missiles could offer Kyiv three forms of relief at once: a way to strike the launchers it can no longer reliably intercept, a way to hold Russian cities at the same risk Ukrainian ones now face and fresh leverage in any return to negotiations, according to Ukrainian officials and military strategists.

With interceptors running low globally, destroying launchers on Russian soil cuts the number of ballistic and cruise missiles that Ukraine has to take down in the air, swapping a small mark racing through the sky for a truck-sized tar-

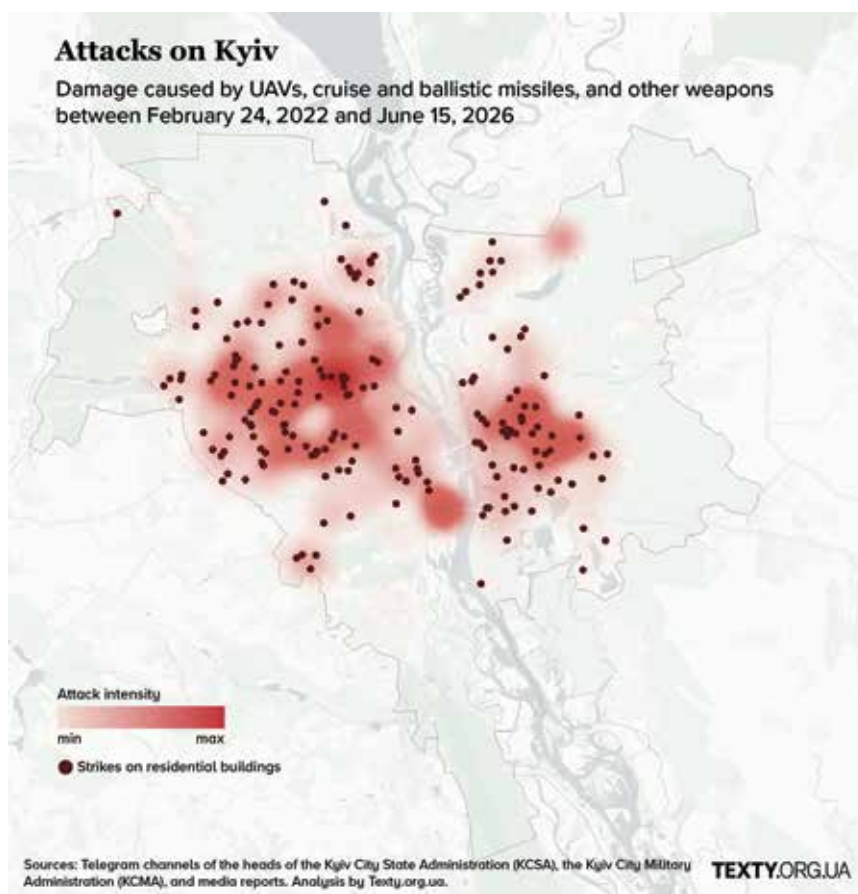
get sitting stationary on the ground. "Advocates of a more offensive approach argue that the country should be aiming to 'shoot the archer, not the arrow,'" according to an Atlantic Council brief published earlier this month.

Fielding both missiles would "significantly enhance Kyiv's ability to strike russian missile launch and production sites, while also potentially boosting deterrence," according to the analysis. The ballistics would also put pressure on moscow's war infrastructure more broadly, a coercive deterrent that mirrors the strikes russia has aimed at Ukraine's since 2022.

Ukrainian officials and company spokespeople have also said that they hope that bringing ballistic warfare to russian soil will help push moscow back to the negotiating table.

"The russians must be brought to the negotiating table. There finally must be sanctions that will make them howl," Volodymyr Zelenskyy said. "Ukraine must be given everything that will force russia to end the war. And this is possible."

'Fire Point' will debut its next-generation missile, the larger FP-9, by late autumn, company representatives told 'Reuters' earlier this month.



Traveling at speeds up to 2 200 meters per second, the FP-9 will be capable of carrying a 800 kilogram warhead as far as 855 kilometers — putting moscow

well within range, according to 'United24'.

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





It Will Take Time

With the United Kingdom passing classified blueprints for British-made components of the SCALP cruise missile to Ukraine, the country is now in possession of the intellectual property and permissions needed to build the high-tech European weapon domestically. France had already provided Ukraine with a production license for the Franco-British weapon, called *Storm Shadow* in its UK variant, back in July.

New UK Prime Minister Andy Burnham announced his decision to allow sharing the sensitive design details with Ukraine during his first visit to Kyiv. The two countries are bound by close military cooperation and

strong British support for Ukraine's defense, and signed a 100-year bilateral partnership agreement in 2025.

However, despite the highly symbolic and strategic nature of the *SCALP* move, it is unlikely that Ukraine will be able to produce large numbers of *Storm Shadows* in the near future, as it lacks specialized, high-precision manufacturing equipment at scale, complicated by the fact that the country is at war.

France and Ukraine are seeking to set up a joint *SCALP* production line in Ukraine, but the effort has so far stalled due to a lack of authorization for British-made components. "The move follows the UK being the first to gift long-range strike weapons for defensive purposes to Ukraine in 2023 and will allow the French and Ukrainians to move forward with the Ukrainian assembly of the missile," the British Prime Minister's office





said in a press statement ahead of Burnham's public announcement. The British government said the decision came alongside 'Project Brakestop', which aims to quickly develop effective and cheap long-range weapons for Ukraine's use.

Moscow has not taken kindly to the announcement, with former russian Deputy Foreign Minister and current kremlin advisor Andrei Fedorov telling the BBC that the UK could see its factories involved in support for Ukraine face a "semi-military" response, "not by russia, but from unknown sources."

Long-range strike abilities for Ukraine have been a sore point for

a long time in the kremlin, and with the humiliating Ukrainian deep-strike campaign targeting oil refineries and warehouses making the war tangible to the russian public just ahead of elections this September, it's an especially touchy subject. In response, hybrid warfare across Europe carrying russian signatures, such as mystery drone appearances and sabotage, have increased.

In May 2023, the UK became the first country to publicly supply long-range missiles to Ukraine in the form of *Storm Shadow*, although initially with a restriction against using them on russian territory. Shortly after, Fran-

ce followed suit and provided *SCALP* to Kyiv. In the fall, the US quietly began delivering *ATACMS* ballistic missiles, though again on the condition they won't be used on russian soil directly. A turning point came in summer 2024, when the Joe Biden administration authorized the use of *HIMARS* rocket launchers across the border into russia to help defend Kharkiv. Similar case-specific uses of *SCALP* and *Storm Shadow* against russia followed later that year. Finally, in May 2025, new German Chancellor Friedrich Merz announced that Germany, the UK, France, and the US had lifted range restrictions, allowing Ukraine to strike deep across russia with Western-supplied weapons.

In parallel, Ukraine has been developing domestic deep-strike capabilities, most famously in the form of the *FP-5 Flamingo* cruise missile built by the private but state-supported 'Fire Point' enterprise. In recent months, the country has also field-tested various homegrown ballistic missiles, including an incident when the russian military shot down a Ukrainian ballistic missile just 40 kilometers from moscow.

Information credit: www.defensenews.com

Photo credits: www.flickr.com,
www.defensenews.com





European Allies Team Up

Poland, Norway, Lithuania and Latvia have signed a framework agreement to buy *Piorun* (Thunderbolt) man-portable air defense systems from Polish state-run defense group 'Polska Grupa Zbrojeniowa' (PGZ) under a deal worth more than 8 billion zloty (\$2.2 billion).

The acquisition covers "several thousand missiles and several hundred launch units," PGZ said in a statement. Deliveries of the group's flagship weapon are to be completed by 2030, with Poland serving as the consortium's leader. On Poland's side, the procurement will be financed from the European Union's Security Action For Europe (SAFE) scheme which foresees around €43.7 billion (\$50.9 billion) in low-cost loans for Warsaw. More than 80% of the acquired gear is to be delivered to the Polish military.

"Not only are we implementing this agreement through the Polish defense industry, but our partners from Lithuania, Latvia and Norway have also decided to make purchases in Poland," Deputy Defence Minister Magdalena Sobkowiak-Czarnecka said. "For the first time, the Armament Agency is making purchases not only

for the Polish Armed Forces, but also for the armed forces of our allies."

Building on the weapon's successful use in Ukraine and the resulting international demand for the *Piorun*, PGZ officials say that, over the past several years, the group has increased its dedicated missile production capacity from 300 to 1 500 units annually,



with plans to reach a capacity of more than 2 000 missiles per year. Amid the weapon's increasing popularity among European allies, PGZ has also sold the *Piorun* to numerous countries outside Europe, including the United States, Japan and Indonesia.

The current generation of the MANPADS is able to hit targets at an altitude of up to 4 kilometers, and it has a range of up to 6.5 kilometers, according to data from the producer. PGZ's subsidiary MESKO, the group's leading maker of ammunition and rockets, manufactures the *Piorun* at its plant in Skarżysko-Kamienna, in central Poland. Meanwhile, PGZ is also working on a new version of the product, the *Piorun New Generation*. The weapon is to be enabled with a longer range, additional features, and improved portability, company representatives said.

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



On the night of 31 August 1993, the occupying forces of the Russian army of the time finally withdrew from Lithuania. However, this was not a single-day event, but the result of difficult political negotiations and persistent pressure from our country's society.

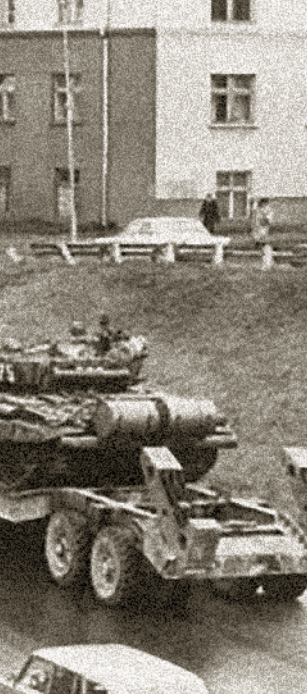
This photo report presents rarely published archive images from 1988–1993, capturing the Lithuanians' 'best wishes' to the occupiers.

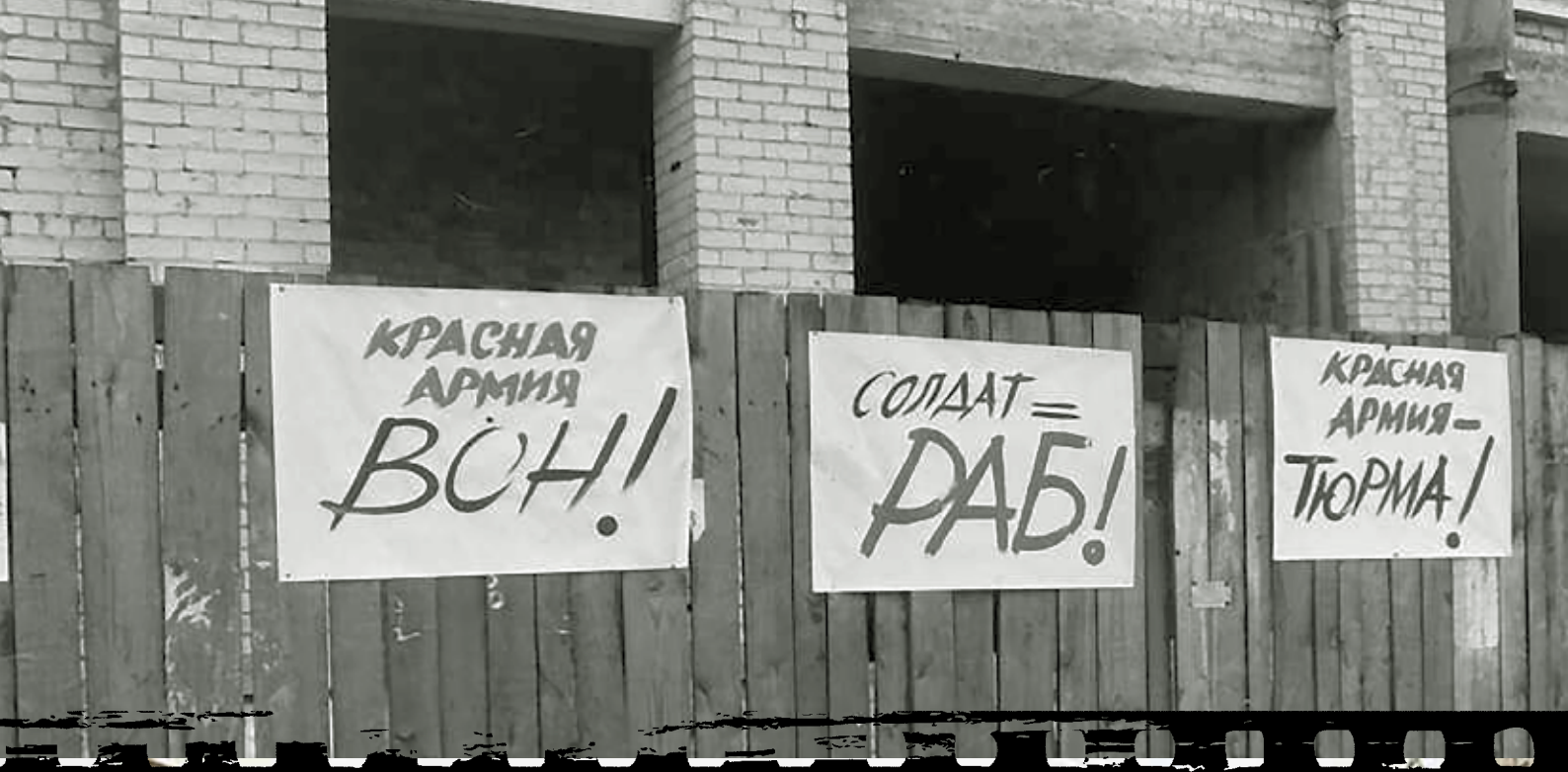


RED ARMY GO HOME











ARSENAL

FREY



A SAFE SKY PROJECT

DARIUS SUTKUS

On May 14, the enemy struck Kyiv

once again in a massive raid. Alongside hundreds of drones, more than fifty missiles of various types were used, including at least eighteen ballistic Iskander missiles, twelve of which were shot down. On the same day, a short message appeared on the country's social networks, in which the word 'Freya' was mentioned for the first time.

'Freya' is a national air defence initiative designed to protect both Ukraine and Europe from missile threats. The choice of name is truly symbolic. In Norse mythology, Freya stands as a goddess uniquely associated with both beauty and war. While they seem completely incompatible, this combination reflects a timeless paradox: civilization often survives only because it possesses the means to defend itself.

Ukraine has accumulated more practical experience in fighting air raids than any other country in Europe since World War II. Every Russian Iskander strike, every attempt to intercept it, and every successful or unsuccessful operation has generated experience that cannot be replicated in peacetime trials.

To destroy the Ukraine's infrastructure, Russia uses several types of missiles, including both cruise and ballistic.

Iskander missiles cause perhaps the most damage to the infrastructure. The relatively good news is that Russians fired most of the Iskander stockpiles they had at the very beginning of the large-scale aggression against Ukraine. From the end of February 2022 to the end of March of the same year, more than 240 quasi-ballistic Iskander-M and cruise Iskander-K strikes were recorded. The warranty period of these missiles is ten years; therefore, Russians utilized the aging stocks to their own advantage. After that, missile strikes became less frequent and less massive for some time.





An unexploded *Iskander* that fell near Kramatorsk. Ukraine is seeking more effective ways to shoot down this type of missile.

However, the threat persisted. Around mid-2025, it was recorded that russians had succeeded in increasing missile manoeuvrability during the terminal phase of their trajectory. Consequently, *Iskander* missiles became significantly harder to intercept; for instance, in September 2025, only about 6% of missiles heading toward Ukraine were shot down. While other engagements were more successful, the Ukrainians faced another critical vulnerability: a severely limited number of *Patriot* systems capable of intercepting ballistic missiles.

Recently, another strategy has been adopted: destroying missiles not in the air, but metaphorically speaking, while they are still on the conveyor belt. Following targeted strikes with *Flamingo* missiles against russia's military-industrial facilities, their capacity to produce ballistic and cruise missiles has decreased. Nevertheless, these counterstrikes are not a panacea. Consequently, it is logical that a clear conclusion was reached: Ukraine must develop its own effective anti-missile shield.

Time for Your Own Capabilities

Is it possible for Ukraine to do without *Patriot* air defence systems? Let's remember that this is a really well-proven weapon, but there are a few 'buts'.

First and foremost is the price tag: a single missile for domestic use in the US costs at least 3.8 million dollars, while export versions range from 6 to 10 million.

Second, the production of *Patriot* missiles is relatively slow. The production timelines left the Ukrainians stunned: 'Since when does it take two years to manufacture a missile, and 30 months just to build the engine for it? While they are building a single anti-missile system, hundreds of ballistic missiles will be hitting Ukraine'.

US defence manufacturer 'Lockheed Martin' currently produces a maximum of 650 anti-missile systems per year. The company plans to increase production to 2 000 by 2033. However, even if the entire production line were dedicated to the Ukraine alone, interceptor supplies would remain insufficient. The Ukraine intelligence estimates that russia is capable of producing roughly 120 ballistic missiles a month, totalling 1 440 units a year.

So far, the Ukrainian Armed Forces have received about 600 anti-missiles in four years. To realistically repel air attacks, they need at least 2000 anti-missiles per year.

Third, nothing is more permanent than a temporary solution. Missiles may be available today, but gone tomorrow. The country cannot risk its security on a hypothetical message: 'We apologize, but due to the conflict in the Middle East, we must temporarily pause the supply of *Patriot* systems. Thank you for your understanding'.

Depending on such volatile uncertainty is simply unsustainable.

But are there alternatives that meet the 'cheaper, faster, and more secure' criteria? Yes, there is. And this is not some distant prospect, but a very tangible project already under development.

This small object in the soldier's hands is a decoy deployed by *Iskander* during flight, functioning essentially as a radio-jamming beacon and a heat source.



TARGET: [ISKANDER]

The *Iskander* short-range missile system, its original name was rather trivial — *Ravenstvo* (English transl.: Equality), entered development in 1988, during the soviet era. It was a strategic manoeuvre by the highest political echelons of the soviet union (USSR) to create a missile that would bypass the 1987 treaty between the USSR and the United States of America (USA) on the elimination of short- and medium-range missiles. The long journey of design, production, testing, and modification dragged on for more than a decade. The system was finally unveiled in August 1999. 'It needs improvement,' the brightest minds of the General Staff decided, and designers went back to work on a modernized version — the *Iskander-M*. However, this updated missile system also turned out to be a slow burner, taking another twelve years to complete. What exactly is the *Iskander*? It is not just a single missile, but a complete missile system comprising an entire fleet of vehicles. This includes a self-propelled Transporter-Erector-Launcher (TEL) carrying two missiles, a reloading vehicle with two additional missiles, a mobile command post, a targeting data post, a technical maintenance vehicle, and even a mobile crew rest and accommodation vehicle. The main purpose of this type of missile systems is to

strike important targets at a distance of up to half a thousand kilometers.

The missile can carry a charge weighing up to 480 kg. Depending on the intended target, the system can deploy various types of warheads. Several variants of cluster warheads to destroy targets spread over a large area, high-explosive incendiary warheads for fuel storage facilities, and concrete-piercing rounds for fortified command posts. Theoretically, the missile can also be used non-conventionally as a carrier for a nuclear payload.

The *Iskander* missile was specifically engineered to maximize its survivability against air defence systems. It features both active and passive counter-measures. The missile body is treated with a special stealth coating to minimize its radar signature. It also carries an electronic jamming system; if internal sensors detect that the missile is being tracked by radar, it deploys decoys to confuse air defence operators. Furthermore, these guided missiles can manoeuvre dynamically at any stage of their flight path, making interception more difficult. However, the chances of this monster hitting its targets will soon decrease...

Iskander is in a combat-ready position and is being prepared for launch.



Missile Becomes Missile Hunter

Developing an anti-missile system will be relatively straightforward for Ukrainians, as the foundation for the future system already exists. It is based on the *FP-7*, a compact surface-to-surface ballistic missile introduced by 'Fire Point' — the very same private company that produces *FP-5* cruise missiles, better known as *Flamingo* (we wrote about them in this year's 8th issue of *WARRIOR*).

Initial information about the *FP-7* emerged in the autumn of 2025. Drawing an analogy to the *Flamingo*, this modification was originally

than destroying ground objects, it is by no means impossible.

An interceptor missile does not require long-range flight capabilities. In essence, it operates as a sprinter — capable of accelerating to extreme speeds to catch and eliminate the target in its terminal phase.

This is what was used to create the *FP-7.x* anti-missile. With a flight time of 250 seconds, the missile accelerates to a maximum speed of 2 000 m/s. Upon intercepting the target, the *FP-7.x* would destroy it with a warhead weighing 150 kilograms.

On June 3, 2026, the first test launch of the anti-missile was carried out. During it,

the essence of the test in his interview for 'Jane's Defence'.

This means that the anti-missile is capable of countering the *Iskander*-type ballistic missile flying at Mach 4.5-5 at an angle of more than 80 degrees to the ground. In practice, the *FP-7.x* cover a distance of about 50 and intercept a ballistic target at an altitude of about 15-25 km. This is essentially in line with the parameters of the *MIM-104F Patriot* surface-to-air missile.

Anti-missile Eye

But is everything so simple? No. Upgrading the ballistic



meant to be named the *Pelican*, but it seems that this name did not really catch on. According to media reports, the *FP-7* is a ballistic missile with characteristics similar to the *ATACMS*. It measures 7.25 meters in length with a fuselage diameter of 0.53 meters, featuring a lightweight carbon fibre body. 'Its lightweight design allows our missile to fly further and outmanoeuvre the *C-400*', stated 'Fire Point' chief designer Denys Shtilerman. According to him, the missile has a projected range of up to 300 kilometers. Flight testing was conducted in February 2026.

That is when the idea emerged: why not use the *FP-7* to destroy enemy ballistic missile positions. If intelligence data is received and prompt action is taken, it is entirely possible to destroy mobile missile launchers.

However, the range of the *FP-7* is only 300 km, whereas the *Iskander* can be launched from a maximum distance of 500 km. What can be done in this case?

The solution is simpler than it seems: the *FP-7* needs to be modified into a 'missile hunter' rather than just a standard ballistic missile. While hitting a high-speed aerial target is more challenging

the *FP-7.x* reached its maximum speed, withstanding significant overloads of Mach 4.5-5.9, performed a complex manoeuvring scenario and destroyed a simulated air target at an altitude of 25 km.

'We simulated a situation when the missile receives a command from a ground-based radar. The missile reaches the zone where the thermal sensor detects the 'threat' — a ballistic missile, and destroys it', D. Shtilerman explained

FP-7 into the *FP-7.x* interceptor requires more than just enhanced fuel and high-maneuvrability ailerons. The missile must autonomously detect and track its target while successfully ignoring radio interference and decoy thermal targets. We know a similar targeting principle — it is used in the *Stinger*, man-portable air-defence system. This is how the *FP-7.x* should work. Its 'eye' is a medium and long-range infrared sensor. However, it

*IRIS-T "eye". A similar infrared sensor is used in the *FP-7.x* design.*





The impact of Russian missile in Poland, left a crater roughly 10 meters wide. Next time, things could end much worse.



The FP-7 missile, on the basis of which the FP-7.x interceptor missile was created.

must be even more sensitive than the one used in the *Stinger* missile. The reason is simple: interceptor speeds are incomparably higher. Flying through dense layers of the atmosphere, it heats up significantly, which can negatively affect the resolution of the infrared sensor.

It is understood that the homing anti-missile 'eye' is an extremely delicate and technologically advanced device. Only a highly specialized manufacturer can produce such a product.

Therefore, 'Fire Point' has entered into a cooperation agreement with 'Diehl Defence', a leading figure in the German defence industry with 120 years of experience. This company produces *IRIS-T* air-to-air missiles and the latter's expertise can be used in the development of the *FP-7.x* anti-missile homing sensor.

Looking ahead, alternative solutions may also be applied; for instance, an active millimetre-wave radar (26.5–40 GHz) could be used for targeting, similar to those found in the *MIM-104F Patriot* and *Aster-30 Block 1NT* missiles.

Not Just Ukraine

Alternatives to *Patriot* missile systems are drawing growing interest not only from Ukraine but also from other European countries. Currently, a situation is arising where airspace violations are becoming routine and are clearly

escalating. Let's remember the sequence of events: first, fighter jets briefly violate the European Union (EU) airspace; next, reconnaissance drones follow; then, a massive drone attack is simulated; and finally, a combat drone crashes into a residential building. On July 30, Polish air defences detected a *Kh-101* cruise missile entering their airspace. However, the political decision to shoot it down was not made, as it was deemed not to pose a threat. Ultimately, the missile landed in a ploughed field and no one was harmed. But what comes next?

'This intrusion is a clear signal, and it

PATRIOT and *FP-7.X*: comparison

- **Manufacturer and supplier:**
Patriot — USA;
FP-7.x — Ukraine
- **Dimensions:**
Patriot (PAC-2) — length 5.31 m, diameter 410 mm;
FP-7.x — length 7.25 m, diameter 530 mm
- **Weight:**
Patriot — around 0.9 t;
FP-7.x — around 1.8 t
- **Flight range:**
Patriot — up to 160 km;
FP-7.x — up to 200 km
- **Unit price:**
Patriot — from 3.8 million US dollars for the domestic market;
FP-7.x — 700 thousand US dollars.
- **Targeting principle:**
Patriot — millimetre wave radar;
FP-7.x — infrared sensor
- **Target destruction:**
Patriot — destroys the target with a direct hit;
FP-7.x — explodes near the target, destroying it with fragments
- **Production scale:**
Patriot — around 650 units/year;
FP-7.x — not yet mass produced.
- **Status:**
Patriot — in service;
FP-7.x — created; currently in development.
- **Combat use:**
Patriot — tested;
FP-7.x — an attempt to shoot down a real target is planned for 2027.



A new Anti-Ballistic Missile Coalition was established in Europe this year, with Ukraine playing a leading role.

is not the first of its kind: from kremenlin's perspective, we are already part of this conflict — as Ukraine supporting countries, as NATO, and as the collective West', warns Piotr Woyke, Director of the Eastern Flank Institute. 'Politically, neutralizing the missile would have been the right response, because russians understands only force in a confrontation. We cannot afford to show weakness when responding to such provocations; otherwise, they will only become increasingly aggressive'.

The lack of a decisive response sets a dangerous precedent. Indeed, as propaganda in russia increasingly intensifies the narrative that 'all of NATO is at war with us', there is a growing risk that future incursions will not merely be *Shahed* drones or cruise missiles 'accidentally straying from their course'. Instead, it could be a ballistic missile, deliberately targeted at a specific objective in EU.

The threat to The Old-World stems not only from russia, but also from the missile arsenals of their allies — most notably Iran. This nation possesses the largest inventory of ballistic and cruise missiles in the Middle East region. If Teheran were to attack Europe with its most powerful systems boasting a maximum range of up to 2 500 kilometers, a potential strike could easily reach and impact southern Italy, eastern parts of Austria and Czech Re-

public, almost half of the Poland territory and practically all Baltic countries. That is to say, the threat extends to the entire eastern flank of NATO.

Becoming a Pan-European Project

And here, the interests of Ukraine and the EU converge more than ever. Clearly, missile defence is required to protect not just Ukraine territory, but the entire eastern flank of the NATO. Repeated incidents have demonstrated that the regional air defence system currently being developed here is neither multilayered nor dense enough. Furthermore, from an organizational standpoint, it lacks efficiency: the procedures from target detection to the decision to engage are slower than the speed of an incoming missile.

'Fire Point' developed its *FP-7* and *FP-7.x* models as a local project, but the concept resonated well with current events. Amid growing concerns over regional airspace security, Europe's three major powers: Great Britain, Germany and France, became interested in the potential of the anti-ballistic shield. During a meeting in Paris on July 13, 2026, the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy presented the pan-European '*Freyja*' air defence pro-

ject to international partners. It demonstrated that the country can not only seek support but also take the lead.

During the meeting in Paris additional countries, including Denmark, Italy, Nederland, Norway, Spain and Sweden, expressed their readiness to join the initiative, bringing the anti-missile coalition to nine nations.

The project could potentially be supported by the 37 nations currently standing with Ukraine in its fight against moscow aggression. In this context, their involvement goes beyond helping a state at war — it is a matter of self-defence. A joint agreement to develop the '*Freyja*' air defence project could lay the foundation for a fundamentally new European security architecture.

However, achieving this outcome requires swift action. 'If everyone takes action, we could see the first results this year. I am not asking Europeans to rush headlong like we do, obtaining permits from the highest authorities the next day. But if everything moves at the usual regional pace — where you have to wait eight to nine months for just one permit — then, unfortunately, nothing good will come of it', D. Shtilerman noted in an interview.

Therefore, this task must be addressed immediately, by adopting the firsthand experience of Ukrainians, currently repelling actual threats, not just preparing for them. First, it is necessary to establish a dense radar network capable of detecting targets across both the lower and upper echelons of airspace. Second, seamless exchange of airspace intelligence data must be ensured between Ukraine and NATO. Third, a multi-layered air defence system must be created, ranging from mobile fire groups designed to combat low-and-slow flying drones to advanced surface-to-air missile systems capable of intercepting ballistic missiles. Furthermore, these efforts should not be limited to only *Patriot* systems.

Air Defence Architecture

What could be the prospective structure of the entire air defence system?

- Upper air defence echelon: *Arrow 3* and/or *Patriot PAC-3* complexes are

designed to counter strategic ballistic missiles.

- Middle air defence echelon: Ukrainian *FP-7.x* and French-Italian *SAMP/T* systems neutralize the bulk of incoming short- and medium-range cruise and ballistic missiles.

- Lower air defence echelon: *IRIS-T* and *NASAMS* systems intercept tactical aviation and strike drones, complemented by mobile air defence groups armed with specialized surface-to-air systems.

The entire system should be integrated into a unified digital surveillance and data exchange network. What does the structural outline of the 'Freya' project look like from the perspective of its creators? We already know that the country is committed to equipping the project with interceptor missiles and launchers. Notably, the price of a single *FP-7.x* missile is approximately 700 000 US dollars, which is four to six times lower than that of similar systems. Each launcher is expected to accommodate multiple missiles and is priced at 150 000 US dollars.

The cost of the missile is not mentio-

ned without reason. It represents the economic reality of any armed conflict, where the balance between quantity and quality must be navigated. These factors rarely align perfectly and everything is determined by the price. If the anti-missile is much more expensive than its target, such a ratio is favourable only to the aggressor. An interceptor priced well under a million dollars is exactly what can correct this imbalance.

Other equally vital components include radar stations, target identification and tracking systems, and command and control centers. Let's consider some clear contenders that should become components of the anti-missile shield.

In the diagrams presented by D. Shtilerman, we see three variants of long-range radars. The first is the *TRML-4D*, which is manufactured by a German

company 'Hensoldt'. It is capable of detecting aerial targets flying at altitudes of up to 40 km within a range of 250 km. Specifically, it can detect a fighter jet at a distance of 120 km and a cruise missile at 60 km. The radar is capable of tracking up to 1 500 different objects simultaneously. This radar station has a proven track record in Ukraine — it is used by the 540th Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade of Ukrainian Air Force. The contract for 'Freya' with 'Hensoldt' company was already signed during 'Eurosatory' exhibition in Paris this year.

The other planned radars are the *SAAB Giraffe 8A/4A* (Sweden) and the long-range *Thales Ground Master 400* (France), the latter of which can detect a fighter jet at a distance of 450 km and a cruise missile at a range of 250 km. All of the listed radar stations are resistant



'Freya eyes'. Long-range radars produced by 'Hensoldt', 'SAAB' and 'Thales' have been selected for airspace control.

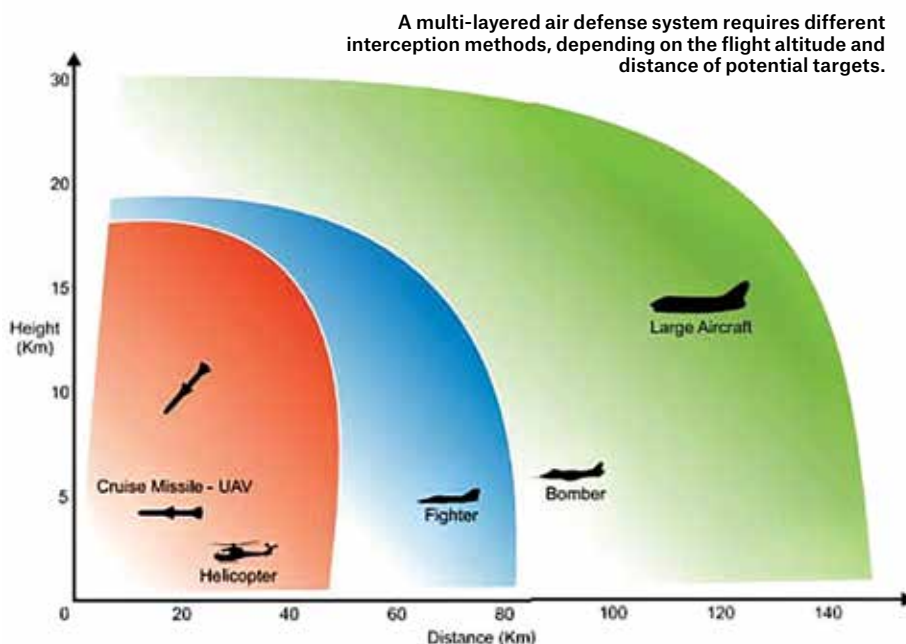


to electronic interference and feature automated, real-time data exchange capabilities.

Other radar systems were selected to track detected targets and guide anti-missiles toward them. The first is the *Weibel GFTR-2100/48* (Denmark), a system that comes highly rated by NASA and US Navy. *GFTR-2100/48* is capable of tracking targets at ranges of up to 1 400 kilometers and at speeds reaching 10 000 m/s. Another similar radar is the *Leonardo KRONOS Land* (Italy).

The command and control center chosen is the *Kongsberg Fire Distribution Center*, manufactured by company 'Kongsberg Defence & Aerospace' (Norway). It is one of the most advanced systems of its kind, uniquely suited for integrated air defence operations and ensuring seamless interoperability at both national and NATO levels.

Radar stations must be deployed along the entire eastern flank. Communication between system elements must adhere to the NATO standard *Link 16* protocol, which is already integrated into the Ukraine's *Delta* information platform. Additionally, the tactical communication channel between the radars will utilize the *Asterix* protocol. For additional anti-



missile course correction, the *Full-Duplex Datalink* protocol is provided, when both data reception and transmission occur simultaneously.

Obstacle Course

The program could have been launched as early as 2025, and its development was supposed to proceed relatively quickly. Military experts emphasized that

many of the elements already existed; they simply needed to be combined like building blocks and integrated into a common system. However, the developers faced unforeseen obstacles.

The big game has begun. It goes without saying that Russia is the least interested in the Ukraine's missile and anti-missile program. But, as it turns out, it's not the only one.

The 'Fire Point' company suddenly

Management and coordination will be ensured by the Norwegian *Kongsberg FDC*, one of the most advanced command and control centers.



drew the attention of the Ukraine anti-corruption service. This triggered investigations and bureaucratic battles that delayed the project. Allegedly compromising material was even leaked to foreign companies targeted as potential program partners. In response, 'Fire Point' commissioned an international firm to conduct an audit, which revealed neither inflated prices nor suspicious connections. Ultimately, while the manufacturers proved the suspicions were unfounded, the process was delayed by nine months.

Naturally, there was a risk that foreign arms manufacturers would be dissatisfied with 'Freya' competitiveness. Some observers note that it was after the announcement of the 'Freya' project that United States promised Poland to grant a license to produce PAC-3 MSE missiles. Competitive struggle and market defence? Be that as it may, the country is now focused on more pressing issues. Every subsequent Russia's missile strike underscores that establishing an anti-ballistic shield is not a matter of competition, but of national survival.

However, it was likely understood in Europe that the dynamics of armed conflict are shifting rapidly, and that the advantage goes to the side capable of adapting swiftly and deploying cost-effective, innovative projects.

This is best illustrated by the opinion expressed by the Mette Frederiksen, Prime Minister of Denmark: 'We realized that you are able to produce faster, more creatively, and more intelligently than anyone else in our country, even though we are not at war. To be honest, this is an uncomfortable truth for the region, but at the same time, it makes a really big impression'.

In early August 2026, it was announced that the first stage of international integration work had been completed. V. Zelenskyy summarized the situation as follows: 'Our program — a joint European anti-ballistic system — is already under active implementation. Ten countries have joined so far, and more partners capable of providing tangible support will follow. We have already reached an agreement on this. I am grateful to all the companies that are ready to work in the Anti-Ballistic Coalition. <...> Today we discussed in detail what is still needed: what steps our country must take, and what actions our



The Ukrainian missiles were displayed during 'Eurosatory' exhibition in Paris. This serves as confirmation that Ukraine is becoming not only a consumer of weapons, but also a supplier.

partners must take, so that the Ukraine's weapons manufacturers and developers can achieve real results'.

The first practical tests of the 'Freya' — focusing on capturing and shooting down real targets — are scheduled for the second half of 2027. Will the results live up to expectations? 'As soon as we begin successfully shooting down enemy missiles, we will be able to very quickly supply our products to many countries', D. Shtilerman notes.

Whether the further development of the project will proceed smoothly will depend on financing, production capacity, and political support.

Summa Summarum

Unlike many defence programs that begin in sterile boardrooms, the 'Freya' project has its origins on the battlefield.

'Each successful test of a new missile is a step toward technological sovereignty. When a country underinvests in engineering education, reduces scientific research, loses manufacturing competencies, and becomes accustomed to relying solely on foreign technologies, it gradually

accumulates a strategic deficit. It becomes noticeable only when war breaks out', a 'Fire Point' spokesperson wrote on social media.

It was this understanding that led Ukraine to propose the idea of an anti-ballistic shield covering entire Europe, allowing it to become not only a customer of defence technologies, but also one of the leading nations in the field of missile systems and their applications.

An interesting paradox has emerged. Western Europe, historically endowed with immense engineering and economic capabilities, has traditionally always exported advanced military technologies. However, Ukraine has slightly adjusted this axiom. Its wartime innovations — ranging from drones and electronic warfare to integrated air defence systems — have been deployed with lightning speed and have comprehensively proven their effectiveness. We are witnessing a process where the Ukrainian experience has already begun to influence the NATO doctrines and Europe's procurement decisions. Combat-tested expertise has become one of the Ukraine's most valuable strategic exports. ■

FOREST ANTS THE SO PART II



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 DVIENT BEAR



The turn of 1945–1946. Alone once more

On the eve of 1946, our group fell apart. Antanas stood before us, looking sad. 'My dear friends,' he muttered, 'you see, it's getting harder and harder for us to hide anywhere; we have to go our separate ways!' Fred and I stood there frozen in silence. What should we do now? Out of despair, Fred muttered: 'I'll try once more to go to the people who hid me before I joined you, if they'll take me in.' Antanas took our weapons and grumbled: 'You'd be better off unarmed if the russians catch you!'

We said our goodbyes, and I felt more like crying than laughing. With this New Year's Eve, another unforgettable chapter of my life came to an end — one that had brought much suffering and countless hardships, but also a genuine, steadfast and courageous community of men, and the opportunity to experience selfless help from many local people.

Both my friends were swallowed up by the darkness of the night, and I was left alone once more. For a while, I took refuge in the attic of a kind-hearted and caring man. The attic was cold, but I was given thick blankets and something to eat. To be honest, I didn't like staying in that house, as it stood right by the road. I voiced my concerns to the owner. He

grumbled good-naturedly: 'Don't worry, the russians won't come here!'

And so I placed my fate in that man's hands. He could have handed me over to the soviets and received a handsome reward for it. Such a life in a foreign country amongst strangers, in such chaotic circumstances, was nothing but a risk. I lay awake for a long time. Downstairs in the house, I could still hear a few people merrily celebrating New Year's Eve. And I came to the conclusion: the old year had given me little. Although I had survived and learnt to live amongst Lithuanians, my situation remained hopeless. As 1945 dawned, I was still a German soldier, albeit without a company; now I was merely a refugee without a home, peace



Adelbert Lohr, the author of the memoirs, with his wife Klara Kettner-Lohr. Photographed on the eve of their golden wedding anniversary on 24 July 2007.

of mind or hope. Last year I could still entertain the thought that I might surrender. After the events of 1945, this possibility was also taken away from me. As a German soldier, I could not expect any favours from the soviets, and certainly not as a 'bandit'! If — as I should have foreseen — the NKVD were to find out that, together with Antanas, I had been involved in a shootout during which we killed four NKVD officers, there would be no mercy...

The farmer kept his word and looked after me sincerely for several days. When I was getting ready to leave, he asked: 'German, where are you off to now?' I replied without thinking: 'I don't know!' — 'Then stay with us for a couple more

days!' He advised me to stay in the loft and never failed to bring me something to eat. It is impossible to put into words the kindness, the help and the willingness to take risks shown by these simple, ordinary people living here in Lithuania — and they are certainly worthy of it.

So I spent a few more days here, then thanked them for their hospitality and slipped quietly out of the house the following night. After walking cautiously for three kilometres through the forest, I reached another village. There, I timidly knocked on the door of some people I knew through Antanas. A woman's voice asked, 'Who's there?' — 'Jurgis,' I replied quietly. They opened the door straight

away. The farmers were surprised to see me on my own. 'Where are Antanas and Fredas?' 'We've gone our separate ways, because it's better for us to spend the winter apart than together,' I explained. I was able to stay with these farmers for a week, but only in the hayloft. They would always bring me into the house after dark so that I could warm up. At night, the soviets didn't dare go out anywhere, as they themselves were afraid of the partisans.

After that, I travelled on: finding shelter here and there, but always only with people I knew. Even so, I could never be sure whether the cash reward offered by the soviets might not dampen their willingness to help, even at the risk of their own lives. The knowledge of the local language, the region and the people that I'd picked up over the six months with Antanas now came in very handy. January, February and half of March passed relatively peacefully — I never once had to flee from my pursuers. After all, winter was still in full swing and the ground was covered in snow.

In a partisan platoon

At the end of March, I was hiding in a farmer's barn. It was already getting dark. Suddenly, a dog began to bark. Through the cracks in the planks, I watched as several armed men approached the house. After about ten minutes, the farmer's wife rushed into the barn: 'Jurgi, go into the house — the partisans have arrived!' I couldn't believe it; I was overcome with anxiety — had I been betrayed? Nevertheless, though I was sceptical, I followed her. The men welcomed me warmly: they all shook my hand, and a lively conversation ensued. Once again, my suspicions had been unfounded. Before long, one of the men said: 'Come with us!' It was the squad leader, called *Strazdas*. I was very hesitant to once again take up arms. However, my hosts also tried to persuade me: 'Jurgi, go with them; at least you won't be alone all the time!' They were right. I was being hunted down anyway, and constantly hiding on my own had become unbearable in the long run. Whilst the sentries kept watch outside, we talked for a good hour. By the time the partisans were getting ready to leave the farmstead, I had firmly decided to go with them.

At the camp, we met a few more men and three women. They cooked for everyone. These women were from different families and had taken refuge in the forest alongside their brothers. All the fighters had aliases; we recognised one another only by those names. Most had chosen the names of forest animals. The unit itself was named after *Genys* [woodpecker — translator's note]. All the partisans had suffered severe oppression at the hands of the russians and hated their oppressors with all their hearts. They were firmly resolved not to surrender alive — and that is usually how it turned out. During my time with the partisans, quite a few of my comrades-in-arms were surrounded by the soviets, but not a single one of them survived. The partisans accepted me — a German soldier being pursued by the soviets and in hiding — as one of their own; they became trustworthy and loyal friends.

In the forest camp there were several small above-ground bunkers — built from logs, with roofs tapering slightly towards the top. All of this was well

camouflaged with branches, moss and turf — from the outside, our living quarters looked like natural forest mounds. Inside these dugouts stood small iron stoves (called *buržuikos*), which we kept burning day and night. We cooked our meals outdoors. No one noticed the smoke, as we had set up our camp right in the thickest part of the forest. The russians only dared to venture deep into the forest during major military operations, when two or three hundred soldiers would be assembled. At other times, they would merely patrol the forest edges in smaller groups of fifteen to twenty men. We weren't always at the camp — from time to time our unit would go out into the surrounding area.

Genys' unit would sometimes swell to more than thirty men. Many young men joined us after receiving conscription notices for the soviet army. They hated the occupiers, so they chose instead to take to the woods and live the life of a hunted animal, just so they could contribute to the struggle for Lithuania's freedom. Unfortunately, over time many of them

were killed, because clashes between the russians and us — even though we tried to avoid them — were inevitable.

We always believed in and hoped for a political solution to our problems, but, sadly, this never materialised. Many freedom fighters hoped that a military conflict between the Western powers and the soviet union (USSR) would soon break out; therefore, gripped by desperate hope, they saw the first signs of war in every aeroplane that flew overhead. We kept a close watch on the soviet garrisons and the infrastructure of the occupying authorities, and were ready to take up the fight at any moment. However, with the West showing no intervention whatsoever, the soviets entrenched themselves in the conquered countries and settled in for the long haul. It soon became clear to us too: whatever the soviets had seized, they would not give up willingly. The resistance in these subjugated countries was immense, but in the long run — without the help of the major Western powers — liberation was impossible. In Lithuania alone, at one point, there were around

Fighters from *Genys'* partisan group. Front row (lying down), from left: Šogas, Adelbert Lohr (author of the memoirs), Leonas Laurinskas-Liūtas. Second row (crouching), from left: Pranas Trijonis-Jaunutis and Aleksas Trijonis-Genys (commander of the group). In the third row (standing), from left: Elena Trijonaitė-Žvaigždutė, her sister Stanislava Trijonaitė-Saulutė, Stanislava Trijonaitė-Aušrelė and Antanas Kinsgaila-Strazdas. Photographed in 1946.



40 000 partisans fighting. Strong partisan movements were active in Latvia, Estonia and, in particular, Ukraine. The name of Stepan Bandera was well known within our group too.

The arrival of spring significantly improved our situation in the forest. However, we still had to constantly stock up on essential food supplies and other necessities. We usually set out on these missions in groups of eight to ten men. Occasionally, a particular group would manage to organise a larger raid. We usually targeted collective farms — a typical communist, state-run form of agriculture, which had been established as so-called agricultural production cooperatives. Such a raid required a cart. This was usually provided by a peasant considered a communist or suspected of spying. On the other hand, by such means we eased the burden on that section of the population who were sympathetic to us and voluntarily supported us from their meagre stores. Around 97% of the population were on our side, so we were constantly well informed about everything that was happening. We were warned in good time whenever the soviets or their collaborators were planning something.

In mid-April, we learnt from our couriers that Pranas Maselskis, a relative of Antanas who had brought us planks to the forest in the autumn of 1945 for the construction of a bunker, had shot Antanas and received a reward of 10 000 roubles for doing so. I was shaken by Antanas' fate and horrified that Pranas, his relative, had become a traitor and a murderer. Pranas was also known to Genys' group. No one had expected this of him. This also explained the mysterious discovery of our bunker at the time — Pranas had already decided to betray us — it was he who led the NKVD to our newly built forest hut, and it was only thanks to Antanas' strict adherence to the conspiracy that we survived.

Genys' partisan group had no choice but to react. Internal betrayal posed a mortal danger to everyone, so it was not only revenge but also self-preservation that compelled us to take retaliatory measures. Anyone who thought of betraying the partisans and wanted to profit from it had to know that they were

taking a huge risk. Consequently, one evening, one of our groups surrounded Pranas' house and eliminated him. I only learnt of this act of retribution later, when we had all gathered together again. The Lithuanians considered it their duty to settle the score with the traitors.

As I have already mentioned, we knew one another only by our aliases. If the soviets arrested any of us, they did not know our real surnames and so could not extract any information from us. This was very important, because the NKVD would torture those they arrested until they spoke. Codenames alone were of

no use to the NKVD. On the other hand, Lithuanians rarely fell alive into soviet hands — they fought to the last bullet, which they kept for themselves. One of the women, our *Aušrelė* [diminutive of 'dawn' — translator's note], surrounded by the soviets, took her own life together with her boyfriend, a teacher.

Throughout the summer of 1946, we wandered through various villages, mostly at night. Once, as dawn was breaking, we found ourselves near a forest, but we stopped at the home of a farmer we knew and decided to spend





A forest camp of Lithuanian partisans.

the day there. Although there were more than twenty of us, the farmer provided us with food. We then spread out between the house and the barn. Just before midday, the sentry raised the alarm — soviet lorries carrying NKVD soldiers were driving along the village road. Our farmstead stood about 300 metres from the road, which encircled it on three sides in the shape of a horseshoe. It was well over a kilometre to the nearest forest.

The lorries came to an abrupt halt. The russians leapt out, stormed into the village and systematically searched house after house. There was no hope of escaping

unnoticed across the open field. We took up positions by the windows of the barn. Armed with three machine-guns, automatic weapons and hand grenades, we were not defenceless, but our hearts were pounding — the end had come, for there were more than two hundred soviets. All we could do is wait. The NKVD were meticulously searching house after house, whilst we prepared for death.

The farmers prayed aloud and wept. But — a miracle happened! Half an hour later, the russians called out: 'They're already waiting for us!' The tension eased. Eventually, they gathered in the distance,

climbed into their lorries and drove off.

We could hardly believe our good fortune. As far as we could see, every farmstead had been thoroughly searched. Why had they bypassed our house in particular? We discussed it for several more weeks, but never found an explanation. If the russians had come in, there would have been a terrible bloodbath. We certainly wouldn't have survived, although with our weapons, had we taken the russians by surprise, we would have inflicted heavy losses on them. The farmer, still deathly pale but delighted to have been spared, brought us two bottles of vodka.

A clash would have cost both him and his wife their lives. The people were happy and relieved when we left that evening.

Such was our life as partisans — like that of a dog: constantly on the run, in a different place every day, with our lives in constant danger.

It was only in the camps deep in the forest that we felt a little safer, but we couldn't stay there all the time. We had to carry out our missions, maintain contact with the people, keep up with the news, and stock up on food, clothes and a host of other things. There was a lack of medical care, but, fortunately, we all remained in

good health. We were young, and we spent all our time outdoors, both in summer and winter, so we became hardened. Lithuania's natural landscape and deep forests protected us and provided us with shelter — to the global superpower, the USSR, we were like an unattainable thorn in their side.

That kind of life was particularly hard for me. My fellow Lithuanians were persecuted just as I was, but they were fighting in their homeland. They would sometimes meet with their loved ones and had at least some hope — albeit a faint one, which was fading ever more. They hoped for a political solution: an international

agreement or a military conflict between the free world and the communist system that trampled on human rights, and they were prepared to contribute to this victory. But we constantly tormented ourselves with thoughts of how much longer this wretched life would last. Days, weeks and years passed, yet nothing changed, and our numbers dwindled ever further. Time and again, someone would fall victim to NKVD ambushes or executions.

* * *

In the autumn of 1946, we set up a new camp in the forest, as there were too many footprints leading to the old



one. The forest paths and tracks were usually wet, so footprints were inevitably left behind, even though we always took a different route back to camp. As the weather turned colder, the situation improved temporarily. However, snow later fell and the problem of footprints became even more acute.

When the time came to move to the new camp, we arrived to find it had been destroyed. We were unable to find out how this had happened, but it was clear that the russians had discovered it. We were forced to set up a new camp elsewhere — we did so in early December.



Christmas 1946 arrived. On Christmas Eve, one of our groups — six men and one woman, all distant relatives — set off for the villages to visit their kin. I, too, dared to go out, as over that time I'd come to know and like quite a few people. This time I had only a pistol with me, although usually in the group I was responsible for carrying a German MG 42 machine gun. We set off after dark. I broke away from the others and, after about four kilometres, reached a house on the edge of the forest. That was where I intended to spend Christmas Eve.

At eleven o'clock in the evening, I was standing at the door of the cottage, listening in astonishment — I soon realised that machine-gun fire was echoing from the direction of our camp. With horror, I heard wave after wave of gunfire. I did not stay long at the farmstead; at midnight, I slipped away quietly. I crept cautiously for about four kilometres through the woods, then another two kilometres across the fields, until I reached another, more remote farmstead. What on earth had happened in the woods? I spent three days staying with various farmers, listening to rumours: *NKVD* forces clashed with the partisans; three were killed, whilst some managed to escape...

After a couple of days, I cautiously approached our forest camp. There I found the remaining comrades-in-arms — the

battle had taken place somewhere else. Two days before New Year's Eve, the partisans who had survived this clash returned. They told us more about this tragic story. It turned out that, that evening, the partisans had decided to stay at the Jancevičius farmstead, situated right on the edge of the forest. It was there, just before midnight, that the *NKVD* ambushed them. The soviets immediately started firing at the house. "Just imagine," said one of the fighters, "those *NKVD* cowards fired at the house for three hours, but still didn't dare go inside. Gradually, they ran out of ammunition and everything went quiet. Some of our men crawled eight hundred metres across the meadow to the edge of the forest and withdrew. However, the *NKVD* still did not storm the building. It was only the next day, at about five o'clock in the evening, that they brought in civilians and sent them into the house to check whether there were any partisans left there. The soviets only entered once the civilians had reported that only corpses remained..."

Little by little, we pieced together the sequence of events. Suspicion of betrayal was inevitable. But who had done it? And how? We speculated, but were unable to find any concrete evidence. Almost a month passed in this state of uncertainty.

It was only at the end of January 1947 that our liaisons in the villages learnt why



Partisans beside an above-ground bunker.

the NKVD raid had taken place on Christmas Eve. A young man from a neighbouring village wanted to meet a girl who lived on the farmstead where seven of our comrades were staying. He approached the door, but the girl would not let him in. At about eight o'clock in the evening he was still asking to be let in, and by midnight the NKVD had already been brought to the house. The Soviets opened fire — three of our fighters were killed in the hail of bullets, and the girl was arrested. We heard nothing more about her.

About three weeks later, after dark, one of our groups approached the traitor's house. Two brothers lived there, but only one was at home. He swore that it was not he who had betrayed us, but his brother, and he pointed out where the latter was hiding. Our men immediately surrounded the neighbouring farmstead and found the informer there. During questioning, after much denial, he confessed to having informed the Russians and to having led the NKVD officers through the woods himself to show them that farmstead. For the informer, this meant a death sentence...

On 27 April 1947, it was quite warm, and we were sitting quietly in front of our bunkers. Suddenly, without any warning,

one of my comrades pointed a pistol at me, cursed the Germans in Lithuanian and threatened to shoot me. I tried to move out of the way quickly, but I slipped and fell. My comrades grabbed the enraged man, disarmed him, tied his hands and tied him to a tree. As I fell, I dislocated my right shoulder. The pain was excruciating. All attempts to put the joint back in place were unsuccessful — no one in the forest was able to provide the necessary assistance.

My comrades were deeply outraged by this attack. They apologised and tried to comfort me, but I still felt dejected. As the only German in Genys' group, I had already spent more than a year there. During that time, I'd had no reason to complain — I was treated as an equal, just like any other fighter; to everyone, I was simply *Jurgis*.

But now I urgently needed a doctor. My comrades did not leave me to my fate and the next morning — 28 April 1947 — they accompanied me to a farmer's house, situated in a very remote spot amongst the woods. We had to walk about five or six kilometres. The men explained the situation to the farmer. He could see for himself that I was wearing a splint and in pain, so he immediately harnessed his horse and set off for the doctor in a small town fifteen

kilometres away. It was a huge risk; we all had to trust one another — us the farmer and the doctor, and the doctor the farmer and us. We remained at the farmstead, having posted a large guard. The wait seemed to last an eternity; as dusk was falling, the farmer returned, but, alas, alone. The disciple of Hippocrates had decided the risk was too great...

Everyone was disheartened. That night, I couldn't sleep a wink because of the excruciating pain. The next morning, the men set off for the surrounding villages for two days. I stayed at the camp. At night, my shoulder hurt even more than during the day. I could no longer handle a weapon — my right arm was, for the time being, completely useless.

The clayey soil of the plains in southwestern Lithuania drains poorly. As the ice melted slowly in spring, it was easy to leave footprints in the wet ground. Although the men always varied their routes, they could not avoid leaving traces. Consequently, spring brought new worries for my partisan comrades — to avoid being tracked down, they had to set up a new camp. In such a situation, I would have been nothing but a burden. I agreed with the commanders that, temporarily, until my arm had healed, I would go to stay with the people whom I was

staying with before joining the unit. It was very important that only three men knew about this. It was sad to leave my friends, who had genuinely looked after me. As I left, I left them a German MG 42 machine gun, but I kept my pistol.

At the Rimgailos' farm

I set off feeling sad; my arm was in a sling. My companions wished me luck, good health and a speedy return. I had to walk five kilometres to reach a farmer I knew. They gave me something to eat there. I then walked along the edge of the forest, taking a wide detour around the village — it was far too dangerous to risk taking the shorter route during the day. After walking another three kilometres, I reached the farmstead of my old acquaintances, the Rimgailos.

The dog barked, but upon hearing a whistle, recognised me — it was my old

friend, a sheepdog. I knocked gently on the window and they let me in. Only Mrs Rimgailienė and her son were at home.

These kind people were genuinely delighted to see me and wanted me to stay. They were curious to know what had happened; we talked at length about everything that had taken place since I'd joined Genys' group.

The Rimgailos' farmstead stood on a small hill, so the surroundings were clearly visible. However, it was also possible to see from the neighbours' yard who was coming or going here, even though the distance to the house was almost three hundred metres. So during the day I hid in the barn — I made myself a comfortable bed in the hay. My food was brought to me in a bucket intended for animal feed, so as not to arouse the suspicion of the neighbours, with whom the family had no contact.

My hand was healing slowly; I was tormented by fear for the future. Life had

changed drastically once again: I lacked direct support from the partisans and remained dependent on the farmers' mercy. The Rimgailos' kindness weighed heavily on my conscience — they couldn't support me indefinitely and risk the dangers that came with it.

Hiding in the barn all the time was far too dangerous. I needed to set up a more proper hiding place. The Rimgailos' youngest son, Kazimieras, came up with the idea of building such a hiding place in the peat store. It was a good idea, but a lot of hard work lay ahead — first of all, a large amount of peat had to be moved. With my injured arm, there was little I could do to help him. Once the peat had been cleared away, he built a small hiding place out of sturdy beams and thick planks — about seventy centimetres high, seventy centimetres wide and two metres long. Just big enough for a person to lie down in. When he'd finished, he piled the peat back on top of the shelter — to a height of about two metres — and left a



A house of Lithuanian farmers from the first half of the XX century.



Soviet soldiers next to discovered outdoor bunker. Photographed in 1952 in southern Lithuania.

small opening at the side through which one person could squeeze. He piled a heap of straw in front of this entrance. To hide there, I had to crawl through the straw and block the opening from the inside. From the outside, no one could tell that a hiding place had been set up there. In an extreme situation, this offered hope of survival.

I didn't have to wait long for such a situation, but, in an irony of fate, I was unable to make use of the new hiding place. One afternoon, the NKVD arrived at the neighbours' house. Mrs Rimgailienė heard a dog barking there — even the dogs didn't like the russians — recognised the danger, rushed out to the pasture and told us to hurry along with her. We ran another hundred and fifty metres or so to an inconspicuous little pile of straw lying in the field. She quickly pushed the straw aside, lifted a plank, pointed to the ladder that had been lowered, and urged: '*Jurgis*, quick, quick!' It was a potato pit. I hadn't even managed to climb all the way down before she'd already put the plank back in place. I heard the straw being shovelled on top, and a moment later I found myself two and a half metres underground, in complete darkness. Until then, I hadn't even suspected there was a potato pit here.

The soviets were already almost at the

farmstead — the woman barely managed to run back home. They looked around everywhere, tried to beg for some tobacco, inspected the almost empty granary and turned onto the path running about twenty metres from the potato pit that had become my hiding place. After lying in the darkness for half an hour, I heard my pursuers muttering as they passed overhead. The risk of being discovered by chance was high; once again, I had to admit that I'd been very lucky. Of course, the farmers were lucky too. One cannot overstate how much these ordinary people looked after me. In the post-war period, their lives, my goodness, were hard enough as it was, yet they still sacrificed themselves and risked everything for a soldier in hiding from a distant, powerless country.

Hideouts and bunkers

After this incident, I went into hiding with other people for a while. One day, when I dropped in on the Rimgailos again, their son Kazimieras surprised me by showing me a hiding place he had set up in the kitchen. It turned out that he had built the hiding place especially for me. At that time, the floors in Lithuanian

kitchens were usually made of clay, with a small cellar for vegetables underneath. In such cases, a pit about one metre deep and 2×2 m wide was dug. The walls were supported by split conifer logs; above them was a wooden platform, like a ceiling, into which a 60×60 cm hatch was fitted, through which one could climb down. People used to store a small portion of their potatoes and other vegetables in such cellars, whilst the bulk of the harvest remained outdoors, in potato pits, which I had to 'enjoy' for quite some time.

Kazimieras dug another pit next to this cellar, which was 1.80 m long, 60 cm wide and 60 cm deep. At night, whilst digging, he would take the excavated earth to the livestock pasture and dump it in the bushes. He lined the pit with planks and fitted a wooden ceiling as well. He coated the ceiling with clay, tamped it down and smoothed it so that it was indistinguishable from the floor.

To enter the hiding place, one first had to climb down into the potato cellar, lie down and push one half-log of spruce inwards, and then, whilst lying down, roll sideways into the hiding place. Once inside, the spruce log could be pushed back into its original position and secured with a wooden peg. Essentially, it was a good hiding place, devised by the young

man and realised through hard work. However, if anyone had climbed down and tapped the logs with a hammer, they would have immediately noticed that one of them sounded hollow. Nevertheless, in a real crisis situation, this hiding place proved its worth.

One afternoon, I happened to be in the kitchen when five NKVD men suddenly appeared. I had no chance of escaping, so I hurried down to the potato cellar, crawled into the hiding place and secured the pine half-log from the inside with a peg.

Immediately afterwards, they burst into the house, searched everything, including the attic, then sat down on a bench next to the stove and, as usual, asked for tobacco and milk. One of them kept tapping the clay floor with a stick, right where the ceiling of the hiding place was — there was only 30 cm of clay between me and the russian, and every blow struck straight at my frayed nerves. My heart was pounding so loudly that I thought it could be heard above, and this torment lasted an hour and a half. Fortunately, I didn't cough at that moment — that would have been the end of it. For me, and for the farmers.

When the russians finally moved on, the weight was lifted from my hosts' hearts even more than from mine — if they'd discovered the hiding place, they'd have had almost no chance of escaping. Wherever the soviets turned up, they were unwelcome guests.

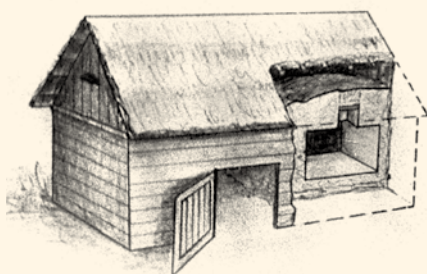
This ambiguous experience with the hiding place gave me the idea of building an outdoor bunker. In the summer, I would usually hide in pastures or small clearings in the woods anyway. Kazimieras liked this idea too.

However, before I could put it into practice, I received yet another unwelcome visit. At the time, I was setting up — or, to be more precise, building — a hiding place in the barn: a

long, deep burrow in the hay and straw. I had almost finished the hiding place, but hadn't yet managed to properly conceal the entrance. That was exactly what I was doing when suddenly a dog began to bark. Through the gaps in the wooden planks of the wall, I peered in that direction and saw about ten soviet soldiers marching towards the barn. They had a dog with them. There was no question of escape — the soviet dog and the marshy, waterlogged ground in the only possible escape route made it impossible.

I quickly shoved a few sheaves of grain into the entrance to the cave; the russian dog barked furiously. The farmer's wife, hearing the commotion, ran out into the yard. The NKVD men — through the cracks I could see the narrow waistbands

Partisans often set up hiding places in farmers' barns. The photographs show a typical barn from the first half of the XX century and a KGB diagram showing a cross-section of a hidden compartment.



Легенда:

1. Бункер обнаружен в деревне Микнюны Дебейской волости, поисковой группой при помощи щупов.
2. Бункер находился в сарае.
3. Устроен в соломе, вход в него был сделан сверху соломы и тщательно маскировался содержателем бункера.
4. В бункере захвачено 2 солдата.



of their uniform trousers, characteristic of the NKVD — stopped by the barn. One of them took a piece of paper from his top breast pocket and asked the farmer's wife for her surname in Russian. She told him. Then the officer in charge of the Soviets gave the order to search everything. My heart began to pound again, and cold sweat was literally pouring down my back. I had no hope whatsoever and thought that my end had come, but I was determined to make them pay dearly for it.

When I heard Russian voices near the entrance to my hideout, I was already holding my loaded German service pistol in my right hand. I was ready to fire the moment an NKVD officer's head appeared. Everything hung in the balance, but suddenly the voices fell silent — the Russian who had been closest to the entrance to the cave had, for some reason, stepped back. However, I had to rely on my hearing — I could see nothing. I could hear that the Russian was not alone in the shed; others were also loitering about.

The anxiety lasted for about half an hour. Then the whole group gathered again in the yard, where I could watch them through a gap in the planks. It was raining, and everyone was wrapped in

their tent covers. There was a brief discussion with the officer. The result was an order to check everything over once more: there's got to be a bandit here. The search began anew, and my hope that it was all over faded. Before long, something rustled in front of me again, and once more I had my pistol at the ready. This time, however, the Russian moved away a little faster, and the gang gathered in the yard once more. Another discussion. And then they took their dog by the lead and walked off...

It took an hour for me to calm down, then I crawled out of my hiding place in the hay and straw. It was already starting to get dark. It was clear that someone must have given us away. This was suggested both by the piece of paper in the NKVD officer's hands, bearing the farmer's name, and by the fact that the place had been searched twice. My guardians had been put through an immense ordeal, and they'd had to hide their fear and anxiety during the search. Speaking about what had just happened, I told them: 'I can't stay here any longer. For the time being, I won't go into any building or any shelter.'

I left that hospitable home in the dark. For several weeks, I hid in the woods and thickets by day, and at night I would visit

farmers I'd known since Antanas' group days, who would feed me. But this nighttime wandering was also dangerous. You could never be sure whether you'd bump into someone or whether you were being followed. All sorts of dangerous situations lurked behind my back. It was exhausting being alone all day; my mind was racing with thoughts.

Six weeks later, I felt drawn to visit the Rimgailos again. The dog recognised me straight away and came to greet me, wagging its tail. The Rimgailos beckoned me to come to the door, and there I was once more in that wonderfully warm kitchen. They prepared a meal for me and asked curiously where I'd been all that time. I told them everything and asked whether the NKVD had been round again. That hadn't happened.

At that time, the idea occurred to me to build a small bunker in the livestock pasture. I discussed this with Kazimieras, the 'bunker builder'. He wanted to consult his parents and, a few days later, gave me a positive answer. I explained to him that I would need thin planks and beams. He replied: 'Jurgis, I can only get these materials for you when I'm at the other farm



we're still managing.' Indeed, a few days later he brought me the materials I needed. The farmer also asked me to explain how I envisaged the bunker, and he approved my plan. However, he muttered: 'I hope everything goes well!' I shared that hope, but there is always a certain risk involved in any undertaking of this nature.

Now all that remained was to wait for the right opportunity. I only dared to start work during a full moon, as I could only work unnoticed at night — there was a path 100 metres away. My 'workplace' was not far from the spot where I had hidden from the NKVD in a potato pit. I often wished I could escape to a 'mouse hole', and the pyramids of grain stalks that the farmers had piled up after the harvest constantly provided me with a suitable hiding place where I could take shelter during the day. However, these piles of stubble only remained for a short time; later they were taken to the barn, and so I lost my outdoor hiding place.

At last, the full moon allowed me to start work. First, I removed the topsoil in patches, which I was later able to neatly lay back in place. Then I dug a pit 1.80 m long, 70 cm wide and 80 cm deep — lar-

ge enough for me to fit inside. I carted the excavated earth in a wheelbarrow to the edge of the pasture and spread it out amongst the bushes. That's what Kazimieras did too when he was digging a bunker in the kitchen. I usually worked until sunrise. Before returning to the barn, I would cover my work area with branches so that no one would notice it.

In the barn, lying on the hay, I would rest until someone from the Rimgailos family came by; they always brought me a little food. After 'breakfast', I would crawl into the old hiding place in the peat store. Tired and exhausted from the gruelling work, I would fall asleep immediately. As evening approached, I would emerge from the hiding place, go over to the barn, have something to eat, and get back to work until dawn.

Once the pit had been dug, I lined it with planks: first the walls, then the floor, and finally the ceiling. This ceiling had to be particularly sturdy, as it had to support the earth above. I left an opening measuring approximately 55×55 cm for the bunker hatch. Having finished this work, I covered everything with earth and neatly laid turf on top. I hammered

together a lid to close the hatch. I had to do this during the day, as I didn't dare to make a clattering noise with a hammer at night. I also covered the bunker hatch lid with earth and concealed it with turf; I threaded a thick wire through it, which was formed into a loop at the top so that it would be easy to grasp and lift the cover. I built the bunker's frame so that it tapered towards the top, meaning a smaller area would need to be camouflaged on the surface. Inside, my foxhole resembled a coffin and was reminiscent of the hiding place in Kazimieras's kitchen, which had already proved its worth once when the NKVD banged on with their sticks for an hour and a half, putting my nerves to the test. I kept watering the turf over the bunker so that everything would grow back thickly. After a few days, everything had settled so neatly that no one, even if they knew, would have spotted anything suspicious. Even the landlords had to search quite hard to find the spot. This night-time work took my mind off things and gave me a modest sense of security.

I felt blessed and considered it a miracle that I'd managed to build that hiding place at all, as my dislocated arm had healed in an awkward position. Although I could no longer handle a weapon properly, I was nonetheless able to work again, even though my shoulder began to ache once more after this construction work. But what is also important is that this night-time work took my mind off various troubling thoughts and gave me a modest sense of security. After so many troubled years, it was like a miracle.

However, very soon afterwards, a second, even greater miracle occurred: one night, my friends from Genys' group turned up again. Kazimieras, who had tracked me down, told me the news with great joy: 'Jurgi, your friends from the forest are here!' And indeed, waiting for me in the cottage were five partisans from Genys' group, brothers-in-arms I hadn't seen for a long time. With joy and pride, they handed me a letter. A letter from Germany, a letter from Bodensee [Lake Constance — translator's note], a real message from home! ■

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Continued in other issues of WARRIOR



Drawing by Ramūnas Vaitkus

Vegetables for Camouflage

By early 1952, the partisan resistance throughout Lithuania had weakened considerably and been severely depleted. Despite this, several strong partisan groups were still active in the forests of Dzūkija in the Dainava District. Not only did they prevent local party activists and collaborators from living in peace, but they also proved untraceable and invincible when conventional methods of combat — such as forest sweeps and searches for bunkers — were employed. Their core consisted of seasoned and experienced fighters, hardened by long years of struggle in the ranks of the partisans. They had learnt the lessons of secrecy; these groups avoided contact with anyone who aroused even the slightest suspicion, made almost no use of liaisons, and held out in well-equipped bunkers camouflaged in remote forest areas. Small partisan squads would suddenly appear as if out of nowhere and, having carried out punitive operations against the occupiers, would just as suddenly vanish into the depths of the forest. The biggest thorn in the MGB's side was the group led by partisan commander Petras Vaitkus-Genys.

All the MGB's efforts to eliminate Genys' group by any means came to nothing. Whilst the Vilnius MGB was drafting reprimands and warnings for its colleagues at the Varėna MGB, plans were being finalised in Moscow that were ultimately intended to crush the 'armed resistance of the bourgeois nationalists to Soviet rule in Lithuania'.

In May 1952, following a series of special operations, Genys' group's bunker was discovered, stormed and destroyed. A few days after the storming of the bunker, security officers from the Vilnius MGB, criticising their colleagues from Varėna, reproached them for the fact that right under their noses — 8 kilometres from Varėna — Genys' partisan group had been operating a bunker for a good year and a half; from there, the partisans not only organised daring attacks against Soviet and party activists, but, as if that were not enough, possessed a radio and had tilled patches next to the bunker in which they grew vegetables. The MGB described all this as brazen audacity. The MGB report makes no mention whatsoever of the 4-square-metre 'smoking room' fitted out in the bunker, probably because, after the vegetable beds, it no longer made such an impression on them.

Here, of course, we observe a particularly paradoxical situation in which, on the one hand, the partisans adhered to strict precautions and the rules of secrecy, whilst, on the other hand, they were completely at ease in the vicinity of the bunker.

Based on: 'Dainavos apygarda. Genio grupės partizanai' Dalius Žygelis. KARYS 2013, No. 6.