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

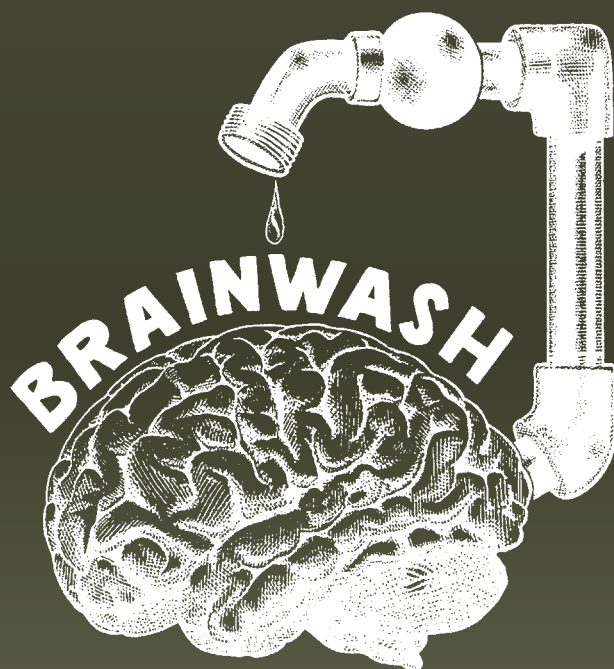
Dear WARRIOR readers,

The country's defence planning and the implementation of measures designed to ensure national security are certainly not, and never have been, based on flashy, sensationalist journalistic reports, screaming headlines designed to attract clicks, or 'Google-translated' texts on news sites labelled as 'articles'. Similarly, the public comments of 'experts' of all stripes have absolutely nothing to do with the country's defence or national security; these are flooding our media in a veritable deluge, appearing on the aforementioned websites, on television and across social media.

Lithuanian society is also being bombarded with similar intensity by sensationalist headlines, readily released into the public domain, claiming that Russia is about to attack this or that European Union country, or that the Kremlin is planning to carry out attacks in the very near future that would undermine the fundamental principles of NATO, and so on.

There's nothing to be done about it – when the 'war experts' have proliferated so much so as to even exceed in number the 'basketball coaches' here in Lithuania, it is hardly worth hoping for a prevalence of cool, sober judgement, or even a significant presence of such thinking in the public sphere. However, every time one reads a sensational or apocalyptic headline and listens to yet another 'expert's insight', it is advisable, first and foremost, to reflect on the responsibility of the latter for the euphoria or panic which an enemy – who certainly does not disclose his plans – so easily sows among us – by our very own hands.

Sincerely,
Darius Varanavičius
Chief Editor



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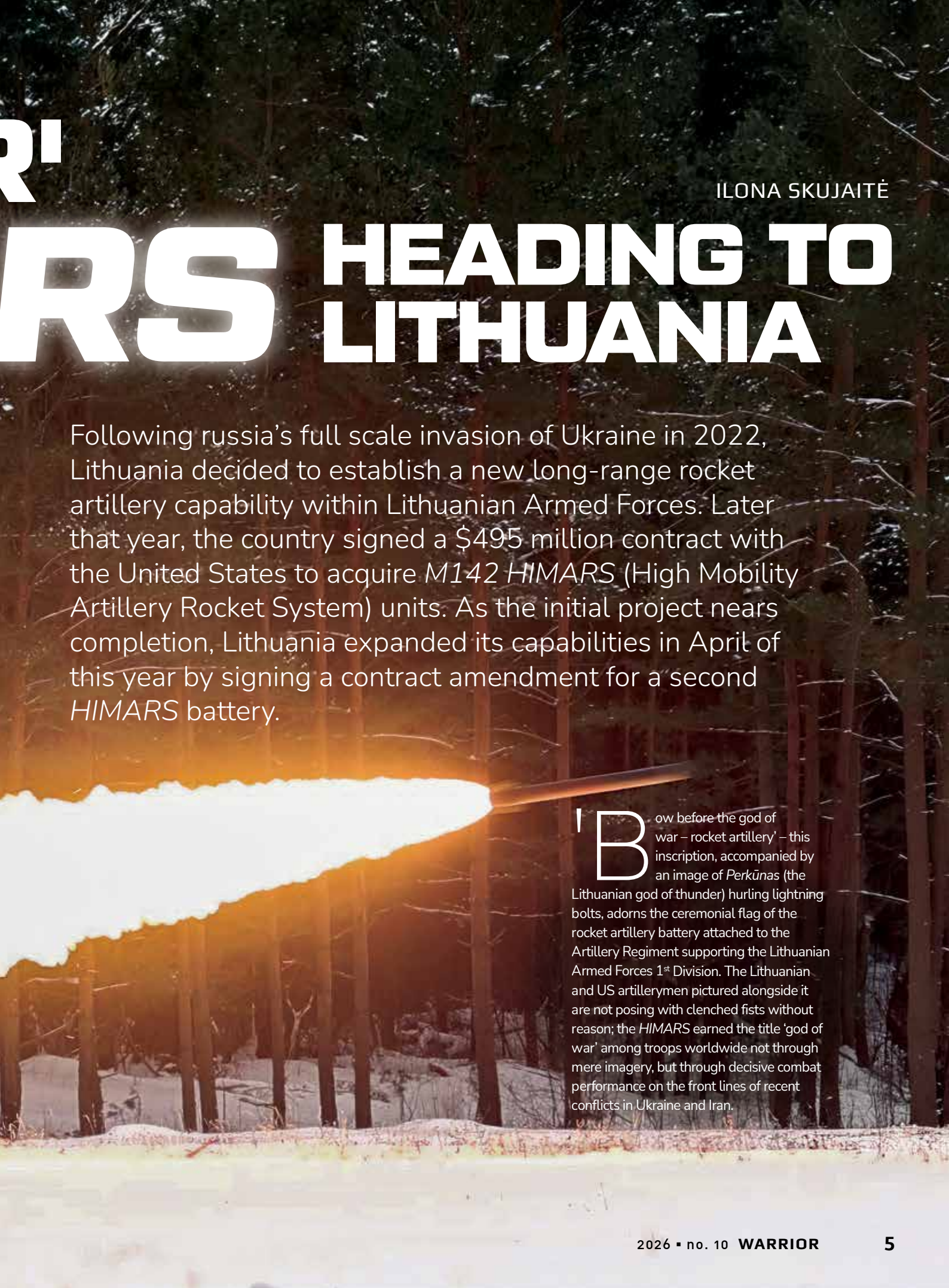


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'GOD OF WAR' HIMAN





R' **RS** HEADING TO LITHUANIA

ILONA SKUJAITĖ

Following Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Lithuania decided to establish a new long-range rocket artillery capability within Lithuanian Armed Forces. Later that year, the country signed a \$495 million contract with the United States to acquire *M142 HIMARS* (High Mobility Artillery Rocket System) units. As the initial project nears completion, Lithuania expanded its capabilities in April of this year by signing a contract amendment for a second *HIMARS* battery.

Bow before the god of war – rocket artillery' – this inscription, accompanied by an image of *Perkūnas* (the Lithuanian god of thunder) hurling lightning bolts, adorns the ceremonial flag of the rocket artillery battery attached to the Artillery Regiment supporting the Lithuanian Armed Forces 1st Division. The Lithuanian and US artillerymen pictured alongside it are not posing with clenched fists without reason; the *HIMARS* earned the title 'god of war' among troops worldwide not through mere imagery, but through decisive combat performance on the front lines of recent conflicts in Ukraine and Iran.

Early in the war in Ukraine – around mid-2022 – the *HIMARS* systems supplied to the Ukrainians by the United States fundamentally changed the dynamics on the battlefield; they forced the Russian hordes to retreat and prompted a reshape of the role of rocket artillery in modern warfare. At the time, the Russian offensive relied largely on Soviet doctrine, utilizing massive, centralized ammunition and fuel depots established relatively close to the front line – at railway junctions or in large warehouses – to sustain continuous, heavy artillery fire. By firing precision-guided 227 mm GMLRS (Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System) rockets – capable of destroying targets with high accuracy at ranges of 70–80 km – and 610mm ATACMS (Army Tactical Missile System) missiles – capable of striking targets with high precision at ranges of up to 300 km – the Ukrainians destroyed these gigantic depots and disrupted

The *HIMARS* multiple rocket launcher system helped turn the tide of the war in Ukraine's favor.



Maj. Justinas Čekanauskas, Rocket Artillery Battery Commander of the 1st Lithuanian Division Artillery Regiment.

the entire logistics chain. The Russians were forced to disperse their logistics and command centres, moving supplies and command functions deeper into the rear (often more than 100 km

away); this drastically slowed the resupply of frontline units and reduced the intensity of Russian artillery fire.

In the summer and autumn of 2022, Ukrainian forces utilized *HIMARS* rockets to destroy not only supply depots but also strategic command posts, high-level headquarters, and barracks across occupied territories, including the Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions. Precision strikes on command centres severely disrupted the Russian chain of command and demoralized its military leadership. This sowed chaos among frontline units, which, at critical moments, were left entirely cut off from higher command. In preparation for the liberation of Kherson in the autumn of 2022, a small number of *HIMARS* systems systematically targeted and crippled railway network hubs and all bridges across the Dnipro River (most notably the Antonivka Bridge). This completely eliminated the logistical capacity to supply Russian forces on the right bank, ultimately forcing their retreat.

Overall, the very fact that Ukraine received a weapon capable of precisely striking targets deep behind enemy lines shifted the moral and tactical balance of the war: the Ukrainians gained confidence, while the occupiers lost their sense of security anywhere within approximately 200 km of the front line. 'Although *HIMARS* systems were used prior to the war in Ukraine, it was there that



this American multiple rocket launcher system demonstrated its greatest impact', said Maj. Justinas Čekanauskas, commander of the Rocket Artillery Battery of the 1st Lithuanian Division Artillery Regiment. 'The *HIMARS* system was designed to be as lightweight and mobile as possible, especially when compared to its tracked counterpart, the *M270 MLRS*. Before the war in Ukraine, the US military employed *HIMARS* in Afghanistan: the systems and missiles would be airlifted to a designated location, carry out their mission, and then be returned to a secure area – or they would fire immediately from safe zones protected by air defence systems. In Ukraine, however, *HIMARS* was utilized in a completely different way; there was no secure operating environment, so the crews had to learn to manoeuvre in a manner that preserved both the systems and their own lives. Unlike tracked vehicles or heavy towed howitzers, the truck-based *HIMARS* system can move easily along roads: the crew simply arrives at a position, fires a salvo of up to six precision rockets within minutes, and instantly departs the site before the enemy can organize return fire'.

Rocket Artillery: A Powerful Deterrent

Prior to acquiring *HIMARS*, the Lithuanian military lacked long-range precision rocket artillery. The decision to acquire such weaponry was driven by key strategic, military, and geopolitical considerations. It was not merely an effort to modernize the Lithuanian Armed Forces, but a vital necessity to counter entirely new regional security threats – challenges further underscored by the war in Ukraine.

Possessing a weapon capable of precisely striking targets at extended ranges – up to 70–80 km with *GMLRS* rockets, up to 300 km with *ATACMS* missiles, and up to 500 km with latest-generation *PrSM* (Precision Strike Missile) munitions – enables the destruction of enemy forces before they can even approach national defensive lines. Experience from Ukraine has demonstrated that such systems



The *HIMARS* ACQUISITION DEAL

In late 2022, the US Government and the Defence Materiel Agency under the Ministry of National Defence of Lithuania signed a contract for the acquisition of *HIMARS* systems. Under this agreement, the Lithuanian Armed Forces was to receive launchers with both live and training ammunition, training equipment, and gear required for system maintenance, as well as services for personnel training and the systems' deployment and integration into NATO's long-range defence network. In April 2026, an amendment to the contract was signed by both parties regarding the acquisition of a second battery of *HIMARS*. The new document stipulates the purchase of additional launchers for the Lithuanian Armed Forces, along with live and training ammunition – comprising sets of guided missiles with varying types and combat capabilities – as well as command and communications equipment, a logistics support package, and a training package.

'*HIMARS* is an American mobile artillery system that has proven its worth in the war in Ukraine and is utilized by 14 NATO and partner nations', stated Robertas Kaunas, the Minister of National Defence. 'Under the contract, our US allies had committed to delivering the first battery this year, but the timeline has been pushed back by a few months into next year. Nevertheless, we continue to invest in the future to further strengthen the country's defence capabilities, enemy deterrence, and our ability to defend the Eastern Flank alongside our allies'. The combined value of the contracts for the first and second *HIMARS* batteries stands at approximately 778 million US dollars, with the contract executed by the US aerospace and defence company 'Lockheed Martin'. The acquired rocket artillery system is fully compatible with other technologies operated by the Lithuanian Armed Forces, streamlining its integration into existing defence plans and directly reinforcing regional deterrence. In anticipation of the first *HIMARS* battery's arrival, Lithuanian military personnel have been undergoing rigorous preparation, supported by advanced training delivered by a US *HIMARS* unit currently deployed in Lithuania. Over the past three years, Lithuania has purchased approximately €2 billion worth of weaponry and equipment from the United States and is the largest buyer of US arms among the Baltic States. Lithuania is also purchasing *Javelin* anti-tank missile systems, *JLTV* armoured vehicles, *Black Hawk* helicopters, *HIMARS* rocket artillery systems, *AMRAAM* missiles for *NASAMS* medium-range air defence systems, and more from the United States.

Information credit: Ministry of National Defence

can strike enemy command posts, logistics hubs, ammunition depots, and troop staging areas at critical moments; for Lithuania, that capability denies a potential aggressor the opportunity to safely mass forces near our borders.

Moreover, the acquisition of *HIMARS* serves as a strategic deterrent not only for our country but also for NATO's Eastern Flank along the Baltic coast; these multiple-launch rocket systems are being purchased by Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland alike, collectively creating immense regional deterrence potential. Standardized procurement enables neighbouring countries to effectively coordinate actions, share intelligence, conduct joint exercises, and ensure unified logistics and technical support – such as through the establishment of regional maintenance hubs.

Furthermore, purchasing this weaponry from the United States via the US government's Foreign Military Sales program ensures full interoperability with other NATO allies. This is crucial, as modern long-range rocket artillery operate in tandem with advanced reconnaissance, unmanned aerial vehicles, electronic warfare capabilities, and integrated NATO fire-control networks capable of transmitting highly precise target coordinates to execute strikes in record time.



The Lithuanian Armed Forces acquired not only the *HIMARS* systems themselves but also several types of rockets: *GMLRS* and *ATACMS*.

The Lithuanian Armed Forces has acquired not only the *HIMARS* platforms themselves but also several types of munitions: *GMLRS* and *ATACMS*. 'The *GMLRS* has an operational range of up to 70–80 km with a 90 kg warhead, while the *ATACMS* has a range of up to 300 km with a 225 kg warhead. In terms of explosive payload, a single *ATACMS* missile is more des-

tructive than a single *GMLRS* rocket; however, a *GMLRS* launch pod holds six rockets, all of which can be fired in rapid succession or at six separate targets', commented Maj. J. Čekanauskas. 'Furthermore, the Americans have developed an even newer, longer-range rocket artillery missile – the *PrSM* – which, when launched from a *HIMARS* unit, can strike targets 500 km away;

There are still vacancies – ranging from the rank of Junior Private to Senior Sergeant – in the newly formed rocket artillery battery.



these missiles come in pairs per launch pod. The Americans report that the *PrSM* has already been successfully tested in Iran. To my knowledge, Lithuania has already expressed interest in acquiring them as soon as the US decides to export this ammunition to allied nations'.

The Establishment of a Rocket Artillery Battery

The formation of the Lithuanian Armed Forces rocket artillery battery commenced in 2024. The initial steps involved selecting soldiers for the *HIMARS* crews and training fire control specialists to coordinate, direct, and relay target data. Concurrently, position reconnaissance teams were established to identify and select optimal locations to maximize crew survivability. It was also essential to train technical maintenance personnel for system maintenance, alongside ammunition specialists to manage and test missiles, ensuring missions are executed timely, accurately, and with the appropriate munitions.

Regarding soldiers' motivation, Battery Commander Maj. J. Čekanauskas emphasized that the opportunity to work with advanced weaponry is the primary draw: 'During the selection process, we speak with everyone who expresses a desire to join the *HIMARS* unit, as it is crucial to understand each soldier's expectations, goals, areas for improvement, length of service, experience, values, physical fitness, teamwork skills, English language proficiency, and drive for self-improvement. While prior service in artillery or air defence is a major advantage for joining our unit, the ability to work as part of a team is equally important. We place the greatest emphasis on this, as other skills can be learned'.

The rocket artillery battery currently being formed has open positions ranging from Private to Senior Sergeant, and interested candidates are invited to contact the unit's leadership to arrange an interview. 'A diverse range of positions is currently

HIMARS ROCKETS

GMLRS

(Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System)

- Type: High-precision guided rocket
- Operational Range: 70–92 km (standard) up to 150 km (the new *ER-GMLRS* variant)
- Warhead: Approx. 90 kg (High-explosive fragmentation or Alternative Warhead with tungsten pellets)
- Guidance: Inertial Navigation System (INS) integrated with GPS
- Capacity: 6 rockets per launch pod container

ATACMS

 (Army Tactical Missile System)

- Type: Tactical ballistic missile
- Operational Range: Up to 300 km
- Warhead: 225–500 kg (depending on the variant – cluster or unitary warhead)
- Guidance: INS integrated with GPS
- Capacity: 1 unit per launch pod container

PrSM

 (Precision Strike Missile)

- Type: Next-generation, high-precision tactical ballistic missile (direct successor to *ATACMS*)
- Operational Range: Approx. 500 km
- Warhead: Approx. 91 kg (optimized high-energy blast-fragmentation warhead)
- Guidance: Advanced INS integrated with GPS
- Capacity: 2 missiles per launch pod container (due to a reduced missile diameter).





open, enabling personnel to select roles aligned with their capabilities, preferences and rank. Our objective is optimal placement, ensuring individual experience enhances unit readiness while supporting professional development. Selected soldiers receive specialized training: certain roles require proficiency in driving, technical systems, or communications; others emphasize mathematical computations; some focus on missile mechanics; while others specialize in equipment diagnostics and maintenance', Maj. J. Čekanauskas explained.

When asked what it means to him personally as an officer to build a rocket artillery battery from scratch and serve as its first commander, Maj. J. Čekanauskas expressed a profound sense of pride in shaping this new capability and building the team from the ground up. However, he emphasized that his current priority is not career advancement, but rather establishing an operational HIMARS unit equipped to execute specific missions and integrate seamlessly into both the Lithuanian Armed Forces and the international rocket artillery community.

Close Cooperation with the United States

To ensure the seamless integration of HIMARS systems in Lithuania, intensive cooperation with US counterparts has been underway since 2023. Initial

training for the Lithuanian artillerymen in the US took place even before the rocket artillery battery was officially formed; at that time, soldiers were serving in other units and joined the battery upon their return. 'Personnel training presents a significant challenge because the country does not yet possess its own HIMARS systems; consequently, we cannot conduct training or prepare specialists ourselves and are heavily reliant on our allies. Nevertheless, it is gratifying to see that we are making excellent progress, as the Americans are eager to train and integrate us, and even assess how well we are mastering the material and handling our tasks. We are highly regarded among US rocket artillery units, having earned a strong reputation over the past couple of years for our professional and dedicated service, as well as for the hospitality we show US troops when they arrive in Lithuania for joint exercises', emphasized Maj. J. Čekanauskas.

Over three years of close partnership with US artillery personnel – including HIMARS crews and their support units – the battery has conducted numerous joint exercises, specialized training, and live-fire drills. 'Although the learning curve is steep, with the right desire, enthusiasm, and determination – coupled with a great team – everything is possible, often sooner than expected.

HIMARS live-fire exercises involving US and Lithuanian artillery units have already taken place in Lithuania on several occasions.





According to Maj. J. Čekanauskas, over the course of two years, the soldiers of the rocket artillery battery earned the respect and a stellar reputation among US rocket artillery units for their professional, conscientious service and their hospitality toward US troops during joint exercises.

For instance, live-fire exercises into the Baltic Sea have already been conducted in Lithuania three times. During these drills, our soldiers initially worked alongside US artillerymen but later operated independently, under US supervision. Furthermore, the US Army's V Corps headquarters and the 41st Field

Artillery Brigade, stationed in Germany, regularly integrate us into their operations, helping us rapidly master the HIMARS systems and critical associated equipment', said Maj. J. Čekanauskas.

The battery commander highlighted last summer's month-long BALTOPS exercises as a standout experience. 'That

was when we saw HIMARS employed in a real-world scenario. A command post was established within Brigadier General Motiejus Pečiulionis Artillery Battalion to plan missions, while the HIMARS platforms themselves were rapidly deployed across borders under the official mission designation HI-RAIN





Lithuanian and US troops have conducted live-fire exercises targeting the Baltic Sea on numerous occasions.

(HIMARS Rapid Infiltration). In Lithuania, these systems and their ammunition were escorted to the Palanga Airport by our battery's troops and the Military Police, then loaded onto aircraft bound for Latvia, Romania or Poland. It was a complex, highly coordinated operation that clearly demonstrated how a planning centre can be located in Lithuania while the systems successfully execute fire missions in other NATO countries. These exercises showcased

the exceptional mobility of the HIMARS and ability to decentralize command without sacrificing effectiveness'.

The Lithuanian troops have frequently conducted live-fire exercises into the Baltic Sea alongside American forces. These drills utilize training ammunition – specifically, rockets without explosive warheads. 'The process works like this: troops launch the training rocket exactly as they would a live GMLRS round, except it does not link to satellites or

rely on GPS guidance. It is essentially a ballistic shot, similar to firing a 155 mm shell from a *Panzerhaubitze 2000*. The fire control centre or the HIMARS crew itself calculates the trajectory, and the rocket flies toward the designated target, with training rockets having a range of 9 to 15 kilometres. Firing live rockets is far more expensive; furthermore, we currently lack the facilities in Lithuania to safely launch them at their full 80-kilometer range', noted Maj. J. Čekanauskas.

During a notable phase of the BALTOPS exercise, HIMARS systems were rapidly airlifted from Lithuania to other NATO countries.



The Most Important Lesson of the War in Ukraine: Survivability.

The rocket artillery battery is currently being integrated into the structure of the newly forming Artillery Regiment. According to Maj. J. Čekanauskas, the process is progressing successfully but remains challenging, as both the regiment and the battery are new units being built from scratch. This requires not only selecting and training specialists but also establishing command and control procedures, while simultaneously ensuring interoperability with NATO allies through joint exercises.

To master and refine *HIMARS* operational procedures, it is necessary to evaluate lessons learned not only from the war in Ukraine but also from experiences in Iran, while relying fundamentally on American manuals and standards. 'When it comes to tactics,



we aren't reinventing the wheel; we are simply preparing as best we can for the arrival and integration of the *HIMARS* launchers to ensure a smooth transition. Of course, the current operational environment is highly dynamic, but with the assistance of the US and neighbour-

ing allies, I believe we will achieve our goals properly and on schedule. We regularly analyse US-prepared reports on *HIMARS* combat employment, the destruction of high-value targets, survivability challenges, and lessons learned – applying this data when de-

The bloody lessons of the war in Ukraine are saving lives elsewhere – soldiers from the rocket artillery battery are constantly consulting with Ukrainians on how to enhance the battlefield survivability of *HIMARS* crews.



veloping our own procedures and analysing potential deployment scenarios', stated Maj. J. Čekanauskas.

Regarding innovations, the rocket artillery battery commander notes that it is crucial not only to possess the weapon system, ammunition, and command element, but also to adapt to evolving modern demands. Currently, the most significant shifts are occurring in data and order transmission methods. For instance, with the rollout of 'Starlink' satellite communications, traditional radio equipment is becoming secondary due to its higher susceptibility to enemy detection.

According to Maj. J. Čekanauskas, developing this new Lithuanian military capability requires extensive consultation with the Ukrainians, as currently the Ukrainian Armed Forces are the most advanced in terms of HIMARS crew survivability – an area involving four key aspects: 'First, it is essential to ensure maximum tactical mobility for the systems: we cannot simply sit in a

field waiting; instead, we must move as fast as possible and avoid revealing our positions and routes. Logistics support must also be mobile – ammunition depots cannot be concentrated in a single location; missiles must be distributed across multiple logistical points'.

The second aspect is camouflage. 'It is vital to utilize the natural environment – such as forest cover or urban terrain – as well as hangars and warehouses to provide aerial concealment, given that drones currently pose the primary threat, as seen in Ukraine. This threat can also be countered through the use of camouflage netting, including both standard and thermal-reflective types that prevent detection by thermal imaging systems', stated the battery commander.

The third key element involves deception measures. 'I have personally seen inflatable HIMARS decoys that look identical to real systems from the air; when lightly camouflaged, they are nearly indistinguishable.

Consequently, the enemy wastes ammunition and drones targeting decoys, which directly helps our crews survive. The Ukrainians successfully employ similar tactics by deploying mock-ups and setting up dummy positions under netting', explained Maj. J. Čekanauskas.

Finally, the fourth factor enhancing survivability is integrated air support and air defence. This encompasses counter-drone measures, including drone jamming devices and early-warning systems that detect incoming threats, allowing the crew to make timely decisions. According to the rocket artillery battery commander, electronic warfare assets are highly effective – as seen in Ukraine – not only for jamming enemy drones or command posts but also for locating and neutralizing adversary electronic warfare systems, thereby enabling friendly forces to survive, advance, or hold their positions. 'In summary, while no single measure can maximize survivability, achieving the best result requires employing them all simultaneously', asserted Maj. J. Čekanauskas. ■

The entire Eastern Flank of NATO – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland – has collectively acquired HIMARS systems, significantly bolstering their border defense.



Photo credits: Sgt. Spec. Karolis Kavolėlis, Rocket artillery battery archive, U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center, manufacturer 'Lockheed Martin'.

EUROPEAN HIMARS INITIATIVE

This program, established and led by the US Army's V Corps, is designed for NATO allies that currently operate or plan to acquire American *HIMARS* multiple-launch rocket systems. The US 41st Field Artillery Brigade, stationed in Germany, serves as the primary organizer of related conferences and events.

The key features, objectives, and activities of this initiative encompass several essential areas:

- **Interoperability and integration.** Standardizes long-range artillery capabilities across NATO nations by bringing together artillery experts, military leaders, and operators from over ten allied countries for leadership summits, tactical briefings, and specialized training cycles, ensuring seamless cooperation among multinational forces.
- **Training and practical experience.** Provides staff specialist training and operational embeds, allowing Allied officers and soldiers to integrate directly into US Army *HIMARS* battalions and units, such as the 41st Field Artillery Brigade.
- **Multi-domain integration.** Synchronizes activities with broader regional initiatives – such as Poland's 'Apache' initiative – to combine long-range precision fires with advanced attack aviation.
- **Eastern flank and Baltic countries readiness.** Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland actively leverage this framework to prepare for the arrival of their own *HIMARS* systems. US troops are already conducting joint exercises and live-fire drills at regional ranges, thereby strengthening deterrence against potential aggression on NATO's Eastern Flank.

European Production Relocation and Industrial Support

Alongside this military initiative, and to reduce reliance on US supply chains, major Western defence companies (such as 'Lockheed Martin' and 'Rheinmetall') are expanding cooperation to establish production and maintenance centres for *HIMARS* munitions – specifically *GMLRS* and *ATACMS* missiles – directly in Europe.

This process is reinforced by developing regional infrastructure, including Europe's first support centre for the *HIMARS* and *M270* Common Fire Control System in Finland, alongside joint manufacturing initiatives in which Lithuania has expressed an interest in participating.

1939:



'FRIENDSHIP SEALED IN BLOOD'

DARIUS SUTKUS



On September 1, 1939, German forces invaded neighbouring Poland. This aggression was preceded by a 'false flag' operation staged the previous day, during which a detachment of German saboteurs, disguised in Polish uniforms, assaulted the radio station in Gleiwitz (present – day Gliwice). Later, journalists famously dubbed SS-*Sturmbannführer* Alfred

Naujocks, who led the saboteurs, 'the man who started World War II'.

The War Begins

In reality, at that time, no one yet expected this conflict to escalate into a world war. A. Naujocks, who led the sabotage operation, was merely the technical executor of a rather crudely staged provocation. A week before the Gleiwitz operation, Adolf Hitler declared to his generals: 'I shall provide a propaganda *casus belli*. Its credibility does not matter. No one asks the victor whether he told the truth'.

German soldiers are toppling the Polish border barrier. The soviets will do exactly the same thing seventeen days later.



Had it not been for the Gleiwitz incident, another pretext for war would have been found. The signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had given Hitler a completely free hand, yet he wanted to launch and conclude the *Blitzkrieg* against Poland as quickly as possible, before the weather deteriorated.

The pre-prepared 'White Plan' (ger. 'Fall Weiss') was immediately activated. Under this plan, Poland was to be methodically crushed, and the Third Reich was exceptionally well-prepared for the campaign. German forces had long been secretly preparing to overturn the Treaty of Versailles. Unsurprisingly, they were ready not for the warfare of the past, but for modern combat, dictating the terms on the battlefield.

The Poles offered fierce resistance. Despite stubborn fighting, the Polish army was forced to retreat to the final major defensive line to protect the capital city of Warsaw.

As early as the first week of the successful offensive, the German leadership began urging Lithuania through diplomatic channels to retake the Polish-occupied territories by force of arms. Playing the 'Vil-

nius card' was a trump move that, in the German view, the Lithuanians would be unable to refuse. However, the government at the time, led by General Jonas Černius, did not approve the military plan to retake Vilnius – despite the enthusiasm of the public and the Armed Forces – falling just one vote short of adoption.

A Blow from the East

At the time, the Soviet Union (USSR) was stalling, feigning complete neutrality in the conflict. However, the reality was different: by September 11, the Belarussian Front had been formed from three armies, and on September 15, its military command issued Order No. 1: 'The Belarussian Front army <...> is launching an offensive with the mission of acting in concert with the insurgent workers and peasants of Belarus and Poland to overthrow the rule of landowners and capitalists'. No workers in Poland rose up. Rather, the time had simply come for the USSR to claim its share of the spoils – a portion of the neighbouring country's territory. Convinced that the British and French would not come to Poland's aid, Moscow concluded a ceasefire with Japan on September 16 – thereby securing its eastern flank – and then struck Poland, which was already defending itself against the Germans, from the east.

At 6 a.m. on September 17, red



Unlike the Nazis, the Soviets portrayed themselves not as occupiers, but as liberators. However, their invasion was a treacherous stab in the back. It is likely that, had they not been attacked from the rear, the Poles would have held out much longer, and the World War II might not have escalated.



army units attacked Polish territory along the entire front – from Polotsk in the north to Kamianets-Podilskyi in the south. More than 600 000 troops, supported by nearly 4 000 tanks, were deployed in the invasion.

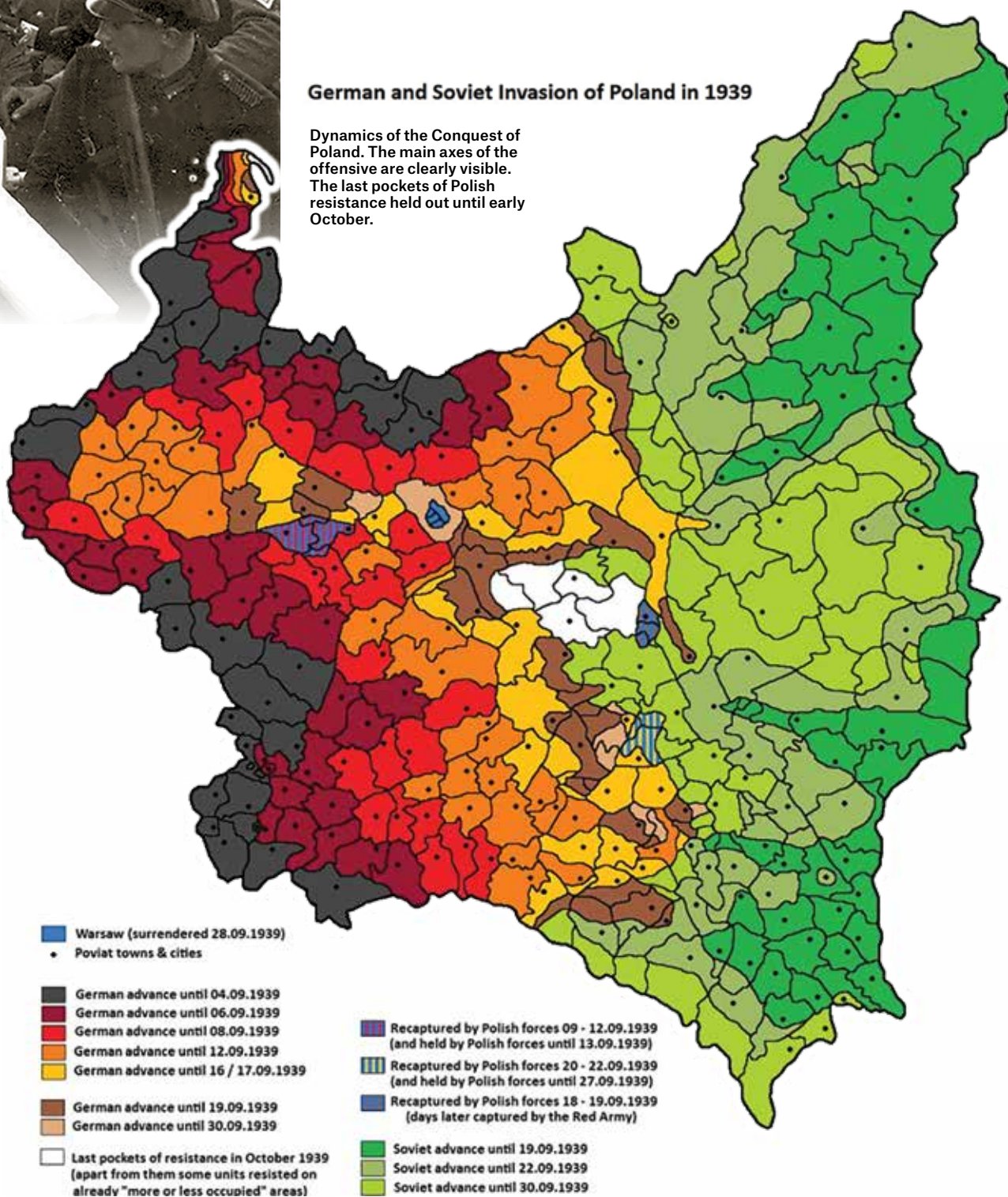
War was not officially declared. This action directly violated the non-aggression pact signed between the USSR and

Poland in 1932, which stipulated that the USSR would not assist a third-party attacking Poland, and vice versa.

The soviet foreign ministry did not simply bypass this obligation; it bulldozed right over it. Just two hours after the invasion began, the Polish envoy, summoned to the ministry, was handed a note stating: 'Poland, as a state and a

German and Soviet Invasion of Poland in 1939

Dynamics of the Conquest of Poland. The main axes of the offensive are clearly visible. The last pockets of Polish resistance held out until early October.





On September 20 in Pruzhany, during their first contact, *Kombrig* Semyon Krivoshein meets with German delegates. As he himself wrote, they were later served 'thick borscht and Caucasian shashlik'.

government, has effectively ceased to exist. Consequently, all treaties concluded between the USSR and Poland have also ceased to be valid. <...> Nor can the soviet government remain indifferent to the fact that Ukrainians and Belarusians living on Polish territory have been abandoned to their fate and find themselves in a helpless situation. Therefore, the soviet government has instructed the red army command to cross the border and protect the lives and property of the inhabitants of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus. At the same time, the soviet government intends to take all measures to liberate the Polish people from the war into which they were dragged by their unwise leaders, and to give them the opportunity to live in peace'.

This was entirely untrue: at the time, the Polish government was still functioning, and its army was still fighting. The envoy lodged a fierce protest and refused to accept the cynical document. Nevertheless, the soviet courier delivered the note to the Polish diplomatic mission anyway – a twisted nod to bureaucratic formality. The 'red avalanche' that poured into Polish territory did not have to engage in high-intensity combat. The eastern border was guarded by a mere 12 000 troops from the Polish Border Protection Corps, armed only with light infantry weapons. Poland's main forces were already fully engaged against the Germans, making a war on two fronts an impossible task.

In the Footsteps of the One Brigade

One of the red army units that crossed the Polish border that morning was the 29th Separate Light Tank Brigade, previously stationed near Bobruisk in the Belorussian Special Military District. Having received its operational orders, the brigade had already moved into staging positions west of Slutsk on the eve of the offensive. Its roughly 250 tanks quickly overcame the resistance of Polish border guards, and the column of vehicles, led by Brigade Commander (*Kombrig*) Semyon Krivoshein, rolled onward.

The dust-covered tanks made a temporary halt in Baranovichi. After a brief rest, the 'liberators' moved further southwest, and by the evening of September 19, the tank crews were already refuelling in the small town of Pruzhany.

Early the next morning, a reconnaissance unit was sent forward. It returned accompanied by an entire squad of German soldiers. Based on the data gathered by the scouts, S. Krivoshein prepared a report: 'The reconnaissance unit made contact with German army units moving from Brest-Litovsk toward Siemiatycze. <...> Battalion Commissar Borovensky was invited to headquarters, where he was briefed on the situation and given a map. A German delegation – two officers and six soldiers – arrived with Borovensky. We welcomed them with a military band and provided a meal. They are requesting that a delegate be sent to their headquarters. The brigade is ready to depart. The equipment has been inspected, the troops are rested and in high spirits, and everyone is eager to move forward'.

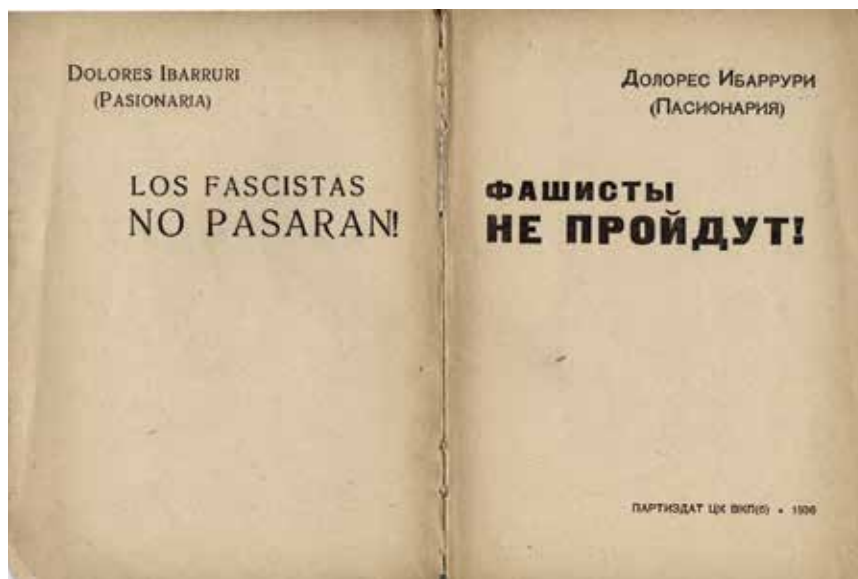
During the night of September 21, an order arrived from the 4th Army commander: remain in Pruzhany for the time being, but dispatch a tank battalion and a motorized rifle company toward Brest-Litovsk (now Brest). This meant the unit in question would have to undertake a continuous march of over a hundred kilometres. Could the light tanks cover this distance? With a full fuel tank, a T-26 light tank had a range of only 90 kilometres, and the local roads were poor... Moreover, the greater part of the march would take place under the cover of darkness. The recommended column

speed was 18–22 km/h, and the pace would have to slow down even further at night. And what if someone strayed from the route in the dark or suffered a breakdown? In short, time was running out!

The New Allies

There was another circumstance – not so much menacing as unusual. The soldiers of S. Krivoshein's brigade would be coming face to face not with Polish troops, but with actual Nazis – the very same kind, marked by swastikas and distinctive steel helmets, that every USSR citizen saw daily on posters and in caricatures. Until very recently, German fascism had been portrayed in the soviet press as a global evil, with Germans depicted as grotesque and terrifying figures. S. Krivoshein himself had fought in the Spanish Civil War just three years earlier – on the side of the reds and against fascism, of course.

Now, suddenly, everything was turned upside down – the newspaper 'Pravda' no longer published anti-German articles. Even the film 'Alexander Nevsky', released the previous year with strong anti-German (and even anti-na-



Citizens of the USSR were convinced that nazism was an absolute evil. After the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, the communist party of the USSR changed its rhetoric.

zi) undertones, vanished from theatres. Moreover, this was happening at the highest political level. Less than a month earlier, Stalin himself had raised a glass and, addressing a visiting German delegation at the kremlin, declared: 'I know how deeply the German people love their *Führer*, so I wish to drink to his health'.

However, collective mindsets do not change so quickly. Therefore, as a pre-

caution, The USSR people's commissariat for defence issued order No. 3373 on September 18: 'Units of our group must be notified as soon as possible that <...> German delegations are to be received courteously by our forces, consequently, commanders and political officers must be appointed in all our divisions, regiments, and tank brigades to conduct negotiations with delegations from

The soviet leadership permitted contact with the Germans only for its forward units. Yet there was no shortage of contact – photographs show soviet and nazi soldiers interacting with complete ease.



German units. During these negotiations, it must be determined which points are to be vacated by the Germans and occupied by our forces, and the procedure for the German withdrawal and our arrival must be established. Higher command must be informed immediately of all meetings and decisions reached'. To avoid unnecessary incidents, the main bodies of troops were required to remain several dozen

kilometres away from German positions, with only advance units permitted to make contact. However, the situation remained highly unpredictable.

And what if the political officers overlooked something, and a soldier let slip a remark about the 'damned fascists'? And what if a shootout broke out? *Kombrig* S. Krivoshein himself likely had no desire for this meeting – after all,

he was Jewish, a fact that required no further explanation. Yet orders were to be obeyed, not debated: upon arrival in Brest, the handover of the city from the Germans already stationed there would have to be organized.

From Hand to Hand

It seems straightforward: two dictators carved up a neighbouring state, and each took his share. Yet, how did it come to pass that two occupying armies simultaneously converged on the same territory?

Under the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the new border between the Third Reich and the USSR was supposed to run along the Vistula, Narew, and San rivers. However, both sides soon agreed that the Bug River would serve as the dividing line between their spheres of influence. The *Wehrmacht's* advance in this direction was rapid – and why wouldn't it be, given that their forces were led by General Heinz Guderian, the theorist of manoeuvre warfare and father of the German armoured forces (*Panzerwaffe*), who was known as 'Fast Heinz'?

Since the soviets lagged behind, the Germans secured operational space for themselves, occupying a much larger territory than originally envisioned in the secret protocols. Now, however, that very territory had to be handed over to the bolsheviks.

H. Guderian received this news with little enthusiasm. His 19th Motorized Corps had captured the city on September 14 – exactly two weeks after the offensive began. Fighting for the Brest Fortress continued for another few days, as the Polish garrison put up a desperate resistance. Finally, on the night of September 17, the remaining defenders withdrew from their positions, evacuating not only the wounded but also the dead.

Naturally, the attacking forces also suffered losses – after the battle, they needed to regroup, rest, repair their weaponry and vehicles, and care for the wounded... Instead, they were met with a rapid succession of surprises.

As H. Guderian himself wrote in his memoirs, on September 20, 'a young russian officer arrived in an armoured car and informed us that their tank

BUNDESARCHIV

(archival document reference code BA-MA RH21-2/21)

Brest-Litovsk, September 21, 1939.

AGREEMENT ON THE HANDOVER OF THE CITY OF BREST-LITOVSK AND THE FURTHER MOVEMENT OF THE RUSSIAN ARMY

1. German forces are to depart from Brest-Litovsk on September 22 at 14:00.

Schedule:

08:00 – Arrival of the russian battalion to take over the fortress and the territory of the city of Brest.

10:00 – Meeting of the joint commission. Participants: russian side – Capt. Gubanov, Battalion Commissar Panov; german side – Local Commandant Lt. Col. Holm, Interpreter Lt. Col. Sommer.

14:00 – Parade of russian and German forces before the command of both sides, followed by a flag-exchange ceremony. National anthems are to be played during the exchange.

2. German wounded who cannot be transported are to be placed in the care of the russian army and will be evacuated when the opportunity arises.

3. German equipment, weaponry, and ammunition that cannot be transported are to be left temporarily under the supervision of German detachments and moved when the opportunity arises.

4. All property remaining after 24:00 on September 21 is to be handed over to russian units.

5. Vehicles left behind due to breakdowns are to follow the German units after repairs are completed. Technical evacuation teams must report this to the liaison officer stationed at the russian headquarters in Brest.

6. All prisoners and captured materiel are to be handed over upon the signing of a handover protocol.

7. Field telephone lines are to be dismantled on September 24 by the rearguard (rear security units).

8. Any outstanding issues are to be resolved by the aforementioned commission.

9. The agreement applies only to the area where army units are deployed northeast of the Bug River.

10. The subsequent direction of the russian advance is to be coordinated by a joint commission, based on directives from the commands of both sides.

Signatures:

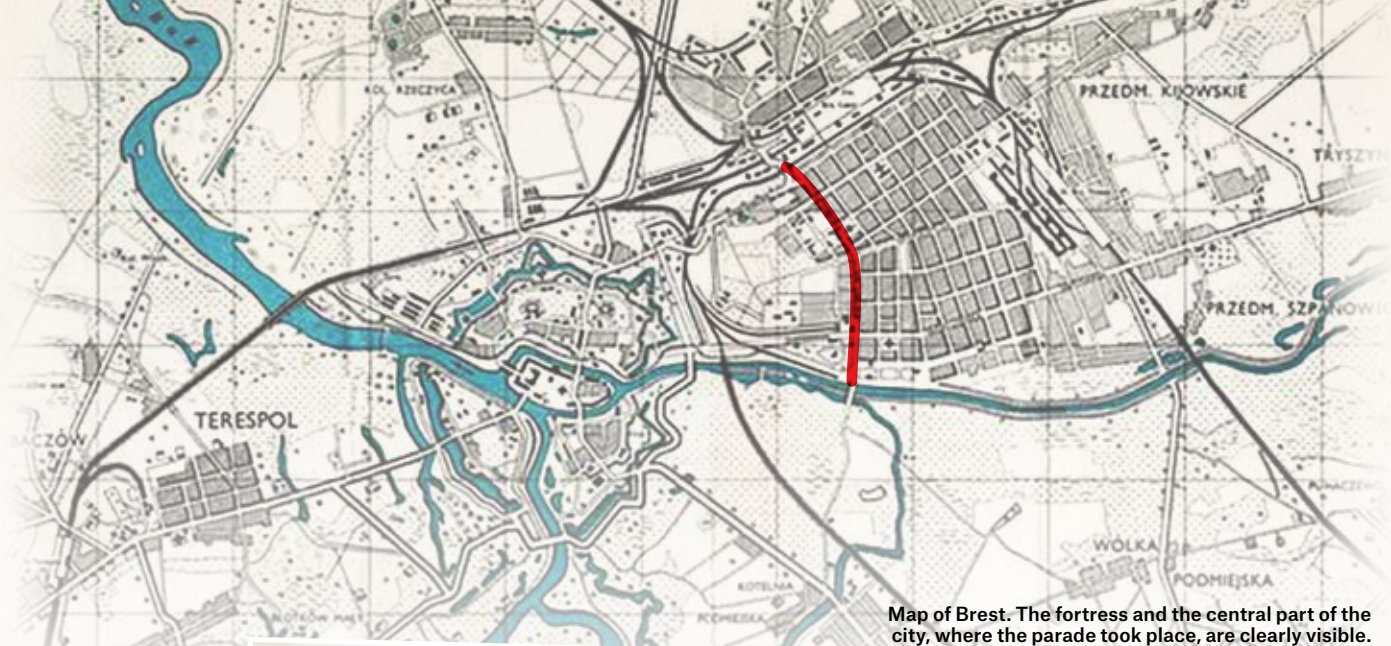
on the german side – Col. Nehring,

on the russian side – Capt. Gubanov.

Distribution of copies:

russian command representative – 1 copy, german command representative – 2 copies, Capt. Gubanov – 3 copies, Battalion Commissar Panov – 4 copies, Lt. Col. Holm – 5 copies, Lt. Col. Sommer – 6 copies, (illegible) – 7 copies, reserve – 8 copies.

Certified true copy: (illegible signature)



Map of Brest. The fortress and the central part of the city, where the parade took place, are clearly visible.

Awaiting the event, a German military band stands alongside red army soldiers, with German tank crewmen, a photographer, and civilian spectators visible in the background.



brigade was approaching. Soon after, we received word regarding the demarcation line established by the foreign ministries. It ran along the Bug River, meaning the Brest Fortress fell to the russians; we considered this an ill-advised decision. Subsequently, we were ordered to vacate the area east of the demarcation line by September 22. This deadline was so tight that we were unable to evacuate our wounded or recover damaged equipment. In all likelihood, not a single military officer had participated in the negotiations concerning the demarcation line and the cessation of hostilities...

On the morning of September 21, advance units of the soviet 29th tank brigade reached the northern outskirts of Brest. S. Krivoshein ordered his subordinates not to begin the advance into the city before 2 p.m. soviet delegates went

to the German command post to discuss the technical details of the city's handover.

The negotiations dragged on. Finally, H. Guderian could breathe a sigh of relief: 'All matters not covered by the Foreign Ministry's directives were resolved directly with the russians on terms satisfactory to both sides. We managed to evacuate everything except the captured Polish property which could not be transported in such a short time'.

However, beyond these logistical matters, the question of how to mark the handover and takeover of Brest was also discussed. After all, this was no ordinary event: representatives of two national armed forces were meeting, and a territory was passing under the jurisdiction of another state. Formal signatures alone were deemed insufficient – an official ceremony was required to involve all

participants and send a clear political message.

This ceremony culminated in a joint parade featuring both *Wehrmacht* troops and red army soldiers.

'Friendship Parade'

News of the parade was not widely publicized; neither the Germans nor the soviets cared much about the opinion of the local population. Yet, word of mouth spread quickly. The ceremonial column was scheduled to march along the city's main thoroughfare, which at the time was still named after the Lublin Union. Curious onlookers watched as a low platform was hastily erected next to the voivodeship administration building. Behind it stood a flagpole, from which a swastika flag fluttered.

Red army units were delayed because tank crews were servicing their vehicles, postponing the start of the event by two hours.

Finally, a marching military band turned onto the main avenue from nearby Hospital Street and headed toward the platform. As one spectator – a mere fifteen-year-old boy at the time – recalled: 'Judging by the red armbands bearing hammer-and-sickle emblems, these were likely members of the communist party of Western Belarus'. Meanwhile, a column of russian tanks was moving along Jogaila Street (now Masherov Avenue). Tubular handrails had been welded to the tank turrets for troops to hold onto.

A *Wehrmacht* unit, accompanied by its military band, had already been waiting for quite some time. Romuald Bulevich (Bulias), who was born in 1922, witnessed the scene nearby: 'I recall the moment when German tanks lined one side of the street and soviet tanks lined the other. The crews exchanged salutes'.

Meeting on the platform, H. Guderian and S. Krivoshein shook hands and exchanged a few words. An interpreter was unnecessary – it turned out they were able to converse in French.

The parade began. According to S. Krivoshein, the German infantry was followed by self-propelled artillery, and

Heinz Guderian and Kombrig Semyon Krivoshein on the platform. Behind them is a flagpole.



then by tanks. A couple of dozen aircraft thundered over the platform at low altitude... Finally, motorized infantry appeared once more.

A German report describes the event as follows: 'Two artillery battalions and a reinforced regiment of the 20th Motorized Division, with a reconnaissance battalion

at the rear, began their ceremonial march. The corps commander took the salute alongside the russian commander, who stood to his left. German and russian bands played alternately during the march'.

Civilians were also watching the proceedings: 'Columns were moving from



Parade participants. A column of German motorcyclists alongside a soviet light tank.



Yet another moment from the parade. Despite the abundance of visual evidence, russian historians try to insist that no joint parade ever took place.

Jagiellonska Street toward the station. The Germans marched first – polished, dashing, and smart in their bearing. By contrast, the red army soldiers who followed looked wretched, with muddy boots, dusty greatcoats, and unshaven faces. Nevertheless, quite a few of the Brest residents gathered along the roadside were favourably disposed toward them.

Then, a sudden incident took place: a woman broke from the crowd toward a soldier at the flank of the formation. With tears in her eyes, she kept repeating, 'Darlings... my brave lads...' But he shoved her back: 'Get away, woman!' Everyone was stunned. Evidently, the political commissars had done a thorough job on the troops the day before.

Horse-drawn artillery appeared close behind the infantry, followed by tracked artillery tractors towing larger-calibre guns'.

The Sirniuk couple, born in 1914 and 1919, later recounted: 'As the tanks moved, frightened people in the crowd began to scream. At the intersection with Kosciuszko Street, where Lublin Union Street makes a sharp turn, a tank suddenly picked up speed and nearly plunged into a ditch'.

The orchestra played the German anthem, and the swastika flag was lowered. In its place, to the strains of The Internationale, a red flag bearing

the hammer and sickle was raised to the top of the flagpole. The commanders spoke a few words. The musicians of the German military band climbed into trucks and were driven to the head of the column. The parade concluded, and the withdrawal of forces began. Marching in unison, the German column moved off toward the Grajewo bridge. As soon as it disappeared into the distance, pro-communist residents began shouting: 'Long live soviet power!'.

The Parade Is Over

As soon as the last of H. Guderian's units reached the far bank of the Bug River, the headquarters of Army Group 'North' began drafting a report to Berlin: 'A ceremonial parade involving one russian and one German regiment took place in Brest. The city and the fortress were ceremoniously handed over to the russians.'

These interactions were not isolated incidents. Even russian sources note that during this brief period of warming relations, joint parades occurred elsewhere. For example, historian Mikhail Semiryaga wrote in 1992: 'In Grodno, Brest, Pinsk, and other cities – even before the capitulation of Warsaw – joint parades (which the Germans called 'victory parades') took place, involving military forces from both

sides'. Other accounts state that a similar parade in Grodno was reviewed by Army group commander V. Chuikov, while researcher A. Nekrich mentions a parade in Lviv during the first days of October.

However, it was the parade in Brest that gained the most notoriety. In modern terms, it became a true media sensation of its time, and there were reasons for this. The joint soviet-nazi parade in Brest was diligently captured on film by propaganda cameramen who followed *Wehrmacht* combat formations like a shadow. The edited footage was quickly featured in the weekly newsreel '*Die Deutsche Wochenschau*'. In a segment showing satisfied officers from both sides emerging from a joint consultation at headquarters, the narrator definitively stated: 'These negotiations have shattered the hopes of many Western democracies'. This was precisely the purpose of the symbolic parade: to vividly demonstrate to France and Great Britain that the USSR was now a clear ally of Germany.

The soviets, however, were more restrained. Although the term 'parade of friendship' occasionally slipped out, their primary goal was domestic propaganda. The goal was to instil, by every possible means, the idea of how oppressive the 'rule of Polish lords' had been, how joyfully the working people had welco-



'We took a closer look at the 'soldier-liberators' over the following days', recounted Boris Akimov, born in 1912, who had fled Kraków by motorcycle with his family at the onset of the German invasion and ended up in Brest. 'I can't say anything about the tank crews, but the infantry marching along every road toward Brest stunned us with their squalor and dishevelment. We were accustomed to tidy Polish soldiers; here, instead, these men were filthy, reeking of a stomach-turning stench, and ridden with lice... Doubts began to surface: what kind of life were they bringing us?'

On September 18, a convoluted joint German-soviet statement,

and – according to official propaganda – 'liberated from the yoke of Polish lords' more than 13 million inhabitants, including approximately 6 million Ukrainians and 3 million Belarusians.

Having swallowed its prey, the red boa constrictor immediately began to digest it. A soviet-style administration was promptly established in the newly occupied territory. On October 28, a puppet 'People's Assembly' was convened in Białystok. Predictably, the elected delegates passed a resolution

WHAT KIND OF LIFE DID THEY

distributed by

TASS, was released, declaring: 'In order to prevent unfounded rumours regarding the objectives of the soviet and German forces operating in Poland, the Government of the USSR and the Government of Germany declare that the actions of these forces do not pursue any aims contrary to the interests of Germany or the USSR, or to the letter and spirit of the non-aggression pact concluded between them. On the contrary, the task of these forces is to restore peace and order in Poland – disrupted by the collapse of the Polish state – and to assist its population in reorganizing the conditions of their national existence'.

In reality, the Polish state had ceased to exist – only minor formalities and adjustments remained. On September 28, 1939, the USSR and Germany signed a Boundary and Friendship Treaty, which minimally altered the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. These changes also directly determined the fate of our country, and their consequences are felt to this day: Lithuania, previously assigned to the German sphere of influence, was transferred to the USSR...

On October 6, the 'comrades-in-arms' finalized the division of the occupied territory. The soviet union could rejoice in its spoils: within a couple of weeks, it had seized an area of over 190 000 km²



The soviets assured the local population that they were 'bringing a better life'. In reality, mass executions of 'enemies of the people' began, and hundreds of thousands of people were deported.

to institute soviet rule and petitioned for admission into the 'family of fraternal republics,' that is, the USSR.

Street names also began to change; for instance, Lublin Union Street in Brest, the site of the joint parade, was renamed September 17th Street, thereby commemorating the date of 'liberation'. Industrial enterprises and banks were nationalized, and on December 15, the use of the zloty was definitively banned and the soviet ruble introduced.

Repressions followed as the hunt for 'enemies of the people' intensified, demonstrating that the NKVD also operated according to the principles of a planned economy. February 1940 proved to be the most harrowing period: in a single day, more than 56 000 inhabitants – including women,

Y BRING?

children, and the elderly – were arrested. NKVD agents crammed them into rail wagons and deported to forced labour camps in Siberia and Kazakhstan.

An even tragic fate awaited the prisoners of war, who numbered around a quarter of a million. Imprisoned alongside soldiers were officers from other uniformed services, members of various political parties and civic organizations, and representatives of the Polish intelligentsia. 'They are all sworn enemies of soviet power, filled with hatred for the soviet system. <...> Officers and police officials taken prisoner attempt to continue counter-revolutionary activities and conduct anti-soviet agitation while in the labour camps,' stated NKVD Document No. 794/B, dated March 5, 1940, and addressed to the Central Committee of the All-Union communist party (bolsheviks).

A vote by members of the Politburo sealed the fate of thousands of people from the occupied territory. In total, at least 21 857 Polish citizens fell victim to the Katyn massacre; of these, approximately 4 400 were found in the Katyn forest alone. Mass executions also took place at other NKVD sites, as well as in prisons in Kharkiv and Kalinin. Among those murdered were not only Poles but also ethnic Ukrainians, Belarusians and Jews.

med their liberators, and the bright future that now awaited them. Meanwhile, the moscow government was waiting for something else – to see how events would unfold on the Western Front.

An Obscured Chapter of History

However, for some time now, arguments have surfaced claiming that such parades never took place – or, at the very least, did not constitute actual parades. The friendship between Stalin and Hitler, which was intended to last at least a decade, endured for only 22 months. Naturally, once Operation 'Barbarossa' began, all signs of that friendship – including the joint parades – were forgotten. In the isolated soviet union, erasing this brief period from collective memory was relatively easy. Even when the joint Brest parade could not go unmentioned, various interpretations were used to navigate the awkwardness of the situation. For instance, S. Krivoshein himself, in his 1964 memoirs, emphatically claims that he did not want the parade and delayed it by every possible means, whereas H. Guderian – standing beside him on the platform – reluctantly acknowledged the superiority of soviet military might, and so on.

And the readers of that time could hardly disbelieve it – they knew what happened not only to dissenters but even to those who merely questioned the 'historical truths' sanctioned by the communist party history institutes. However, as present-day russia becomes increasingly radicalized, the Brest issue has once again caught the attention of historians funded by pro-rashism organizations, as well

as outright propagandists. Once Putin established a 'vertical of power', facts inconvenient to the proclaimed imperial grandeur began to be interpreted in a highly peculiar manner. Eager to please the regime, these commentators have produced interpretations that sometimes take on truly grotesque forms.

In 2011, Vladimir Medinsky, a Doctor of Historical Sciences, stated in his book 'War: USSR Myths, 1939-1945', that the parade in Brest 'simply did not happen' and that this 'popular historical myth' arose 'due to skilful film editing'. Medinsky even went so far as to compare the footage to American moon landing videos – thereby inadvertently relegating himself to the fringes of conspiracy theories...

A year later, he elaborated on his version during an interview, calling the Brest parade a 'phantasmagorical lie, a fabrication, and the 'Photoshop' of that era'.

These and other efforts did not go unnoticed. Later, after becoming the Minister of Culture of the russian federation, Medinsky shifted his stance, stating that the parade might indeed have taken place, but that it was not a joint event: the Germans simply marched out as the soviets marched in.

However, this claim is contradicted by the presence of two commanders on a single platform, two orchestras, and footage clearly showing not only German and soviet vehicles standing side by side, but also soldiers interacting with one another.

For instance, the soviet and russian historian Oleg Vishlyov also maintains that the handover procedure at Brest was not a parade. Why? Because, in his view, it 'did not comply with the 1938 red army drill regulations'. Presumably to ensure full compliance with these regulations, the russian forces that attacked Kyiv

The Brest parade was not the only event commemorating the nazi-soviet victory. Similar parades were held in other towns, and in some places, 'Arches of friendship' featuring joint symbolism were erected.





Another amateur snapshot of a 'Friendship arch'.

in 2022 brought their dress uniforms along with them – yet the exact opposite of the Brest scenario occurred: they had the dress uniforms, but no parade...

Incidentally, O. Vishlyov – a historian of the older, soviet-era generation presented as a 'specialist in soviet-German relations' – either deceives himself or attempts to mislead others in his research by claiming that 'by the time soviet units marched in, not a single German soldier or officer remained on the streets of Brest'. Such a claim hardly reflects well on a scholar researching such a specialized field.

Even a classic figure of the historical propaganda genre like Alexander Dyukov – who is considered *persona non grata* in many Schengen Area countries – clings to a similar 'formalist' view: 'There was no joint parade in Brest in the sense defined by military regulations. There was a ceremonial withdrawal of German forces from Brest and a handover of the city to soviet forces'.

An old historical analogy comes to mind here. When Alexander Jagiellon, Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of

Poland, wed the muscovite princess Elena, a specific wedding ceremony was carefully pre-arranged, dictating that the newlyweds be blessed by both Catholic and Orthodox clergy – ensuring that neither party's freedom of belief nor confessional liturgy would be compromised. This raises a question: how far in advance and at what level did the nazi-soviet 'friendship parades' have to be coordinated to satisfy the requirements of both countries' military regulations? But did the organizers even care about matching ceremonial details? Forced by circumstances, representatives from both sides – in an atmosphere still hot from battle – simply agreed on how to hand over the occupied territory while keeping up basic military manners. Whether you call it a parade, a ceremonial march, or something else, such linguistic word games change nothing in essence.

On the contrary – such evasions resemble the excuse of a not-too-bright recidivist trying to win over the jury: 'I don't quite remember if my friend and I stole the horse, but we certainly didn't go to the tavern together to celebrate it...'

'Brothers in Arms'

But why has there recently been such a fierce attempt to push the narrative that, 'there was no parade, or if there was, it wasn't a parade'?

It is quite simple. The primary reason behind the chain of events leading to the Brest parade was the cooperation between the soviets and the Nazis – a collaboration that lasted right up until June 22, 1941, when Hitler rushed to strike the USSR before it could attack him.

To many, nazism and communism appear to be two completely hostile ideologies. In reality, beneath the public mutual denunciations lay layers of cooperation that were kept strictly out of the public eye.

Near Kazan, even before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed, a joint military facility served as a training ground for Heinz Guderian's future tank aces. German pilots also trained near Lipetsk. By doing so, the Germans circumvented the prohibitions of the Treaty of Versailles, while the soviets gained valuable technical knowledge.

In 1939, speaking at the fifth extraordinary session of the Supreme Council of the USSR, Molotov sent a clear message to the West: 'One may accept or reject the ideology of Hitlerism, just like any other ideological system – that is a matter of political opinion. But to wage war against Hitlerism under the false banner of a 'struggle for democracy' is not only senseless but criminal'.

This was a form of direct moral support that is now often glossed over.

Yet, the soviets also provided the Germans with direct military assistance. For instance, on the very first day of the war, they allowed the *Luftwaffe* to use the Minsk radio station as a navigation beacon for German bombers. Thus, the 'neutral' soviets bear a share of the blame for the casualties caused by these air raids.

The stark fact remains that on September 17, the USSR entered World War II as an ally of nazi Germany. Following the partition of Poland, the soviets congratulated the nazis on a victory sealed in blood.

The USSR supplied Hitler with the raw materials needed for the war and continued to do so even after the occupation of Poland. This meant that right up until the launch of operation 'Barbarossa', Germany waged war against Western European

countries with a secure rear and material support from the soviets.

Official acknowledgment of the Brest parade would provide concrete confirmation that Hitler was not the sole instigator of World War II. In fact, it is highly likely that without soviet backing, he would not have dared to launch the invasion. Furthermore, despite being attacked by Germany, Poland mounted a fierce defence and stood a chance of holding out – especially if it had managed to resist longer and France had succeeded in mobilizing its forces in the meantime.

The perspective of the Poles themselves also important here. 'It is often said that the Germans brought the greatest suffering to Poland. But it is not quite that simple', states historian Zbigniew Woźnica. He attempts to view the tragedy of that era through the eyes of contemporaries. From that perspective, it was not Germany, but russia, that must have appeared to Poles as the most terrifying adversary at the time. Tsarist oppression, the brutal suppression of uprisings, and mass deportations – all of this resurfaced in the Polish historical consciousness after September 17, 1939.

While Poles soon recognized the mortal threat posed by the Germans, the

historian notes a key difference: the Nazi regime collapsed, whereas Stalin's legacy is still felt to this day.

A Nail in the Rashist's Boot

Germany clearly acknowledged its historical guilt, and apologies were also offered to Poland. In 1970, Willy Brandt, then Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, knelt before the Warsaw Ghetto Heroes Monument. At the same time, however, painful and uncomfortable questions regarding the wrongs inflicted upon Poland by the USSR and russia remained unaddressed for a long time. The only brief exception the apparent admission of soviet responsibility for the Katyn massacre, accompanied by participation in the commemorative events marking its 70th anniversary.

But all of that was quickly swept aside. What the Poles regard as a stab in the back is still officially termed the 'Polish campaign' in russia. However, this terminology now appears to be reverting to the aggressive 'liberation march' – exactly the same term used during the Stalinist era. This framing aligns perfectly with

moscow's current geopolitical plans regarding Ukraine and NATO's eastern flank.

Even the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact is justified on the website *history.ru* with the claim that 'Great Britain and France did not want to accept the system of collective security in Europe proposed by the USSR', while Putin himself stated that Poland forced Germany to launch an attack.

Thus, a cult of 'victory over nazism' was created in russia – one that not only rests on an ideological foundation but also features its own peculiar rituals. Plywood *Reichstag* replicas are stormed, and historical reenactors playing nazis 'shoot' 'soviet prisoners' dressed in striped robes during theatrical events. Even kindergarteners are dressed up for photo shoots in outfits meant to resemble the uniforms of 'soldier-liberators'.

Given this context, it is hardly surprising that the vast majority of the 'russian world' has no idea when World War II actually began, or that the USSR started it in league with the nazis. Some russians are genuinely convinced that the war was won not by the anti-Hitler coalition, but by them alone – thereby 'liberating the entire world from fascism'.

Consequently, a historical fact like the Brest parade on September 22, 1939, is like a sharp nail inside the 'victor's' jackboot. Seemingly unseen, yet piercing... ■

Why are the events of 1939 being concealed in russia? Because the fact that the soviets also caused World War II destroys their entire cult of 'great victory' and 'warrior liberator'.



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COL. ALEKSIEJUS GAIŽEVSKIS

**A MILITARY DOES
NOT DETERMINE WHO
ITS ENEMY WILL BE
OR HOW IT WILL ACT.
IT CAN ONLY
DETERMINE HOW
WELL IT IS PREPARED
TO FIGHT IT.**

An adversary's constant adaptation – what does this mean for our military training? One of the most dangerous mistakes in military planning and preparedness is underestimating the adversary. Drawing lessons from Russia's war against Ukraine, we can conclude that the adversary may be poorly equipped, suffer heavy losses, face command and control problems, lack qualified personnel, or employ methods that Western military culture regards as ineffective or even primitive. However, none of these circumstances in itself implies that the adversary is incapable of learning, adapting and transforming its actions in line with the experience gained, thereby turning it into more effective methods of combat on the battlefield.

**A
ADVERS**

A dramatic photograph of a missile launch. A missile is seen ascending from a dark, low-profile vehicle, likely a tank or armored car, in a grassy field. The launch is captured at dusk or dawn, with a bright orange and yellow glow emanating from the base of the missile, creating a large plume of smoke and fire. The missile itself is a long, slender, dark object with a pointed tip. The background is a hazy, overcast sky. The overall mood is intense and powerful.

LEARNING SARY



The experience of the Russian private military company (PMC) 'Wagner' in the war against Ukraine is significant precisely in this regard. It should be neither romanticised nor mystified, nor regarded as a model to be emulated. However, it would also be a mistake to ignore it. An analysis prepared by the United States (US) Army's Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) shows that the organisation of the 'Wagner' PMC's assault units and their *modus operandi* were sufficiently systematic to warrant a separate study and deeper analysis. Even more significant is the US Army's analysis, 'Russian Assault Groups' Evolution in Ukraine', which notes that some of the tactical lessons learnt by the 'Wagner' PMC have been adopted and adapted by the regular Russian ground forces. This is a crucial factor, demonstrating the adversary's capacity to learn and, at the same time, the necessity to know who we will be fighting.

In this context, it is not enough simply to ask how the 'Wagner' PMC fights or has fought. We must ask what the Russian military system has learnt from

this experience, what it has adopted and modified, and what the consequences of these adaptations are for our own preparations.

To understand and analyse the adversary, we draw on six of the eight interrelated warfighting functions: command and control, movement and manoeuvre, intelligence, fire support (fires), sustainment, and protection.

However, these functions should not be viewed as six separate 'compartments'. On the battlefield, they operate as a single, integrated system. It is important to maintain a coherent understanding – from how the adversary assesses the situation and makes decisions, to how they move, exert influence, sustain their combat power and preserve their ability to continue fighting. The main point is simple: it is essential to understand the adversary's tactics, not in order to copy them, but to comprehend the logic behind their actions, recognise changes and prepare one's own units to fight against a thinking, adaptable and learning adversary.

Not reputation, but adaptation

Our underestimation of an adversary is usually caused not by a lack of information, but by its misinterpretation. When we see the adversary suffering heavy losses, we may mistakenly conclude that their tactics are ineffective. When analysing the centralised command structure they employ, we risk concluding that this organisation is incapable of adapting to changing conditions on the battlefield. By emphasising the uneven level of training among personnel, we often come to believe that the entire military unit is unprofessional. Finally, when assessing the adversary's previous failures, we assume that they will repeat them time and time again. War may not forgive such subjective interpretations...

The example of the 'Wagner' PMC is significant not because this organisation has developed a universal or unbeatable combat system. On the contrary – its operations have been characterised

by heavy losses, highly controversial methods of personnel deployment, and serious political and legal issues. However, from a military perspective, what is important is that combat experience was analysed, conclusions were drawn from it, and some of these practices were subsequently adapted by other units within the Russian armed forces. This process is the most important lesson. We must realise that an organisation may cease to exist, the names of its units may change, and its structure may be reorganised, but the lessons learnt on the battlefield endure and are passed on to other organisations. Sean McFate's review is also useful for understanding the broader context of the 'Wagner' PMC's role in Russia's power projection.

An analysis by NATO's Defence Education Enhancement Programme (DEEP) assesses the 'Wagner' PMC

within the broader context of Russia's use of military power. It highlights that, following the death of Yevgeny Prigozhin, the previous organisational structure of the 'Wagner' PMC has changed; however, the models of private or semi-state military structures utilised by the Russian state have not disappeared. This leads to the logical conclusion that our intelligence and the military training of our units cannot be focused solely on the organisation's name – we must analyse the way it operates.

Effective command and decision-making

Every manoeuvre, every instance of fire support and every logistics operation is, first and foremost, the result of a decision. It is therefore logical to begin an

analysis of the adversary with command and control.

When assessing Russian forces, emphasis is often placed on the centralised nature of command, the varying degrees of autonomy among junior commanders, organisational conflicts, or political influence on military decisions. However, merely noting these shortcomings is not enough. For a professional soldier, another question is more important: does such a system, despite its flaws, manage to pass on and institutionalise the lessons learnt on the battlefield? The development of the 'Wagner' PMC and subsequent Russian assault groups suggests that, in certain cases, the answer is yes. This means that an adversary's command and control system must not be assessed solely on the basis of whether it conforms to our understand-





ding of good leadership – it is essential to evaluate its actual ability to deliver a military outcome.

In Christopher Spearin's analysis, the 'Wagner' PMC is described as

a structure that operated in close alignment with russian state interests and utilised russian military resources, infrastructure and platforms. This is an important example demonstrating that

formal organisational boundaries can be misleading. By looking solely at the organisational chart, one may fail to recognise the actual links in command, supply and support.

The practical conclusion for military training that follows from this is clear: commanders must be trained not to accurately recognise a previously known adversary's structure, but to be able to identify changes in it.

The true aim of training must be to determine whether a commander is capable of making a decision when his initial assumption about the adversary proves incorrect. This is particularly important for the training of junior commanders.

From this perspective, command and control become the first link with another combat function – movement and manoeuvre. A decision only acquires military value when it is translated into action.





The most important thing is to understand the adversary's intentions

When analysing the experience of the 'Wagner' PMC, it is easy to focus on the size, composition or sequence of operations of individual assault elements. However, from a military perspective, a broader conclusion is more valuable – namely, how the adversary adapted the organisation of manoeuvres to the specific conditions of the battle. The FMSO publication analyses the structure of the 'Wagner' PMC assault elements and their interaction with support capabilities. A subsequent analysis of the evolution of Russian assault groups already notes a broader transfer of tactical lessons into battlefield practice.

This means that when analysing an adversary's tactics, it is dangerous to become overly fixated on a single organisational scheme. In warfare, structures change because the battle environment, the adversary, the resources at their disposal, casualties, objectives and

the transparency of the battlefield all change. Therefore, the question should not be what the size of the adversary's assault group is. It is more important to ask oneself what result this element is attempting to achieve.

This has a direct impact on the preparation of our units. A soldier and a junior officer must be able to distinguish between the adversary's visible actions and their true intentions. What a unit observes within its sector of observation is not necessarily the adversary's main forces or their manoeuvre. A small adversary element does not necessarily mean a small threat. Local activity does not necessarily mean a local objective. Temporary inactivity on the part of the adversary does not necessarily mean that they have lost the initiative. This is precisely why movement and manoeuvre cannot be trained in isolation from the adversary's reconnaissance and fire support capabilities.

If, during exercises, a unit can move as though the adversary were not observing it, we end up with a flawed training outcome. If soldiers become accustomed to the idea that the adversary only appears when contact is declared in the scenario, they learn

the logic of the training ground rather than that of the battlefield. Therefore, manoeuvre training must cultivate not only the physical ability to move, but also situational awareness. From this follows a simple rule: every movement has a purpose, every halt has consequences, every position can be observed, and every recurring pattern of activity can be recognised. Here, the function of movement and manoeuvre naturally transitions into reconnaissance, as the decision of where and how to move depends on what we know about the adversary and the extent to which our knowledge corresponds to reality.

Our greatest adversary – our own assumptions

One of the most important issues discussed in the DEEP analysis is so-called mirroring – the tendency to judge an adversary according to one's own thought patterns. This is one of the most dangerous intelligence errors. We assume that the adversary will not take a certain action simply because we would not take it. We believe that



certain losses would be unacceptable to them simply because they would be unacceptable to us, or that they would value time, territory, personnel or equipment in a certain way simply because that is how we value them. However, a professional analysis of the adversary must begin with a fundamental principle: the adversary must be understood according to their own logic, not according to our expectations.

The case of the 'Wagner' PMC illustrates this particularly clearly. In Ch. Spearin's analysis, the organisation is assessed not merely as a battlefield unit, but also as a broader instrument of Russian political and military influence, particularly in Africa, where its functions included training, regime protection, combat support and links to economic interests. In this regard, intelligence interests cannot be limited to the question of where the adversary is. It is essential to understand why they are there, what

objectives they are pursuing, what they consider to be a valuable target or object of attack, what they are prepared to sacrifice in order to achieve their objectives whilst still carrying out their mission, which resources are most important to them, and what reactions they hope to provoke from us.

In this context, the article 'How Russia Fights' (2025), published on the T2COM G2 website, is significant because it assesses Russian operations as a broader combat system – not merely as individual weapon systems or military units. This same systemic approach is complemented by a later T2COM G2 analysis, 'How Russia Fights in Large-Scale Combat Operations'. This is a crucial methodological guideline for our own training, as understanding a potential adversary cannot be the sole responsibility of the intelligence department.

A fundamental principle of military

training is that every soldier is an observer. However, observing and seeing are not the same thing. Seeing is a biological function, whilst observation is a military skill developed through military training. A soldier must be taught to notice changes, to distinguish the unusual from the everyday, to convey information accurately, and not to confuse fact with interpretation. 'I see movement' – that is a fact. 'The adversary has launched an attack' – that is already an assessment. The earlier a soldier learns to distinguish between these things, the better the quality of situational awareness becomes for the entire unit.

At platoon and company level, these individual observations must be combined into an overall picture of the adversary's actions. At battalion and higher-level headquarters, the most important thing is not to gather as much information as possible, but to clearly distinguish between what we know, what we assess as likely, and what we do not know, as well as what new information would force us to change our current assessment. This last point is particularly important. A command that gathers information merely to confirm a decision already taken will, in the long run, find itself fighting not the adversary, but an image of the adversary it has created for itself. And it is precisely at this point that intelligence converges with fire support. On the battlefield, information becomes valuable only when it enables a decision to be made and an impact to be achieved.

System of impact – more important than the weapons themselves

When assessing an adversary's firepower, the easiest approach is to count the number of barrels, systems, missile ranges or the quantity of ammunition. However, knowledge of technical data alone does not explain how the adversary translates its firepower into combat results. The FMSO analysis of the assault elements of the 'Wagner' PMC is also significant in that manoeuvre elements are assessed in conjunction

with support capabilities. This allows for a broader conclusion: infantry activity is not an isolated phenomenon. Its effectiveness depends on how it is integrated into the overall cycle of detection, decision-making, engagement and assessment.

Therefore, in the analysis of fire support, the most important factor is not merely what the adversary is capable of firing, but also how they locate a target, how quickly information is transmitted, who makes the decision, how information is converted into effect, how the result is assessed, and how subsequent action is then adjusted. It is precisely here that understanding the adversary becomes directly linked to our own survivability.

If a unit is trained as though its movements, communications, positions and operational patterns do not provide the adversary with intelligence, such training will not reflect the reality of the combat environment. Therefore, an individual infantryman need not become an expert in the adversary's technical sensors, but he must understand the fundamental principle that, on the modern battlefield, being detected can mean becoming the target of the adversary's entire system of impact. This highlights the importance of discipline – control over discipline and habits relating to movement, communications, informa-

tion handling and the use of positions.

A junior commander must be trained not only to carry out a task, but also to constantly assess the impact that his unit's actions have on the adversary. Company command elements and battalion staffs must realise that manoeuvre, reconnaissance, fire support and protection are not separate activities carried out by different units – they form a single system of decision-making. The value of 'How Russia Fights' lies precisely in its broader analysis of the Russian military system, which helps to assess individual capabilities within a broader context. However, even the best firepower system loses its value if it cannot be sustained. We therefore naturally move on from firepower to another, often less visible but crucial function – logistical support.

Logistics: It is not the one who starts who wins, but the one who keeps going

In wartime, attention is almost always focused on what is most visible and has the greatest impact on the battlefield: manoeuvres, fire support, unmanned aerial vehicles or armoured vehicles. However, behind every operational unit stands a system that supplies, repl-

nishes, repairs, treats, redeploys and enables it to continue the fight. Logistics is therefore not merely an administrative aspect of battle readiness – it is a prerequisite for combat itself.

'How Russia Fights' assesses logistical and support structures as an integral part of the Russian forces' operational system. The experience of the 'Wagner' PMC provides an additional perspective here. Ch. Spearin points out that the group has always utilised Russian military infrastructure and state capabilities. This means that an adversary's capabilities cannot be assessed solely on the basis of what a specific unit formally possesses within its established structure. At this point, it is important to understand what system it has access to.

This issue applies to us as well. A unit may have a certain capacity on paper, but its actual combat effectiveness depends on whether the available resources reach the troops at the right time. During peacetime training, it is dangerous to create conditions in which logistics always function perfectly. If food always arrives on time, transport is always available, technical support is never delayed, communications are always working, and personnel fatigue does not affect decision-making, the unit is not training for war. It is training for an ideally organised day of exercises.



A commander must be able to assess more than just what his unit is capable of doing right now. He must understand what the unit will be able to do after the next task, what it will be capable of in a few days' time, which functions begin to deteriorate first, and what must be preserved in order to continue fighting. This is also important when assessing the adversary, as their heavy losses do not necessarily mean they are approaching final defeat. In this regard, it is important to understand their ability to replenish personnel, restock resources, reorganise their structure and form a new combat unit.

The 'Wagner' PMC and the subsequent evolution of Russian assault groups serve as a very clear reminder that losses and organisational adaptation occur simultaneously. A unit may suffer heavy losses and still learn lessons that make the future unit even more dangerous than the one that was destroyed. Therefore, logistics must be assessed in conjunction with the final combat function – protection. For sustaining forces means not only supplying them – it means preventing the adversary from destroying or paralyzing them.



The essence of protection is to preserve the entire unit's ability to operate

Protection is often understood in a rather narrow sense – as armour, cover, camouflage or physical protection

against the adversary's actions. However, in a broader sense, the function of protection means the preservation of combat power.

This function encompasses personnel, the command and control system, communications, information, logistics, enabling capabilities, as well as the moral resilience of soldiers and their ability to continue operations after suffering a blow.





From this perspective, NATO's DEEP analysis is also significant because it examines Russian military operations not only in the context of physical combat, but also within the broader informational, hybrid, psychological and psychophysiological environment. This is particularly important for the modern soldier. An individual infantryman must understand that his survival is determined not only by individual protective measures – it is determined by discipline, the ability to observe, avoid revealing unnecessary clues, maintain information discipline and continue the mission even when the usual conditions for conducting combat are disrupted. It is no less

important to remain effective whilst feeling fatigued, under pressure and amidst the uncertainties of battle.

However, the resilience of an individual soldier is only one part of the system. A unit must be organised in such a way that the loss of a single person, a single means of communication, a single element of command or a single logistical node does not paralyse the entire system. Therefore, protection is directly linked to command and control.

If subordinates do not understand the intentions of their superior, a breakdown in communication becomes not a technical failure but a command disaster. If all vital information is con-

centrated in a single element, its loss becomes an organisational disaster. If personnel are unaware of the functions of neighbouring units, personnel losses very quickly result in a loss of combat effectiveness.

This is why the six functions of combat must be understood as a single system: **command** creates the decision, **intelligence** provides its basis, **movement and manoeuvre** turn the decision into action, **fire support** creates the necessary impact, **logistics** enables all of this to continue, and **protection** allows the system to remain viable both physically and organisationally. If one link fails, the entire system begins to weaken.



The real lesson: from experience to change

It is here that we can return to the fundamental question of this article.

What should we really learn from the 'Wagner' PMC? Not from individual historical actions, not from a specific assault model, not from a specific organisational structure – the most important lesson is the process of adaptation itself.

FMSO analyses the organisation and tactics of the 'Wagner' PMC assault units. A subsequent US Army analysis already documents the evolution of Russian regular assault groups and their adoption of 'Wagner's' tactical lessons. The NATO DEEP analysis reveals an even later stage – whilst the organisational form of the 'Wagner' PMC has changed, the broader utilisation of Russian military structures and experience continues. Consequently, we can observe a consistent sequence: combat experience – analysis – adaptation – a new organisational or tactical form.

This must not only be a model for analysing our adversary – it must also be a model for our own military training. This is precisely why the advantage of a professional army must not lie in the

conviction that our doctrine is superior. The advantage must lie in our ability to learn more quickly.

Conclusions for the infantryman: what does this experience change?

Understanding the adversary's tactics and actions must begin with individual soldiers. The modern infantryman cannot merely be someone who knows how to use his weapon and simply carries out the direct orders given to him. He must be a thinking element of the combat system, putting the previously discussed observation and information-sharing skills into practice, realising that his behaviour may be under observation, understanding his place within the unit's structure, and maintaining discipline even when the situation does not correspond to a previously trained scenario.

Therefore, within the system of individual training of soldiers, understanding the adversary should not be limited solely to recognising equipment or learning a few standard adversary manoeuvres. It is necessary to cultivate a far more important quality in a soldier – military curiosity. A soldier must be

taught to ask himself questions: what do I see, what has changed, what do I actually know and what am I merely guessing, what might my actions reveal to the adversary, and what information must I pass on to my commander? Such an infantryman is not merely a fighter – he becomes part of the entire unit's situational awareness system.

What this means for section-, platoon-, and company-level training

At the level of junior commanders, the primary focus of training should be on decision-making rather than procedures. Standard operating procedures or TTPs – Tactics, Techniques and Procedures – are an important planning tool that saves time, reduces the need for coordination and enables soldiers to act uniformly and in concert with other units. However, TTPs must not become dogma.

An adversary observing our activities will, over time, recognise recurring patterns. Therefore, a junior commander must understand the purpose of the procedure and, should circumstances change, be able to adapt their





actions. This requires the appropriate use of opposing forces (OPFOR) when training troops. The adversary in exercises cannot exist solely for the purpose of being 'defeated' by the unit being trained. If elements of the adversary force are unable to make their own decisions, the exercise merely validates the training unit's plan. If they cannot capitalise on a mistake, the commander does not learn to take responsibility for it. Finally, if the adversary cannot alter its actions, the commander does not learn to recognise the need for adaptation. Therefore, the opposing side must be professionally managed, have its own objective and act in accordance with rational combat logic. This is not required in order to mechanically copy the 'Wagner' PMC, but so that the unit being trained faces a thinking adversary.

What this means for battalion- and staff-level training

At the battalion level, individual combat functions must ultimately be integrated into a single system. The staff's task is not merely to process information. Its task is to help the commander understand the situation faster than the adversary and make a better decision.

Therefore, the quality of the headquarters cannot be assessed solely on the basis of the number of documents or the completion of formal processes. What matters most is the ability to assess and provide information in a timely manner: did intelligence detect the change in time; was the command system able to understand it; was the plan amended; and were manoeuvres, fire support, logistics and protection adjusted accordingly, and did the unit manage to adapt faster than the adversary?

At this point, the issue of 'mirror

thinking' in NATO's DEEP programme, which has already been discussed, is particularly important. The staff must consciously foster a culture in which assumptions are tested rather than defended. A professional staff officer must always ask himself: why do we believe the adversary will act in this particular way; what facts support this; what signs would indicate that we are mistaken; what might he have learnt from previous contact with us; and what patterns of our behaviour have we already revealed to him? And this is not about questio-





ning the leadership's decisions. This is what professional military analysis is all about.

From action review to genuine organisational learning

After every stage of military training or exercise, we ask: what do we need to do better? When facing a learning

adversary, this question is no longer sufficient. We need to add another: what would the adversary have learnt about us following this specific engagement? This question can transform the entire quality of the after-action review (AAR). Were our reactions predictable? Did we repeat the same patterns of movement? Did we consistently use the same command posts? Was our decision-making cycle visible? Would it have been easy for the adversary to identify the rhythm of our actions? Did we alter our

behaviour after the first engagement? Could the adversary exploit what they had just learnt about us the next time? Such an AAR culture is essential because the adversary is also learning.

The evolution of the 'Wagner' PMC and Russian assault groups demonstrate that combat experience can be transferred from one organisation to another. Therefore, our own training system must be capable of doing the same – only faster and to a higher standard. A lesson must be incorporated into the training programme, the training programme into the TTP, the TTP into exercises, and the exercises into new assessments. Only then is a closed cycle of organisational learning formed.

Understanding the adversary does not mean copying them

When analysing the 'Wagner' PMC, it is essential to maintain another boundary. Studying the adversary does not mean imitating them. Ch. Spearin's publication also discusses the serious legal and human rights aspects of the 'Wagner' PMC's activities. Therefore, its operational model cannot be assessed solely from the perspective of technical effectiveness. The aim of a professional army is not to become like its adversary. Its aim is to understand why a particular



adversary's method yields results in certain circumstances, and to prepare its own forces so that this method no longer works against them. This is a fundamental difference. We must understand our adversary so that they do not take us by surprise, not so that we might adopt their organisational culture, moral standards or political operating model.

Conclusions

The experience of the 'Wagner' PMC should not be viewed as a separate, exotic chapter in Russian military history – its significance is much broader. It demonstrates that even a highly controversial military organisation, characterised by uneven quality and suffering heavy losses, can draw tactical lessons which are subsequently incorporated into the wider military system. Therefore, the first conclusion is fundamental: one must never underestimate the adversary's ability to learn. Second, understanding the adversary must not be based solely on knowledge of its structure or technology – it is essential to understand its

operational logic and combat system.

With regard to **command and control**, we must understand how they make decisions and how they pass on experience. With regard to **movement and manoeuvre** – what outcome they seek to achieve through their actions, rather than merely what organisational structure they employ. In terms of **intelligence** – how their thinking differs from ours and which of our assumptions may be incorrect. In terms of **fire support** – how they integrate detection, decision-making and impact. With regard to **sustainment** – how long they can sustain operations and how they replenish losses incurred. With regard to **protection** – how he safeguards his organisation's ability to continue fighting and how we must maintain our own.

Third, understanding the adversary must begin with the individual soldier. A soldier must not only be able to carry out orders, but also to observe, understand, pass on information and adapt. Fourthly, the core of training for junior officers must focus on decision-making under conditions of uncertainty. This does not mean abandoning procedures, but rather the ability to recognise

when they no longer suit the situation. Fifthly, when training units, the OPFOR must serve as a realistic training tool. An adversary who cannot win cannot train us effectively. Sixth, staff must be trained not to defend their initial assessment of the adversary, but to constantly verify whether it remains accurate. Seventh, identifying lessons learnt is not the same as learning. Learning only begins when a lesson leads to a change in the subsequent training cycle. And finally, most importantly – the aim of military training should not be to produce a unit that has mastered a single combat scenario to perfection. The aim is to create units capable of engaging an adversary who observes, analyses, adapts and strives for victory themselves. Victory is not a given – it is the result of a multitude of correct decisions. And the first of these decisions is made even before the battle – when we decide not to underestimate the adversary, but to understand them. You may try to defeat an adversary you know only superficially, but an adversary whom you understand as a functioning and learning combat system can be defeated systematically. ■



THE FATHERLAND DEFENCE FORCE THE BATTLE OF SEDA



On 7 October 1944, near Seda, Lithuanian volunteers from the Fatherland Defence Force (Lit. *Tėvynės apsaugos rinktinė*, *TAR*) engaged in open combat with the red army. Both the *TAR* and the Battle of Seda were covered in issue No. 10 of *WARRIOR* in 2014; however, new documents, memoirs and testimonies have recently come to light, allowing for a more detailed examination of the history of this brigade. In preparing this article, criminal and filtration files of former *TAR*

soldiers held at the Lithuanian Special Archives were examined, as well as documents from the archive of the The Resistance Participants' Rights Commission at the Lithuanian Genocide and Resistance Research Centre (Lit. *LGGRTC*) and other previously unpublished sources. Valuable material was provided by the local history project prepared by Regina Montrimienė and Birutė Žiaugaitė, teachers at the Seda Vytautas Mačernis Gymnasium, entitled 'The Battle of Seda: Participants in the Battle and Their Fates'. With this article, based on newly collected and previously unpublished material, we aim to supplement the history of the *TAR*, reveal lesser-known episodes in the lives of its soldiers, and clarify the circumstances of their service and subsequent fates.



DEFENCE FORCE AND TITLE OF SEDA

DR. ARŪNAS BUBNYS
DALIUS ŽYGELIS

During the German occupation (1941–1944), patriotic Lithuanian forces sought not only to restore an independent Lithuania, but also to re-establish the country's armed forces. The Provisional Government of Lithuania endeavoured to form military forces and organise them in the same way as they had been before the start of the soviet occupation. However, nazi Germany did not allow this – only self-defence (police) battalions could be formed. Following the German military's defeat at Stalingrad in early 1943 and the military breakthrough in favour of the soviet union (USSR), the Lithuanians sensed the threat of a new soviet occupation approaching and sought to avert it. They planned to organise armed resistance and halt the soviets at the Lithuanian border using their own forces. The Germans, for their part, also sought to form military

units subordinate to them from the local population – the Lithuanians – to fight against the red army. On 23–24 November 1943, the General Councilors of Lithuania and the National Council in Kaunas rejected the plan to organise the Lithuanian armed forces in the form of an SS legion and declared their support for a national Lithuanian force based on the principles proposed by Gen. Stasys Raštikis. In accordance with these principles, on 1 February 1944, Gen. Povilas Plechavičius was appointed commander of the Lithuanian Territorial Force (Lit. *Lietuvos vietinė rinktinė, LVR*), which were then being organised, and the formation of Lithuanian armed forces began. Twelve battalions (each comprising 750 men) were formed, whilst other units operated under the command of local military authorities – around 20 000 people joined the units. In May 1944, the LVR was disbanded, and many of its members were persecuted because the brigade's leadership and battalions refused to come under the command of F. Jeckeln, the SS and police commander of Ostland, and the district commissioners. Similarly, the establishment of the TAR in July 1944 is

viewed in historiography as an attempt to re-establish the Lithuanian Armed Forces and to avert the soviet threat.

Formation of the *TAR*

In late June 1944, as the front line approached from the east, the German occupation authorities authorised the establishment and operation of Lithuanian self-defence units attached to the county commandant's offices. According to a statement by the first general councilor, Gen. Petras Kubiliūnas, published in the press, these units were to '*fight bandits and maintain order in their own district*'. As the red army advanced into Lithuania, members of Lithuanian underground organisations and other active citizens had to decide how to resist the impending soviet occupation – whether to openly join the fight alongside the German military or to adopt independent partisan tactics. On the orders of the headquarters of the Lithuanian Freedom Army (Lit. *Lietuvos laisvės armija, LLA*), armed men were to form groups and retreat into the forests to lie low, and, upon the arrival of the new occupiers, launch an armed resistance.

On 4 July 1944, the troops of the USSR's 1st Baltic Front (commanded by Gen. Ivan Khristoforovich Bagramyan [born Hovhannes Khachaturi Baghramyan, 2 December 1897]) crossed the north-eastern border of Lithuania. In the southern part of Lithuania, the troops of the 3rd Belorussian Front, led by Gen. Ivan Chernyakhovsky, advanced into the country, driving out the German army. By mid-August 1944, Vilnius, Kaunas, Utena, Šiauliai and other Lithuanian towns and areas had been occupied. By 26 August, the 1st Baltic Front had established a defensive line – Gostiniai (on the western bank of the Daugava River)–Nemunėlio Radviliškis–Bauska–Jel-



gava–Auce–west of Žagarė–Kruopiai–Pailė–west of Šiauliai and further along the Dubysa River. As the soviet reoccupation took place and *Wehrmacht* forces retreated westwards, some of the local population and armed Lithuanian units retreated alongside the German army. The armed units often became embroiled in skirmishes of varying intensity with russian units whilst retreating. For example, between Jūžintai and Užpaliai, a unit of around 200 men engaged in combat with red army troops, attempting to prevent them from crossing the Šventoji River. Clashes also took place near Salos, in the Biržai and Panevėžys districts. Unfortunately, the fighting did more harm than good – the soviet advance deep into Lithuania was not significantly halted, whilst the Lithuanians suffered losses in manpower. By the end of July 1944, several thousand of armed Lithuanians had gathered in Žemaitija. A considerable number of men who had fled from Zarasai, Pasvalys, Rokiškis, Joniškis, Svėdasai, Meškučiai, Pašvitinys, Utena, Vabalninkas and other areas gathered in the vicinity of Viekšniai. It is clear that, in that situation, the men did not yet know exactly how to proceed, but they were determined to defend their homeland against the 'red plague' with every fibre of their being. Lt. Juozapas Paužolis describes this situation very aptly in his memoirs: *'For us, junior officers scattered across the villages of Lithuania, world politics was difficult to grasp, especially during wartime, when biased reports were circulated and the warring nations spread insidious political propaganda. At that time, even our generals and politicians did not believe that the red army would occupy Berlin and reach the River Elbe. Our consciences reproached us for failing to defend our land and our homeland. We would fight, we would defend ourselves, and if we could not hold out, we would retreat to the Baltic. After that, each of us would decide our own fate. Having experienced the russians' cruelty in 1940–1941, many thought of keeping their last bullet for themselves – to die in their own homeland, rather than be humiliated in the camps of distant Siberia by starvation and the cold. Or perhaps things would change in*

the meantime? Perhaps Germany would capitulate in the west and turn all its forces against the soviet union? Or perhaps... We could come up with all sorts of scenarios...'

Due to the objective dangers posed by the advancing front to large units, the fighters in north-eastern Lithuania were unable to carry out the aforementioned orders from the LLA leadership to engage in open combat. Consequently, the volunteers joined defence units or established them on their initiative. However, these small self-defence units – newly formed, poorly armed and scattered – were unable to hold back



Lt. Juozapas Paužolis

the aggression and, upon the arrival of the first soviet soldiers or sabotage units, were forced to retreat. One of the first to move was a 39-man self-defence unit formed in the town of Ignalina and the surrounding villages, which retreated to Panevėžys by narrow-gauge railway. The people of Švenčionys, together with those from Anykščiai, formed the Anykščiai partisan detachment and also retreated towards Panevėžys. The Dusetos unit, led by Maj. Alfonsas Urbonas (who later commanded the 1st Lithuanian Volunteer Infantry Regiment of the TAR), retreated through the Utena district towards Vabalninkas.

The TAR soldier Algirdas Šukys

(born 1926) described the retreat of the Pasvalys unit to Žemaitija: *'In 1944, as the front line drew nearer, a group of young men – of which I was a part – led by Jr. Lt. Ignas Uogintas from Pasvalys, set off for Žemaitija, where, as far as we knew, patriotic-minded young people were gathering. Our group included three gymnasium students, the librarian Albinas Vaitkus (now known as Albinas Marius Katiliškis), who, whilst living in the United States of America (USA), described these events in his book 'Išėjęs negrįžti' ['Gone Never to Return' – translator's note], and other individuals. Most of us were armed with French carbines, russian rifles and pistols. There was no continuous front line along the Lithuanian border, so we reached Žemaitija without difficulty, travelling by bicycle and on horseback. It was July–August 1944.*

Volunteer forces were being formed in the Pailė and Telšiai areas. We spent about three weeks holed up in trenches near Pailė. At the beginning of September, we were transferred to Seda, where, having dug trenches, we prepared for defence. There were many soldiers from the Pasvalys region in the company; my 3rd Company was commanded by the leader of our Pasvalys group, Jr. Lt. Ignas Uogintas. I was appointed the company commander's liaison officer. At regimental headquarters, I found my sister's husband, Jr. Lt. Jonas Dovydenas, who had joined the regiment a little later and was serving as the regimental headquarters' column commander. Our 3rd Company was stationed on the southern outskirts of Seda.'

As early as the first few days of July 1944, on the initiative of the head of Zarasai County, the priest Dr. Jonas Steponavičius, a meeting was convened of representatives of resistance organisations and former commanders of the 1941 insurgent units. Several participants proposed fighting the soviets behind the front lines by organising mobile partisan units, but the majority favoured attempting to retreat westwards and fighting the soviets on a united front alongside the German army. Vincas Tamošiūnas, the police commander of Zarasai County, ordered the police officers – including those from the Salakas district – to assemble in Zarasai and retreat in an organised manner towards



Soldiers of the 3rd Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Regiment of the TAR. Front row (seated), from the left: NCO Mykolas Prancevičius (remained in Lithuania, suffered soviet repression), company commander Jr. Lt. Ignas Uogintas (fate unknown after the Battle of Seda) and NCO Petras Linkevičius (fled to the West, emigrated to the US). Second row, from the left: regimental staff clerk Albinas Vaitkus (later became a writer known as Marius Katiliškis – fled to the West and emigrated to the US), Jr. NCO Jonas Šateika (killed whilst retreating after the Battle of Seda near Barstyčiai), Vytautas Pavilionis (fled to the West) and Jr. NCO Dičpetris (fate unknown). Photographed on 20 September 1944 in Seda.

Žemaitija. Some of them obeyed the order, whilst others decided not to leave their homeland. On 7 July 1944, a column of more than 100 armed men set off from Zarasai for Žemaitija. At the end of July, the TAR was formed on the basis of this unit, which attempted, as far as possible, to halt the red army's advance towards the West. Among those fighting in the unit were former members of the Salakas district riflemen, fighters from the defence units that had taken part in the June 1941 uprising, and officers of the public and auxiliary police, including Justinas Preibys, Bonifacas Rūkštelė, Kazys Ubonis, Povilas Davainis and others. Some of them were killed; others, having lost hope of halting the soviet advance under the conditions at the front, headed west.

Entire families joined the TAR – fathers, sons and brothers. Their fates varied greatly. For example, Jonas Kirdeikis from the village of Gutaučiai in the Daugailiai district of Utena County, a participant in the June 1941 uprising, retreated alongside the people of Zarasai. His two sons – Pranas (born 1925) and Leonas Kirdeikis – retreated with their father. At the end of July 1944, they all joined the TAR; the

brothers were assigned to the 2nd Company of the 1st Regiment, whilst their father was assigned to the logistics unit. The Kirdeikiai brothers took part in the Battle of Seda – Leonas was killed, Pranas was taken prisoner by the soviets, whilst their father Jonas fled to Germany.

On 10 July 1944, the command of the retreating German forces allowed the Lithuanians to form self-defence units to carry out protective duties; however, armed units had already been established even before German permission was granted. The commanders of the units that had withdrawn from Aukštaitija would come to Capt. Jonas Čėsna, the head of security for the Viešniai district, to enquire about the general situation. Upon learning that the local defence forces had no intention of withdrawing, the units from north-eastern Lithuania would stop there. On 28 July, the commanders of these units were invited to gather at the headquarters of the Viešniai district defence unit for consultations. The following day, a meeting took place in Pievėnai, attended by the commanders of the retreating units from Zarasai, Joniškis, Svėdasai, Meškuičiai, Pašvitinys, Pasvalys, Rokiškis, Utena and other areas – 14 men

in total. It was here that the future of the units and the form of the forthcoming struggle were decided. The aforementioned Lt. J. Paužolis also took part in the meeting. His recollections of this meeting are of particular historical importance, and we therefore present them in full: 'I received a message instructing me, together with Jr. Lt. Uogintas, to come to the church village of Pievėnai for a meeting. The meeting took place at the end of July [29 July] at the Pievėnai parsonage. It was attended by the commanders of the units stationed in the district, officers, Dr. J. Steponavičius from Zarasai and Capt. Izidorius Jatulis – 18 people in total. Jatulis chaired the meeting.

The situation that had arisen demanded clarity and resolution. The commanders felt a sense of responsibility for having organised the armed units. The situation necessitated merging into a larger unit. The question of unification was passed without debate, and it was agreed that all units should come under a single command.

The second question was: how would we fight the russians? Two proposals emerged: 1) to join officially as a Lithuanian unit – a regiment or brigade – with the German military – the Wehrmacht; 2) to

retreat into the forests of Žemaitija and, once the red army had occupied the region, to launch a partisan war. These issues were discussed at length and gave rise to lengthy debates. Opinions among the participants were split down the middle. Dr. Steponavičius and Jatulis spoke in favour of joining the German forces. I put in my two cents' worth in favour of a partisan war. Capt. Kuodis, a military signals engineer from Žemaitija, was in favour of partisan warfare and remaining in the forests. He spoke very passionately and patriotically, as if quoting Simonas Daukantas: The forest fed the

Lithuanians, sheltered them and defended them from their enemies. The most important arguments against collaborating with the Germans were: the removal of our provisional government and the abolition of independence in 1941; the occupation without any promises for the future; and the treacherous and cruel treatment of the Territorial Force by the Germans.

The partisan war waged from the forests raised the problem of supplies of weapons, ammunition and clothing and, most importantly, the question of how long the second russian occupation would last. The question

required a secret vote. Eight voted in favour of the partisan war, ten in favour of allying with the Germans. In accordance with democratic principles, the supporters of the partisan war had to defer to the will of the majority. Dr. Steponavičius and Capt. Jatulis were tasked with negotiating with the German military command in Žemaitija.

The Pievėnai meeting marked the start of the formation of the unit. The name of the combined unit was not discussed at the Pievėnai meeting. The name 'Fatherland Defence Force' only emerged a few days later, once the squads had gathered at Plinkšiai Manor.'

During the meeting, it was decided not to retreat any further, but to join forces and take up the fight, to rally the forces in the part of the Fatherland not occupied by the bolsheviks and, in cooperation with the German army, to fight against the mortal enemy – to show the world that Lithuania was resisting soviet attempts to re-occupy it. It was decided to name the newly formed military unit the Fatherland Defence Force.

TĖVYNĖS APSAUGOS RINKTINĖ I Į S A K Y M A S Nr.1

1944 m.rugpjūčio mėn.18 d.
Plinkšiai.

§ 1

1944 m.liepos mėn.13 d. Vieškėniuose sudarytas Tėvynės Apsaugos Štabas, suorganizavęs 1-ąją Lietuvių savanorių pulką, išplečiamas ir nuo šio mėn. 3 d.vadinasi Tėvynės Apsaugos Rinktinė /TAR/

§ 2

T A R uždavinys - organizuoti lietuvių kariuomenės dalis kovai su bolševikais Lietuvos teritorijoje. Savo tikslui pasiekti T A R organizuoja štabą, kuris:
a/veda propagandą ir vykdo vyrų verbavimą,
b/palaiko santykius su vokiečių karinėmis ir civil.valdžiomis, kiek tai liečia kariuom.dalių organizavimą ir jų panaudojimo reikalą,
c/rūpinasi karių šeimų ir jų artimųjų reikalaujančių šelpimu bei globojimu.

§ 3

T A R vadovauja rinktinės vadas.

§ 4

T A R vadu laikinai lieku aš. Nuo šios dienos sudarau šios sudėtis:

1. Kpt. Jonas ČESNA - štabo viršininkas ir vado pavaduotojas
2. Kpt. Vladas KUODYS - mobilizacijos viršininkas
3. Brig.gen.Kazys NAVAKAS - ūkio viršininkas
4. Dr. Jonas STEPONAVIČIUS - prie štabo ryšiams

§ 5

T A R štabo organizacija ir atskirų skyrių pareigūnų uždaviniai ir kompetencija bus nustatyta vėliau.
Laikinoji štabo būstinė - dv.Plinkšiai.

§ 6

Štabo skyrių viršininkams iki šio mėn.21 dienos patiekti man savo skyrių pagalbinio personalo sudėtį.

Kpt. Jatulis
T A R V a d a s



TAR Commander
Capt. Izidorius
Jatulis

On 29 July 1944, the Fatherland Defence Staff issued order No. 1, integrating the Lithuanian combat units operating in the Vieškėniai district and Mažeikiai County into a single structure called the Fatherland Defence (this unit was soon renamed as the Fatherland Defence Force). Capt. Izidorius Jatulis was appointed as commander, Capt. Jonas Česna as chief of staff, Capt. Motiejus Piliponis as chief of personnel, Capt. Vladas Kuodis as deputy commander. In total, the TAR staff comprised eight departments and was based at Plinkšė Manor near Seda. The Fatherland Defence units were ordered by the Wehrmacht to defend Vieškėniai and

to await the enemy approaching from Kuršėnai, Žagarė and Aucė, as enemy reconnaissance units had been spotted in those areas. On 30 July, platoon leaders gathered and passed a resolution to support the *Wehrmacht's* fight against bolshevism (at the Vieksniai positions). The TAR then approached Col. Helmut Mäder, commander of the German forces in Žemaitija. A request was made to authorise the formation of units to be designated as the 1st Lithuanian Regiment. In August 1944, the TAR leadership met with *Wehrmacht* representatives in Plinkšės. Helmut Mäder stated that formal consent had been received from higher command to allow the formation of Lithuanian volunteer regiments within the division. However, the formation of the regiment had already begun, and the 1st Lithuanian Regiment had started to be formed within the TAR. An order issued by the TAR on 3 August 1944 announced that Capt. I. Jatulis was appointed as commander, Capt. J. Čėsna as chief of staff, Capt. V. Kuodis as chief of personnel, Alfonsas Bivainis as chief of intelligence, Lt. Vincas Tamošiūnas as chief of supply, Lt. Klemensas Žukauskas as adjutant, and Jonas Steponavičius as staff adviser of the regiment.

Capt. Ignas Povilavičius became commander of the regiment's 1st Battalion, and Lt. Antanas Kenstavičius became commander of the 2nd Battalion. Each battalion comprised three companies. The order emphasised that the regiment was being formed in accordance with the statutes of the former Lithuanian Armed Forces. From 1 August 1944, the 1st Regiment of the TAR was ordered to assemble in the Seda district. From 4 August 1944, the 1st Regiment operated in the sector stretching from the Latvian border to the southern outskirts of Telšiai. The regiment later expanded its operations following the formation of a company in Tverai. The Žarėnai detachment also joined the TAR. Throughout the Žemaitija sector of the front, from the Latvian border to Kaltinėnai, the regiment's combat and reconnaissance units were active, cooperating with *Wehrmacht* units. The regiment's soldiers clashed with the soviets on several occasions and suffered minor losses. On 8 August 1944, two TAR soldiers encountered soviet saboteurs on the Vieksniai–Seda road. During the fire-fight, Pvt. Nikodemas Jakutis (born 1922) was killed. He was the first casualty of the



TAR Chief of Staff, Capt. Jonas Čėsna

1st Regiment of the TAR.

On 26 August, the regiment had around 1 200 men, 47 of whom were officers. Order No. 46 of the TAR, dated 8 September 1944, announced that the formation of the 2nd Lithuanian Infantry Regiment had begun. Col. (Engineer) Mečys Kareiva was appointed regimental commander (he died at the end of September, after which Lt. Col. Matas Naujokas took over as commander. M. Kareiva was buried in the Catholic cemetery in Seda). Initially, the regimental headquarters was in Plinkšės, and later in Telšiai. Whilst the 1st Regiment was stationed along the Venta River, several soldiers were killed during the constant clashes with the soviets; a few were wounded, and several others went missing. On the orders of the Germans, from 20 September 1944, the TAR was renamed the Lithuanian Military Units Inspectorate.

According to a TAR order dated 8 August 1944, the registers of the 1st Company of the 1st Battalion of the 1st Regiment listed 140 soldiers, those of the 2nd Company listed 160, and those for the 3rd Company listed 158; the Signals Company comprised 23 soldiers, the Pioneer Platoon – 8, the Regiment Commander's Staff – 12, the Second (reconnaissance) Section – 8, the Administrative Section – 3, the Supply and Service Section – 33, and the Medical Section – 21 soldiers. In total, on 8 August 1944, the 1st Battalion comprised 566 soldiers (572 including officers). By

Order No. 17 (20) of 18 August 1944, Capt. I. Jatulis, commander of the TAR and the 1st Lithuanian Regiment, appointed Maj. Alfonsas Urbonas to temporarily command the regiment before leaving on a mission. It was not until 5 October 1944 that, by Order No. 5 (62) of the Lithuanian Military Units Inspectorate, Maj. A. Urbonas was appointed commander of the aforementioned regiment with effect from 1 October 1944. On 21 August 1944, the 1st Lithuanian Regiment of the TAR comprised 41 officers, 15 personnel performing officer duties, 1 011 soldiers and 33 women (nurses, cooks, etc.) – a total of 1 100 personnel. According to the register dated 24 August 1944, the 1st Lithuanian Regiment comprised 47 officers, 15 personnel performing officer duties, 18 master sergeants, 220 non-commissioned officers and junior non-commissioned officers, 84 corporals, 297 privates, 527 recruits, 12 charitable sisters, 34 field medics, cooks and others – a total of 1 254 personnel. A total of 112 officers served in the TAR, five of whom held the rank of colonel: Jurgis Giedrys, Mečys Kareiva, Matas Naujokas, Mykolas Kalmantas and Kazys Pranckonis.

According to Lt. J. Paužuolis, adjutant to the commander of the 1st Regiment, the regiment's soldiers wore a variety of uniforms – some wore civilian clothes with a white armband, others wore a variety of uniforms: those of the independent Lithuanian Armed Forces, the police, the fire brigade, the German military, the auxiliary police and others. The soldiers had no warmer clothing, coats or blankets, even though the weather was growing colder as autumn set in. The regiment's command asked the Germans to provide suitable weapons, clothing and footwear. In early September, the 1st Regiment was withdrawn from its positions on the Venta River and took up quarters in the vicinity of the village of Šiaudinė, about 7 km from the front. The regiment's soldiers were issued new uniforms from the German military and military police. A few days later, the regiment received orders to march to Seda. The companies took up positions to the west and north of Seda, along the country roads to Barstyčiai, Ylakai and Renava. The regiment's headquarters was established in the yard of a well-to-do farmer, by the road to Ylakai, about 3 km from Seda.

Each volunteer was issued a soldier's

service identification book (Ger. *Soldbuch*), which contained information about the soldier (personal details, type of weapon and unit name). The details of newly arrived volunteers were recorded by the administrative section. The 1st Regiment also had its own chaplain – Father Vaclovas Paulauskas held this post. The TAR headquarters also published a newspaper entitled '*Lietuvos gynėjas*' ('Defender of Lithuania'). It was edited by the journalist Simas Miglinas. Five issues of the newspaper were published: the first on 18 August 1944, and the last on 29 September. It was the only Lithuanian-language newspaper remaining at that time in the part of Lithuania not occupied by the bolsheviks.

A considerable number of young men from the districts of Žemaitija joined the TAR. On 22 August 1944, the commander of the 4th Battalion, Lt. Stasys Bakšys, reported to the headquarters of the 1st Regiment that 210 volunteers had registered with the battalion in its area of operations (the districts of Salantai, Darbėnai, Skuodas and Mosėdis). A major problem was the shortage of weapons, which undermined discipline and the volunteers' willingness to fight. On 25 August 1944, Petras Tiškevičius went to see the chief of police in the Salantai district and expressed his wish to serve in the TAR. He was directed to the volunteer recruitment centre in Mosėdis. P. Tiškevičius arrived in Mosėdis on 28 August. The new recruits underwent eight days of drill training there, after which they were sent to Seda and assigned to the 1st Regiment. P. Tiškevičius was assigned to serve as a clerk in the 5th Company of the regiment's 2nd Battalion. The commander of the 5th Company was Lt. S. Bakšys.

On 8 September 1944, by Order No. 41 (46) of the TAR, the formation of the 2nd Lithuanian Infantry Regiment began. Col. (Engineer) M. Kareiva was appointed its commander (following his death at the end of September, Lt. Col. M. Naujokas took over as commander). In order to speed up the organisation of the 2nd Regiment, by Order No. 50 (55) of 20 September 1944, Lt. Antanas Kenstavičius, commander of the 2nd Battalion of the 1st Lithuanian Regiment, was assigned to assist M. Kareiva.

Recollections of TAR soldiers regarding their service in the unit prior to the Battle of Seda

Zenonas Drongis (born in 1925 in Alytus), formerly a soldier in the 6th Company of the 2nd Battalion of the TAR, recalls his service prior to the Battle of Seda: 'One reconnaissance mission in particular has remained etched in my memory, one in which I also took part. Around midday, the then commander of the 2nd Battalion, Lt. Kenstavičius, arrived and addressed our company, which was lined up, stating that volunteers were needed to carry out a reconnaissance mission behind enemy lines, that is, beyond the Venta River. My friend Albinas Žiška, another soldier whose surname I cannot recall, and I volunteered. Lt. Kenstavičius instructed us to try to scout the area without provoking enemy fire, and to withdraw immediately if the enemy spotted us. The battalion commander himself, along with the company commander, Lt. Jaunutis, and a few other soldiers, accompanied us along a bushy ditch leading downhill towards the Venta. Whilst we were wading across the Venta, they remained behind to wait for our return. Having crossed the Venta and entered the alder thickets, we agreed on the directions each of us would take and split up. I made my way towards the ditch that led to where we suspected an enemy machine-gun nest was located. Having crept up to the suspected position, I discovered craters and trenches blasted by our artillery, leading towards the farmstead. As it was very risky for one person to move through the enemy trenches to the farmstead, I returned along the same route. After crossing the Venta River, I immediately met the battalion commander, who was waiting there with his group, and the members of my reconnaissance group, who had already returned. For carrying out this mission, the three of us were awarded the rank of corporal by order of the regiment commander.'

Vytautas Ališauskas (born 1924) from Šiauliai served in both the LVR and the TAR. In his biography, he writes: 'In July of that same year (1944, – A. B.) the Russian army advanced on Šiauliai and occupied the town. Having captured the town, they immediately announced a mobilisation. I

had no desire whatsoever to serve in the Red Army, so my former schoolmate from my secondary school days and I decided to head west. Near Kuršėnai, we managed to cross the Venta River, which at that time formed the main front line. We continued our journey towards Telšiai through no man's land as far as Luokė. <...>

A few days later, we left that group and set off for Telšiai. At that time, there was already a TAR command post there, to which we reported. The headquarters of the TAR was established in Plinkšiai, near Seda. A few days later, I was assigned to the 1st Infantry Regiment, commanded by Capt. Izidorius Jatulis, and posted to the 1st Company. This company had at that time taken up positions near the town of Papilė, along the Venta River. We remained there until the second half of September, when we were relieved by the Germans, and our regiment moved to Seda and the surrounding villages. At the end of September, we buried Col. Mečys Kareiva, the commander of the newly formed division. I took part in his funeral as part of the honour guard.'

TAR soldiers were being trained for combat against the Soviets. Linas Janulionis (born in 1925 in Kaunas), a volunteer in the unit who served in the 4th Company of the 2nd Battalion of the 1st Regiment (company commander – Lt. Jurkūnas), recalled those days: 'We lived in a farmer's cottage on an isolated farmstead. We slept in makeshift two-storey huts. Training was largely limited to the dismantling and reassembly of mortars (the heavy weapons company, led by Capt. Pranas Počebutas, was equipped with 82 mm calibre mortars, three 75-millimetre anti-tank guns and six new German heavy machine guns capable of firing 1 200 rounds per minute), estimating the distance to a target by eye, and then verifying it by counting steps. We were trained in drill less frequently. But whenever we marched, it was always to the sound of a song.'

On 24 September 1944, Soviet High Command issued an order to the 1st Baltic Front specifying the directions of the offensive. The front's task was to cut off the German forces of Army Group 'North' in Latvia from East Prussia. The 1st Baltic Front was ordered to secretly and urgently withdraw its forces from Riga and to concentrate a strike force in the Šiauliai area, which, once the operation began, would advance in the

direction of Klaipėda. The initial objective was to break through the first and second lines of defence and capture the front line at Tirkšliai, Plungė, Šilalė and Tauragė. The plan was then to advance to the Baltic Sea coast in the stretch between Palanga and the mouth of the Nemunas. A mere six days were allocated for preparations, whilst the operation itself was to last 10–11 days. The main assault was to be carried out by the 6th Guards Army, the 43rd and 51st Armies, and the 5th Guards Tank Army. Supporting forces consisted of the 2nd Guards Army and the 1st Tank Corps, operating in conjunction with the 39th Army of the 3rd Belorussian Front. Almost half of the forces of the 1st Baltic Front were concentrated in the main offensive sector, which was 18–20 km wide. For every kilometre, there were 180–200 guns and mortars, 30–50 tanks and self-propelled artillery pieces.

The German forces comprised 22 divisions; this group also included two Lithuanian self-defence battalions and the TAR. One of the Lithuanian battalions (the 13th) was commanded by Maj. Jonas Semaška. On 5 October 1944, the forces of the 1st Baltic Front launched an offensive in Žemaitija towards Klaipėda and reached Courland on 11 October. The red army's 16th Lithuanian Rifle Division took part in driving out the Germans. On the afternoon of 6 October, there was a light drizzle. Columns of German soldiers – units of the defeated Courland forces – were retreating along the road from Mažeikiai via Seda. To the east, the din of battle could be heard and the glow of burning farmsteads was visible. Russian reconnaissance aircraft were circling overhead, surveying the area around Seda.

The Battle of Seda

Lithuanian regiments of the TAR fought against the bolsheviks near Seda and Barstyčiai. On 7 October 1944, around midday, an advance unit of the 19th Tank Corps (commanded by Maj. Pisarev) under Gen. I. D. Vasiljev reached the outskirts of Seda. Operational Order No. 8 of the 1st Regiment of the TAR, dated 6 October 1944, stated that the 1st Battalion (commanded by Maj. Pranas Puodžiūnas) was to take up positions extending south-east from the shore of Lake Seda and defend the sector Seda–Rubikiai–the Varduva River–the



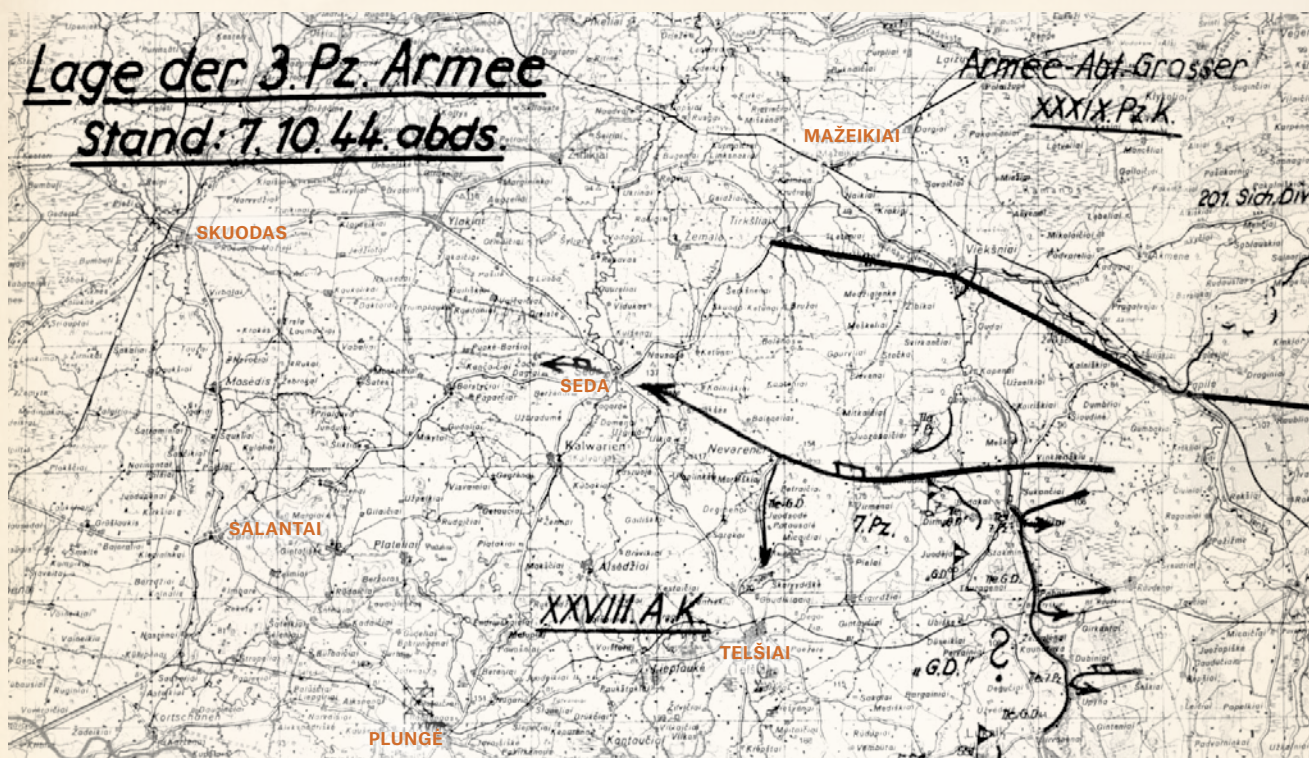
TAR soldier Albertas Kondratavičius. October 1944

crossroads of Seda and Žemaičių Kalvarija, and Seda–Barstyčiai. The 2nd Battalion (commanded by Lt. Liudas Norkus) was tasked with taking up defensive positions to the north-east of Seda – to protect the eastern bank of the Varduva River, Žydvaris and the northern shore of Lake Seda. The dividing line between the battalions was to run through the centre of Lake Seda.

The regiment's 3rd Battalion was held in reserve and deployed on the western bank of the Varduva near Barstyčiai. The regiment's headquarters was established in Seda. The 2nd Regiment of the TAR took up positions between the road to Žemaičių Kalvarija on the right flank and the Domija River on the left. The regiment's combat mission was to halt the enemy's advance across these water obstacles. In preparation for the defence of Seda, ring-shaped

trenches were dug. The TAR command had expected the soviets to launch an airborne assault, but the red army attacked with the support of tank units. Seda was situated in a strategically advantageous location – at the confluence of two rivers. The muddy riverbanks presented a difficult obstacle for infantry, and particularly for tanks. The only crossing over the Varduva was the bridge near the watermill. This made any future retreat by the TAR troops extremely difficult.

On 7 October 1944, red army T-34 tanks appeared near the positions of the 1st Battalion. Several of them were destroyed using *Panzerfausts* and other anti-tank guns of the heavy weapons company. The infantry accompanying the tanks were eliminated by mortar fire from the heavy weapons company led by Capt. P. Počebutas and Lt. Bronius Nainys. Two soviet tanks were



A Wehrmacht operational map from NARA (National Archives and Records Administration – the US National Archives). The position of the German 3rd Panzer Army, which held the front line in Lithuania, on 7 October 1944. The arrow marks the breach made by the soviet 19th Tank Corps in the German front line between Vieksniai and Tryškiai, cutting through the German 28th Army and 39th Panzer Corps. Attempts were made to halt the soviet tank spearhead, which had broken through into the German rear, by units of the TAR stationed in Seda and those in reserve.

destroyed by the artillery master sergeant, Antanas Meškuotis, a founder-volunteer of the Lithuanian Armed Forces (who died in the USA in 1954). Although wounded, A. Meškuotis managed to withdraw. The commander of the 1st Battalion, Maj. P. Puodžiūnas, was killed in the battle. Having run out of ammunition, the soldiers began to retreat, whilst some of them, having no other option, surrendered.

When soviet tanks broke through, the regiment retreated towards Barstyčiai, where it once again attempted to organise a defence. Around 100 TAR fighters were killed near Seda, whilst another 200 were taken prisoner.

Lt. Petras Bistrickas, commander of the 1st Company of the 1st Battalion, was killed in the battle near Barstyčiai (he was buried in Salantai). Capt. Pranas Počebutas, commander of the 4th Company of the same battalion, was also killed in battle near Seda. The names of several other TAR officers and non-commissioned officers who were killed are also known: Lt. Vosylius, platoon commander of the 2nd Company; Lt. Zubrickas, platoon commander; Sgt. Žukauskas, commander of the heavy machine-gun platoon; assistant platoon commander Kazimieras Ubonis

of the 1st Platoon, and assistant section commander Petras Glinskas of the heavy machine-gun section. The 1st Company of the 1st Battalion of the 1st Regiment, which was defending the section of the front between the Telšiai and Pievėnai crossroads, suffered the heaviest losses.

Around 70 soldiers from this company were killed in the battle, a dozen or so were taken prisoner, and only a few managed to break through towards Barstyčiai. Most of those killed in the fighting were buried in the Seda Cemetery. The surviving volunteers – around 600 soldiers – retreated via Barstyčiai towards Klaipėda, and later withdrew to the West (Germany). In Germany, the remnants of the TAR were divided into eight construction engineer companies, which built fortifications in East Prussia.

We shall review the recollections of some of those who took part in the Battle of Seda. Vincas Seibutis (born in 1925 in Užpaliai) recalls: 'On 7 October, around midday, columns of russian tanks appeared from the direction of Pievėnai and Telšiai. Carrying russian infantrymen, they were rapidly advancing towards us. I must give credit to the fine work of the regiment's mortar platoon, led by Bronius Nainys (who later served as the long-standing chairman

of the Lithuanian World Community). They began firing intensively at the tanks with their mortars, forcing the infantrymen to dismount. When the infantry are on open ground and we are in the trenches, our position is considerably better.

Three tanks drove right up to our platoon's trenches and came to a halt. We didn't have Panzerfausts and were practically powerless against that mass of steel. You'd fire a rifle and hear the bullet bounce off it like a pea. Not far behind us stood a medium-calibre regimental gun, which took out one tank with a single shot over our heads. Then the remaining two tanks suddenly surged forward, rolled over our trenches (it wasn't the most pleasant feeling, lying flat on the bottom of a trench whilst watching the tank tracks roll above your head), crushed the gun behind us and took up a position on the hillock by the church. Just as the tanks were behind us, enemy infantry began to advance. That's when our work began, as we felt much safer in the trenches than the enemy did in the open. So we had our work cut out for us, and we practically halted the advance of the russian infantry. But another problem arose. After intense firing, we realised we had completely run out of ammunition. We had to retreat, but how, with tanks behind us

and russian infantry in front? As far as I can remember, I crawled out of the trench and, in short bursts (from one hollow to the next), made my way towards the river. There was a narrow little bridge nearby, so I crawled in that direction. Shells were exploding all around, bullets were whistling past, and the sky seemed to merge with the earth. To this day, I cannot understand how, with my sides scraped by shrapnel but otherwise unharmed, I managed to crawl to that little bridge and cross it at a sprinter's pace. But there was no cause for great joy ahead either. About 0,5 km of flat meadow lay ahead, which I had to run across, whilst tanks stationed by the church were firing at it with cannons and machine guns. <...> So, in short bursts, often taking cover behind mounds, leap by leap I made my way towards a ridge where I could take shelter from direct fire. The meadow was littered with a great many of our wounded and fallen soldiers, wailing in agony, but there was nothing I could do to help them now. I was lucky. All hopes that we would hold out and do our Fatherland proud had vanished like smoke, leaving only the question – the difficult question – of what to do next. The red army standing before us is too great for us to defeat with our enthusiasm alone, and direct resistance

to this mighty military machine of the enemy is futile. Of course, we are retreating so as not to fall into the russians' clutches. But where to? Weighed down by such sombre thoughts, I reached Plateliai and pressed on. By late afternoon the following day I arrived in Kretinga, and from there, clutching onto a train platform, I reached Tilsit on the morning of 9 October. From there I ended up in a camp in Königsberg, where a construction pioneer unit was formed and sent to Poland to dig trenches and build fortifications. I became the company medic.'

Vytautas P. Didžiulis recounts: 'On the morning of 7 October, we were ordered to proceed immediately to Seda, take up positions and dig trenches. As the russians approached, several German fighter planes flew over, presumably to warn us of the approaching enemy. Fighting broke out soon afterwards. Russian tanks and infantry broke through our defensive lines, as we had neither tanks nor artillery. We were ordered to retreat across the Varduva. The river had been dammed near the mill, making it quite wide, and a footbridge had been laid across it – partly submerged in the water – which the enemy fired upon with a machine gun. Tank shells were exploding right there. We could see our

fallen comrades on the bank and in the river.'

Lt. J. Paužuolis, a participant in the Battle of Seda, recalls: 'The regimental commander, barely taking his ear off the telephone, kept asking the commander of the 1st Battalion about the situation on the front lines. When the battalion commander reported that they had destroyed four russian tanks, he commended him and the soldiers of his battalion.

The 2nd Battalion fought against the tanks with Panzerfausts and SS 42 m machine guns, firing anti-tank rounds. It was difficult to determine exactly how many tanks had been destroyed. After the battle, when I asked around, some said seven, whilst others said ten. The heaviest russian pressure came along the Seda–Tirkšliai road, from the east, towards the 2nd Battalion's positions.

At around ten o'clock, unable to withstand the enemy's assault, the 2nd Battalion began to flee in disarray and panic towards the main bridge over the Varduva. The situation became extremely dangerous. <...> It was high time to think about our own survival. We got into the car and sped north along the street towards the bridge on the right bank of the Varduva River. On

A russian T-34-85 tank destroyed by a Panzerfaust-60 grenade launcher.



the left was the open, unbuilt riverbank; on the right were the houses lining that street, which provided some cover from enemy fire and bullets. As we approached the bridge – the most dangerous spot – I urged the driver to go at full speed. <...> Having safely crossed the bridge, we stopped at the junction leading to Ylakai, Barstyčiai and Žemaičių Kalvarija. Our regiment's commander, Mäder, was still there with his officers and several German soldiers from Mäder's staff. <...> We had only just escaped from the enemy. It was dangerous to linger. We had to retreat westwards.'

Col. H. Mäder, appointed by the Wehrmacht's Army Group Centre (Ger. *Herresgruppe Mitte*) had assured Maj. A. Urbonas, staff adjutant Lt. K. Žukauskas and Lt. V. Tamošiūnas that the battalions defending Seda would be supported by the tanks at his disposal.

However, those tanks had neither ammunition nor fuel, and so were unable to assist the Lithuanians in any way. On the other hand, Col. H. Mäder, whilst coordinating the defence plan for Seda with the TAR leadership, had a clear objective – to halt the red army's advance, at least temporarily, and thus allow the German units behind the front line to regroup. It is likely that the German officer planned for the Lithuanian battalions, having no room for manoeuvre (as the Varduva River, with its slow-moving waters, lay behind them), to fight to the last man. In fact, this is exactly what happened – there was nowhere to retreat to, and no one wished to fall into soviet captivity. The Lithuanian volunteers fought until their last bullet, but even those ran out. Having fired all their ammunition, the Lithuanians attempted to cross to the other bank of the Varduva – it was then that most of them were killed. According to V. Kazlauskas, the 2nd Regiment was left behind the front line and did not take part in the fighting, as it had not yet been properly trained – only the 1st Regiment saw action. However, archival records show that the 2nd Regiment also did not avoid a clash with red army units. Even before the war had ended, the soviet security services put on trial former soldiers of the 2nd Regiment, Albinas Matuzevičius and Vytautas Kazeliūnas. During his interrogations, A. Matuzevičius stated that, until 8 October 1944, the 2nd Regiment had been in Seda engaged in military training, whilst the 1st Regiment was at the front.

As the soviet offensive unfolded, an order was received to take up defensive positions near the town. After the soviets had broken through the defences, the regiment retreated towards Barstyčiai and attempted to organise resistance there once more.

V. Kazeliūnas also testified that, as the red army approached Seda, his regiment took up defensive positions on its outskirts.

Vaclovas Kocius, a former soldier of the 2nd Regiment, stated during an interrogation on 23 June 1951 that on 7 October 1944, his unit near Seda was attacked by soviet tanks. Under heavy fire, the soldiers began to retreat towards Klaipėda. During the retreat, near Barstyčiai, the regiment's officers met with the German command – the soldiers were ordered to take up defensive positions in the trenches to cover the German army's retreat. As the soviet tanks drew nearer, some of the soldiers began firing at the armoured vehicles, whilst others continued their retreat towards the coast. Those soldiers who remained in the trenches and attempted to hold back the enemy with anti-tank fire managed to avoid being surrounded – when German tanks rushed to their aid, they all withdrew in an organised manner towards Klaipėda.

The fates of TAR soldiers

During his interrogation, Aleksas Mišeikis (born 1924) stated that in September 1944 he began serving as a private in the 2nd Regiment of the TAR. This regiment took part in battles with soviet units near Seda and Barstyčiai. The 2nd Regiment was reportedly defeated by the soviets on 11 October 1944, and he himself was taken prisoner by the soviets in Palanga. A. Mišeikis was subsequently imprisoned in POW Camp No. 193.

Konstantinas Čužumas (born 1925) served as a private in the 6th Company of the 2nd Volunteer Regiment (commanded by Capt. Silvestras Normantas). According to him, the regiment took part in battles with the soviets near Seda and Barstyčiai, and then retreated via the Curonian Spit to Germany, where it was disbanded. K. Čužumas was assigned to a German construction battalion, and in May 1945, near Danzig, he was taken prisoner by the russians. A comparison of the accounts of A. Matuzevičius,

V. Kazeliūnas, V. Kocius and other detainees suggests that during the fighting near Seda on 7 October 1944, the 2nd Infantry Regiment – although it was in a different position to the 1st – was also ordered to take up defensive positions; however, the 2nd Regiment was most likely not given the order to engage in open combat.

Following the battle of Seda, on 8 October 1944, Order No. 193 was issued by the supreme soviet military commander. It ordered that the red army soldiers who had distinguished themselves most in the capture of strategically important German strongholds (Telšiai, Plungė, Seda) be put forward for awards. To mark the occasion, a salute of 20 artillery salvos was fired in moscow at 22:30 on 8 October. The soviets described Seda as a strong defensive position. The Seda cemetery contains 96 graves of comrades-in-arms, the 'liberators', with six fallen soldiers buried in each. However, this does not mean that all these soldiers were killed specifically during the Battle of Seda.

After the Battle of Seda, the fates of the TAR soldiers varied. A significant number of them managed to retreat to East Prussia and on into Germany. It is known that most of these units were disbanded on 28 October 1944 near Mohrungen (now Mrągowo in Poland). Former volunteers of the brigade later served in various German military units. Some of them were taken prisoner by the soviets at the end of the war and imprisoned in camps, whilst others were killed on the front line or during the mass bombing of German cities. Some of those who survived to see the end of the war remained in Western countries.

Jr. Lt. Juozas Uleckas joined the TAR on 9 August 1944 and served as a platoon leader in the 2nd Company of the 1st Regiment. This company was initially commanded by Lt. Liudvikas Norkevičius, and later by Capt. Valerijonas Beniušis. Following the Battle of Seda, the unit led by officer J. Uleckas retreated via Barstyčiai and Kretinga towards Klaipėda, and later reached Königsberg by rail. From there, the officers were sent to Dresden. After the war, J. Uleckas emigrated to Canada.

According to soviet sources, around 200 soldiers of the Lithuanian Armed Forces were taken prisoner. Among them was Stasys Šlajus (born 1921). He joined the unit on 6 September 1944 and was

assigned to the 2nd Artillery Battery of the 1st Regiment in Seda. The volunteer took part in the Battle of Seda and, together with other soldiers, fired anti-tank guns at the advancing soviet tanks. Together with other prisoners of war, S. Šlajus was taken to a POW camp in Šiauliai, and from there, on 1 November 1944, he was transported to Daugavpils, and later to Cherepovets and Moscow in Russia. There he fell seriously ill and was returned to a POW camp in Riga. In March 1946, due to ill health, S. Šlajus was released from the camp as unfit for work and returned to his home in the Tauragė district.

Some former soldiers of the TAR joined the post-war partisan resistance. Among them was Jr. Lt. Aleksas Zapkus (1916–1946), who joined a partisan unit in Vieksniai. On 30 July 1944, he was

appointed commander of the Vieksniai (4th) Company, and on 20 September, by order of the commander of the TAR, he was transferred to command the 8th Company. After the Battle of Seda, A. Zapkus, along with a group of about 40 soldiers, was taken prisoner by the Soviets. A few days later, the prisoners were transported by train via Šiauliai to a camp in Daugavpils. On the way, in the vicinity of Kaišiadorys, A. Zapkus and several comrades managed to jump off the train and escape. He later joined the partisans of the Didžiosios Kovos District (DKA) and, in late March 1945, became the district's chief of staff (under the alias *Piliakalnis*). A. Zapkus-Piliakalnis was killed on 24 March 1946 in the Šiloniai Forest, together with other partisans and a staff liaison. On 1 October 2008, by order of the director of the LGGRTC, A. Zapkus

was posthumously granted the legal status of a volunteer soldier. This status has also been recognised at various times for other members of the TAR: Antanas Kenstavičius (posthumously), Bronius Nainys, Juozas Uleckas, Vincas Tamošiūnas, Zigmas Dautartas (posthumously), Vladas Kazlauskas, Adolfas Kikilas, Kazys Narsčius, Mečys Pranevičius and Bronius Vaškelis. In total, the LGGRTC has granted the legal status of volunteer soldier to 38 TAR volunteers, including Valdas Adamkus, the former President of the Republic of Lithuania.

On 1 August 1999, in Seda, whilst commemorating the 55th anniversary of these battles, Bishop Antanas Vaičius of Telšiai consecrated a memorial to the fallen TAR soldiers. The memorial was designed by Osvaldas Neniškis, a sculptor from Telšiai, and architect Aloyzas Rimeika. During the Soviet era, the old Seda cemetery, where the TAR soldiers were buried, was turned into a cow pasture. Following the restoration of Lithuania's independence, it was restored on the initiative of Genovaitė Gricienė, the principal of Seda Secondary School, and the school's teachers. ■

A memorial to the TAR soldiers who died in Seda. Sculptor – Osvaldas Neniškis.



TAR veterans at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the unit's founding. Photographed in August 1994.





Drawing by Ramūnas Vaitkus

Partisan Aliases

The second meeting of the Tauras District was scheduled for late September, on the eve of St. Michael's Day. The gathering took place in Skardupiai, with all participants arriving under the cover of darkness. They had been warned beforehand to strictly follow the hosts' instructions in the event of danger, as the locals would guide them to secure hiding places. The hosts themselves were often astonished when, upon returning home, they found their own beds occupied. When they asked who was there, the answers they received were names like *Roe Deer*, *Wolf*, *Boar*, or *Aurochs* – as if the house had been swarmed by spirits transformed into wild beasts.

Juozas Daumantas

Aliases were vital for security reasons – they allowed partisans to conceal their true identities from soviet security agencies (MGB/NKVD) and protect their families and loved ones from repression. Moreover, these combat names became an integral part of the partisan identity. They created an aura of mystery, bolstered the fighters' spirit, and facilitated smooth integration into the underground structures.

At times, the choice of an alias was heavily influenced by a person's hobbies, physical traits, or speech patterns. As partisan courier Elena Gerulaitytė recalls, V. Rimkus possessed a beautiful singing voice – hence his name *Aidas* (Echo) – while T. Rimkus, known as *Siaubas* (Horror), was remarkably brave. S. Keršulis was given the name *Žirafa* (Giraffe) because he was tall and slender. M. Žilionis, a staff member of the Vytautas Detachment, became *Plunksna* (Quill) because he did a great deal of writing. J. Armonaitis, who enjoyed playing cards, adopted the alias *Triupas* (Trump), while J. Kubilius became *Pelė* (Mouse) thanks to his incredible marksmanship – he had once shot a running mouse with his pistol. B. Aleksandravičius was named *Vijurkas* (Whirligig) due to his agility, and K. Jankauskas took the alias *Vikeris* (from the Polish *wicher*, meaning whirlwind) for the exact same reason. Finally, P. Zalieckas became *Dagilis* (Goldfinch) because he was constantly singing or whistling.

There were also inexplicable, grammatically incorrect aliases and linguistic barbarisms: *Kengūrė iš Amerikės* (Kangaroo from America), *Sigolis, Oficieras* (Officer), *Staršina* (Sergeant Major), *Stružo Vaikas* (Stružas's Child), *Sperlingas, Snelius, Milko, Baikininkas* (Joker), *Soldatas* (Soldier), *Strausas* (Ostrich), *Levas* (Lion), *Gaspadorius* (Homestead Master), and *Parolis* (Password). Ultimately, these names merely highlight how partisan aliases formed a distinct layer of Lithuanian naming culture – one entirely shaped by the raw logic and desperate circumstances of the postwar struggle.

Historical sources state that partisans received their aliases upon taking the oath. However, interviews with surviving veterans reveal that they usually chose these names themselves. In such cases, the chosen alias was officially formalized during the oath-taking ceremony and was subsequently used as if it were their real name.

Prepared based on: Juozas Daumantas, *Partizanai* ('Partisans'), Vaga, 1990; Justinas Sajauskas, *Pietų Lietuvos partizanų slapyvardžių kilmė* ('The Origin of Southern Lithuania Partisan Codenames'), Vilnius, 2008; Jurgita Konstantinavičiūtė, *Lietuvos partizanų slapyvardžiai semantiniu ir etnolingvistine aspektu* ('Lithuanian Partisan Codenames from a Semantic and Ethnolinguistic Perspective'), Vilnius, 2012.