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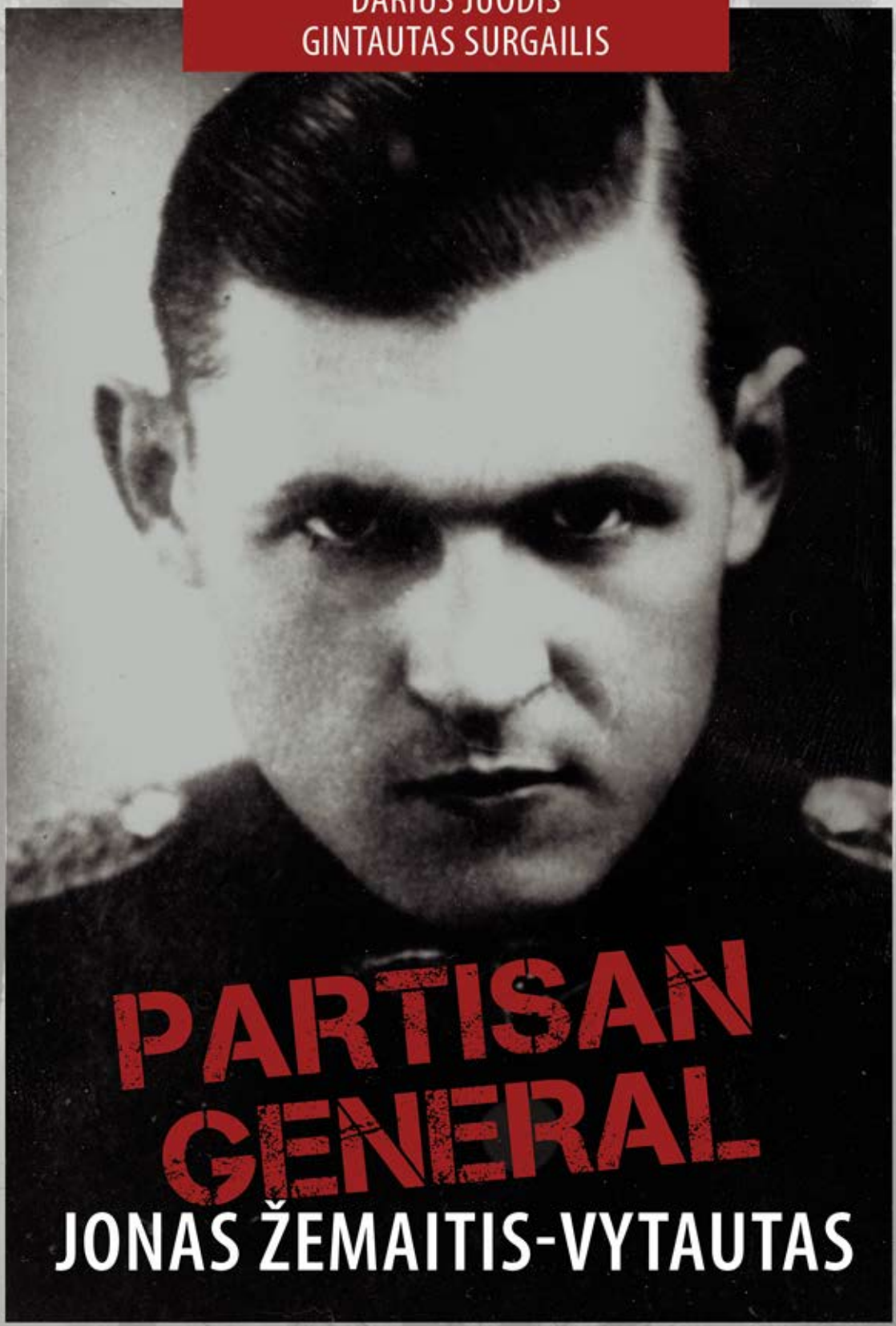

PARTISAN GENERAL

JONAS ŽEMAITIS-VYTAUTAS


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JONAS ŽEMAITIS–
VYTAUTAS
Vytautas

GENERAL JONAS ŽEMAITIS
MILITARY ACADEMY OF LITHUANIA

ALFONSAS EIDINTAS
DARIUS JUODIS
GINTAUTAS SURGAILIS

PARTISAN GENERAL *JONAS ŽEMAITIS–VYTAUTAS*

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Abbreviations

UDRM – United Democratic Resistance Movement (Lith. BDPS – Bendrojo demokratinio pasipriešinimo sąjūdis)
LFA – Lithuanian Freedom Army (Lith. LLA – Lietuvos laisvės armija)
LFDU – Lithuanian Freedom Defenders' Union (Lith. LLGS – Lietuvos laisvės gynėjų sąjunga)
MSFL – Movement of the Struggle for Freedom of Lithuania (Lith. LLKS – Lietuvos laisvės kovos sąjūdis)
LLB – Lithuanian Local Brigade (Lith. LVR – Lietuvos vietinė rinktinė)
UKPD – United Kęstutis Partisan District (Lith. JKA – Jungtinė Kęstučio apygarda)
MGB (Russ. Министерство государственной безопасности) – Ministry of State Security
MVD (Russ. Министерство внутренних дел) – Ministry of Interior Affairs
NKGB (Russ. Народный комиссариат государственной безопасности) – People's Commissariat for State Security
NKVD (Russ. Народный комиссариат внутренних дел) – People's Commissariat for Interior Affairs
SMERSH (Russ. abbr. Смерть шпионам – Death to Spies) – USSR military counterintelligence
SCLL – Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (Lith. VLIK – Vyriausiasis Lietuvos išlaisvinimo komitetas)
UFFMO – United Freedom Fight Movement Organisation (Lith. VLKS - Vieningos laisvės kovos sąjūdis)
CC CPSU – Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CC CPL – Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania

FOREWORD

Foreword

There is a great monument to General Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas in the very heart of the city of Vilnius, guarding the entrance to the Lithuanian Ministry of Defence. And if you are to visit Antakalnis, there is a compound of buildings located on a vast territory, the plaque at the entrance reading: The General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania. Even if you know nothing about this person, these two landmarks in the capital city will lead you to understand that this is an exceptional figure in the modern history of Lithuania; that the country's public holds his deeds and his fight for the country's freedom in high regard.

Lithuanian warlords are usually renowned with reference to the medieval era, when the country's grand dukes led armies to battles against Moscow, the Golden Horde, the crusaders; and the most loved military leader, without the shadow of a doubt, was Vytautas, the Grand Duke of Lithuania who commanded the joint Polish–Lithuanian army in the Battle of Grunwald (Lithuanian name Žalgiris) in 1410.

Ever since the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth among Russia, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary in 1795, the people of Lithuanian could not live with it and, during the 120 years of the Russian imperial reign, cherished the idea of fighting to regain autonomy and freedom and to restore an independent state: such were the visions of the Lithuanian-speaking nation that had awakened, risen from the depths of oblivion, confident in its strength as a nation capable and determined and willing to be its own ruler. Given favourable circumstances, with the Council of Lithuania declaring the restoration of the independent state of Lithuania on 16 February 1918 and the two neighbouring empires suddenly collapsing, thanks to tremendous efforts and armed strife, Lithuania preserved its independence and gained international recognition (in 1921, the country became member of the League of Nations, and in 1922 it was recognised by the Great Powers), entering the family of the European states as a fledgling democracy.

Jonas Žemaitis was a child of the first generation of the independence; he went to a Lithuanian primary school and secondart school (gymnasium), was able to see with his own eyes the state of Lithuania growing: the year 1922 saw the adoption of the first democratic Constitution, introduction of a national currency, passing of many mandatory economic laws, a true breakthrough in agriculture – land reform that turned Lithuanian rural populace into farmers and led to establishing thousands of new settler farms: the parcelling of manors, including the division of villages into homesteads, covered about 56% of the whole of the country's territory. This reform was instrumental in modernising the domestic economy: if, with the war approaching its end, roughly 35% of all tillable land in the country ravaged by war and occupation was virgin soil, in 1921 this ratio was a mere 6%. In 1922 already, Lithuania went back to the pre-war level in terms of crop and grain harvest, and even surpassed that level when it comes to the volume of livestock.

In 1924–1925, Lithuania's industry returned to its pre-war productivity as well. Education flourished; by early 1923, the number of schools doubled, and the number of pupils tripled (up to 117,000). Key governmental bodies operating in Lithuanian were established, and a fast-growing athletic movement began. The tertiary course in Kaunas soon evolved into the Lithuanian University, which was opened on 16 February 1922. In less than two decades, it raised 3,700 specialists, scholars, educators. The Lithuanian language attained the status of the national language of the civil institutions and the official language of the government, its ministries, the military, science, and research. New traditions were born, with the first national song festival taking place in Kaunas in 1924.

The first census of Lithuania's residents that took place on 17 September 1923 showed that the country's population was 2,028,971 (exclusive of Vilnius and Klaipėda regions). Lithuanians accounted for 82%, Jews 7%, Germans 4%, Poles 3%, Russians 2.3% of the total population. The ethnic minorities were free to foster their language and culture. Lithuania was an agricultural country, 84% of its population living in rural areas and Lithuanians accounting for 91% of all rural inhabitants. The professions in the country were largely represented by Lithuanians, with Jewish entrepreneurs traditionally dominating the export and import sector; on top of that, Jews owned 83% of all trade companies, compared to 13% owned by Lithuanians.

At the time, around 330,000 Lithuanians were living in the US (180,000 of them born in Lithuania), another 100,000 in the Vilnius region and Lithuania Minor (mainly the region of Klaipėda) each, yet another 6,000 in England. During the years of independence, thousands of expats returned to Lithuania and were buying land, starting businesses, launching industrial companies and banks. Transfers from US Lithuanians accounted for 1/10 of the Lithuanian national budget, political movements of the diaspora were funding Lithuanian political

parties, collecting donations for the efforts to build the state and its culture. The young Jonas Žemaitis and dozens of thousands of young people saw Lithuania getting back on its feet, and the only matter left unresolved was the destiny of Vilnius as the historical capital: it was occupied by Poland; in early 1923, however, success was achieved in incorporating Klaipėda, which had been sliced off Germany under the Versailles Treaty – that way, Lithuania got its own Baltic seaport. These two regions belonging to Lithuania was the most critical issue Lithuania and its diplomatic service had to address over two whole decades.

Unfortunately, after Lithuania's independence had been defended on the battlefield, the period of peace and creative work was but brief. The Soviet Union and Germany signed a non-aggression pact and the secret protocols in Moscow on 23 August 1939 spelled the fate of the Baltic states, the Republic of Lithuania among them, and the Nazi-Soviet conspiracy was finally sealed on September 28 with the boundary and friendship treaty and several more secret protocols. On 15 June 1940, the USSR government violated international law and every bilateral agreement, issued an ultimatum demanding that the government be replaced and an unlimited number of Red Army troops be stationed in the country, trespassed the border of Lithuania and occupied its entire territory. After the Germany-USSR war began on 22 June 1941, the Nazis replaced the Soviet invaders who returned to Lithuania in 1944; only this time, contrary to 1940, they were met with an armed opposition from the Lithuanian nation.

The first partisan territorial units to combat the Soviet invaders already started appearing in the fall of 1944, and Lithuanian people fought an unequal fight against the USSR's repressive units for nearly 10 years. Tens of thousands of Lithuanian men left their homes for partisan territorial units, one of them being Jonas Žemaitis, one of the most prominent figures of the Lithuanian nation, a talented soldier, a renowned organiser and unifier of partisan armed forces who was appointed to lead the national resistance. The international situation permitting, if Lithuania broke free from the Soviet occupation after February 1949, before a democratic Parliament of Lithuania is formed, the post of the President of the Republic of Lithuania would be held by the Chairman of the MSFL Council's Presidium. This was anchored in the Declaration of the Movement of the Struggle for Freedom of Lithuania Council signed by all Lithuanian partisan leaders on 16 February 1949. It was Jonas Žemaitis (partisan alias Vytautas) who was elected Chairman of the MSFL Council's Presidium and was appointed the first and only partisan general.

The importance of the resolution of the partisans (who called themselves freedom fighters) and the 1949 Declaration by the Movement Council representing all militia groups operating in the territory of Lithuania under united command was symbolically honored in the declaration titled *On the Acknowledgement of Jonas Žemaitis a Leader of the State*, adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania on

12 March 2009, which reads that '*from the adoption of the declaration by the Council of the Movement of the Struggle for Freedom of Lithuania on 16 February 1949 and until his death on 26 November 1954, Chairman of the Presidium of the Movement of the Struggle for Freedom of Lithuania Jonas Žemaitis was the leader of the Lithuanian state that waged a war on occupation, factually serving as the President of the Republic of Lithuania.*'

This parliamentary declaration restored historical justice and paid homage to the man who led the fight against the Soviet invaders.

Who was this man? What were the conditions and beliefs that gave strength to him and others like him to fight against an enemy much stronger and wilier, and what was the source of his exceptional resilience, resolve, and courage? This was undoubtedly the product of a deeply ingrained sense of duty, love of his own country and people, just as it was of Lithuania's very history, which was permeated by a never ending resolve and determination to fight to preserve the state of Lithuania, its independence, and nation.

They knew what they were fighting for, why they went to war after the war – a war for a independent democratic Lithuania.

Involvement into armed strife against the Soviet regime and for the restoration of Lithuania's independence was a bold move. Because the partisans could not expect to achieve any kind of victory alone, for a while they were hoping for a conflict between the West and the communist USSR. The hope of restoring a free and democratic Republic of Lithuania was linked with the end of the Second World War and the future Peace conference. Partisans believed in the principles set out in the Atlantic Charter, and later, those in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, passed by the UN on 5 December 1948, the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 and other instruments of international law. After victory was achieved, the partisan forces would restore the independent Lithuanian authority; as a result, the partisans took efforts to wear Lithuanian military uniforms, insignia, adopted their statutes, and organised drills for the fighters. After the re-occupation, the USSR used military force to turn Lithuania into one of its regions, ruthlessly suppressing any aspirations for freedom, any opposition or resistance to the communist ideology, conscripting men into the military by force, burning villages, torturing captured members of the resistance during interrogations, annihilating them physically, imprisoning them, or deporting them to Siberia.

The entire Soviet military-police machine of violence first and foremost targeted armed resistance, units of freedom fighters, calling the Soviet repressions measures against 'banditry', 'Lithuanian bourgeois nationalism'. Each individual's choice to join the armed fight against the regime with its vast military superiority meant a sacrifice in the name of freedom and independence, a threat to be killed in action, while being surrounded, or out of ambush; and, at best, many years of suffering in exile in some camp in Siberia. On top of that, any partisan also ran the risk of losing his family, which, once the partisan's identity had been

uncovered by the Soviet authorities, would usually be persecuted, interrogated, departed to the East as often as not, and have all of their property taken. Having waited for any support from the West in vain, at the end of the partisan warfare, diminished groups of partisans hid in their underground bunkers from the continuous combing operations by the Soviet security, publishing their press; the formation of a joint command of freedom fighters in 1949 kept sending out a signal that the resistance was still alive until 1953.

1

THE CHILDHOOD AND YOUNG YEARS OF JONAS ŽEMAITIS. MILITARY SCHOOL

The Childhood and Young Years of Jonas Žemaitis. Military School

Jonas Žemaitis was born on 15 March 1909 in Palanga to the family of Lithuanian Catholics Jonas and Petronėlė Žemaitaitis, who later shortened their family name to Žemaitis. At the time, his father worked as a dairy master at the farm of Count Felix Tiškevičius, and his mother was looking after their three children. After Jonas was born, the family moved to Poland to live with the parents and brother of Petronėlė Daukšaitė-Žemaitienė near Lomza. Aleksandras Daukša, the brother of Jonas's mother, had his own large dairy. Žemaitis's parents got work at it, and Jonas attended elementary school in town (prior to going to school, he had his last name spelled as Žemaitis), where he also learned to speak Polish.

The Žemaitis family, ca 1917. Sitting down, left to right: grandfather Antanas Daukša, mother Petronėlė Žemaitienė, father Jonas Žemaitis. Standing: children Kotryna and Jonas.

In 1917, the Žemaitis family repatriated to Lithuania and settled in their home region in Village Kiaulininkai in Šiluva Volost, Raseiniai County. However, after just one year, the difficult situation forced the family to move to Raseiniai. After the statehood of Lithuania was restored, the father travelled from one place to another as a hired hand.

The father was something of a freethinker, an enlightened man who tried to educate his children as well. His daughter Kotryna and son Jonas went to Raseiniai gymnasium (the third child, a boy, died when he was little). In the sixth grade, Jonas took interest in a social-democratic club, but the spark was short-lived.

The father hoped that Jonas would carry on his business as a dairy specialist; however, Jonas had different plans. Contrary to his parents' wishes, having finished six years at Raseiniai gymnasium in 1926, he went to Kaunas and enrolled in the Military School. His dream was to become a Lithuanian army officer.

The Lithuanian public took particular pride in its own armed forces and the Kaunas-based Military School in particular – after years of foreign rule, the school was preparing Lithuanian officers, teaching them in a patriotic spirit, and the country's own army was the new jewel in the crown of the public and the sovereignty of the state. The people were hoping that the military would protect them, help free the region of Vilnius (the underlying cause of the absence of any diplomatic relations with Poland), help keep Klaipėda and the region of Klaipėda, which had been recognised part of Lithuania, but only as an autonomy, with the German language and German education and courts system still in place. By becoming an officer, Jonas Žemaitis was hoping to be of use to Lithuania, his homeland.

On 10 September 1926, having passed the entrance examinations in the Lithuanian language and history, Jonas Žemaitis entered the Military School, majoring in artillery as a future officer.

The 1926 class at the Military School had a 3-year curriculum. Under the curriculum, freshmen cadets would be sent to military units of the branch of their majors to serve one year as privates. This fieldwork helped would-be officers gain a deep understanding of the soldier's situation, get to know the operations, living conditions, and traditions of their military units. Cadets and other privates would participate in manoeuvres, field exercises, and other operations. However, as future officers, they had some other specific duties that conscripts did not have. They had to give lectures to privates, prepare all kinds of programmes, even teach illiterate soldiers – still a thing back then – to read and to write, as well as other elementary-school subjects.

Officers were just learning democracy and would hence dabble in politics, and national-minded officers who were not happy with the left-wing party government staged a coup on 17 December 1926, took over the key strategic points in Kaunas, and helped Antantas Smetona, the first President of the state, make his comeback to the government. Elected by a Christian-democrat vote at the Parliament, Smetona

appointed Professor Augustinas Voldemaras, a fellow nationalist and historian, as the Prime Minister and, having disbanded the Parliament, toured Lithuania's towns and villages in an attempt to appease the population. Žemaitis stayed out of politics, did not engage in the radical nationalist Voldemarist movement, which was very popular among the young officers; then, after the coup, the political passions gradually subsided. Žemaitis then took up to study military subjects.

After their stint at military units, cadets would continue to study their majors at the Military School. Žemaitis entered his freshman course at the Military School on 20 September 1927. His studies were intensive; Žemaitis did well and on 15 May 1927 already the cadet was transferred to a senior grade and took an oath to Lithuania on November 18.

Class 11 cadets of the Military School. Jonas Žemaitis is third from left in the first row.

In addition to studies, cadets led an exciting cultural life and developed their other skills. The school staged dance nights, cadets would go to see movies, plays, exhibitions, have field trips, would participate in military parades in Kaunas on public holidays, and so on.

On 3 February 1929, Žemaitis's dream came true: he was appointed an artilleryman. In June, he did fieldwork in the Second Infantry Regiment, and had an internship in the Segregated Artillery Group between June 3 and August 22. Before his final exams, Žemaitis and other would-be artillerymen attended two rounds of manoeuvres at Varėna range in September as part of the Third Artillery Regiment.

After three years of studies at the Military School, Jonas Žemaitis took all exams and graduated on 6 October 1929 and, by Decree No 416

of Antanas Smetona, President of the Republic of Lithuania, was granted the rank of a lieutenant the very same day.

The graduation ceremony of this 11th crop of the Military School coincided with another celebration: the school was awarded a new battle flag.

The rank awards ceremony was also impressive and touching. After the Presidential decree was read, former cadets now dressed in officers' uniforms would take a knee and the President of the Republic of Lithuania would touch their shoulder with a sabre, pronouncing the words *'Do not raise without a cause, do not put down without honour!'* Each officer would then pick up the sabre, a symbol of an officer's honour, kiss the blade, put the sabre back into its sheath and return to the rank. Lt Jonas Žemaitis went through this very ceremony as well.

The oath-taking ceremony followed. The words of the oath were read by Archbishop Pranciškus Karevičius, who was very fond of the Lithuanian military, and the cadets-turned-officers would raise their right hand and repeat them solemnly, while the band silently played 'Mary, Mary' in the background.

During the independence years, the Military School turned out 20 crops; the 21st crop was released in the fall of 1940, when the Soviet occupation had already happened. The total turnout of the Military School, 14 crops of aspirants included, was 1,905 officers in the real military service and 2,585 reserve officers. The important thing is that the school's work made it possible to train reserve officers via the cadet-aspirant institution, aiming to equalise the level of officer knowledge and set up a Higher Officer Course since 1921, and to conduct General Staff Academy studies since 1931.

2

OFFICER OF THE LITHUANIAN ARMY

Officer Jonas Žemaitis, 1931–1934.

Officer of the Lithuanian Army

By order from the Minister of Defence dated 6 October 1929, Lt Žemaitis was detailed to serve at the Second Artillery Regiment in Kėdainiai, then under the leadership of Lt Col Justinas Kibirkštis. He appointed the young lieutenant junior officer at the 5th battery. It was a position closest to the private soldiers. It was the junior officers who had the duty of training troops as their primary responsibility: they were tasked with training recruits, conducting classes and brigade drills, target practice on the range. Lt Žemaitis soon became popular with the troops for his modesty and profound knowledge, as well as for his ability to establish a rapport.

In early May 1930, Lt Žemaitis and his battery went to his first target practice on the range. Artillerymen were the first to go to the range in summer so they can fire live rounds without putting other troops in any sort of jeopardy. Target practices would end with a training exercise between a blue and a red team who would compete to see which of them performs better. The exercises would be observed by the high military command.

With the new Law on Officer Ranks coming into effect on 1 January 1931, Žemaitis had his lieutenant rank changed to second lieutenant, however on October 29 already Žemaitis was appointed senior officer of the 5th battery.

In the period between the two world wars in Lithuania, military officers would advance their skills by attending the officer courses of Vytautas Magnus. On 1 October 1932, the young and promising officer was commissioned by his command for further training at the Artillery Department of the course. He enrolled in the 5th class of the course, but, owing to the course being restructured, on 2 August 1933 was transferred to the Artillery Department of the Military School, which he successfully graduated on 9 September 1933 to return to serve in the Second Artillery Regiment.

The gifted officer made progress up the career ladder as well: on 20 November 1933 Žemaitis was promoted to the lieutenant's rank. On 3 January 1934, he was appointed senior officer of the 5th battery, on March 21, he became the orientation officer of the 3rd artillery group. The change in duties meant he had to make more visits to the range.

Between April and June that year, Žemaitis and his brigade went to four target practices on the range.

Since weather plays an important part in artillery officers' organising and overseeing artillery practice, on 11–29 August 1934 Lt Žemaitis was sent to a meteorology course. The young officer needed the knowledge that the course offered very much. The artillery of varying calibres that the Lithuanian army had was being replaced and modernised: the old cannons were sold, new cannon systems were bought, which added excitement and meaning to the service.

Sports were a popular thing in the Lithuanian armed forced during the inter-war era, with military football, basketball teams, field and track athletes, riders having a huge influence on the development of sporting activities in the country. In addition to nearly every sport being pursued, a lot of attention was paid to the general development of officers and soldiers. This was the responsibility of junior officers, who in turn were educated in the organisation of the troop development process by physical education instructors. Lt Žemaitis attended this type of Physical Education Officer Instructor course at the Chamber of Physical Education in September to October 1934, and was appointed assistant sports supervisor at his regiment.

On 22 January 1935, Lt Žemaitis was transferred to the 4th artillery battery in Klaipėda to serve as a senior officer. Žemaitis was very happy with this decision of the military command, for he was born in Palanga, and his father and sister were living in Kretinga.

In the meantime, local German national-socialist organisations were growing stronger in Klaipėda; the Germans and their followers had the support of the German Consulate General, and the region started to slip out of Lithuania's control. In a bid to put a reign on the anti-state activities of the Nazis, the Lithuanian authorities took unprecedented action: on 8 February 1934, the Law on the Protection of the Nation and the State was passed, stipulating punishment for those who would degrade and abuse the Lithuanian nation, government, state insignia, flag, and would act against Lithuania for the benefit of any foreign state. The Lithuanian authorities collected ample accusatory material, and searches conducted at the homes of 805 members of Nazi organisations yielded 1,104 firearms and literature instigating discord. A massive 126 individuals were prosecuted, and on July 13 two regional national-socialist organisations were outlawed.

The trial that took place in Kaunas between June 1934 and 1935 was the first penal procedure against members of the German national-socialist party and the anti-state activities of their groups in the region of Klaipėda after Hitler's accession to power, and the only one of its kind at the time. The process had the attention of many reporters from Western Europe who were able to learn a lot about the terrorist and propaganda acts of the Germans and to warn their readers of the looming threat. Germany was appealing against Lithuania claiming it was violating the status of the autonomy of Klaipėda region; insults of Lithuanians, and

Jonas Žemaitis, 1930s.

the troops in particular, and various provocations ensued. Žemaitis was a persona with broad expertise, high morals, solid patriotic disposition. When two young German nationalists started insulting him on a street in Klaipėda, Žemaitis, who could speak German and understood what they were saying, slapped one of the offenders on the face. The other German fired a surprise shot at Žemaitis, wounding him, yet the Lithuanian officer defended his honour. The medics quickly removed the bullet and Žemaitis made a complete recovery.

On 18 October 1935 Lt Žemaitis was transferred from the Klaipėda garrison to Seredžius. On 9 January 1936, he was appointed acting commander of the 6th battery, and became the chief of the battery on February 21.

The most accurate testimony to his morals as an officer is most probably his certification. The 1935 certification sheet contains the following entries by acting chief of the second group, Cpt Vladas Vaitkus:

Mental characteristics: educated, smart, quick to find his bearings in any circumstances.

Upbringing: tactful, polite, tidy.

Morals: honest, fair, equitable.

Manner: strict, lively.

Health: healthy, stout.

State- and national-mindedness: state- and national-minded.

Achievement in military service: takes interest in the progress in the field of the military science and is capable of applying his knowledge in soldiership.

Understanding and performing service duties: attentive, authoritative, punctual, able to lead, teach, and tutor.

Officer life: the relations with officers and their families are good.

Non-service related work and public activity: no side jobs, no membership in military and public organisations.

Material existence: no personal property, the father is well-off.

Negative inclinations: no negative inclinations.

Preparedness for further service: suitable for brigade service.

Suggested certification opinion: suitable for a promotion.

On the certification sheet, the regiment commander wrote that Lt Žemaitis was 'suitable for a promotion as the battery chief'.

In the meantime, Lithuania grew rapidly, its economy was evolving to finally become truly Lithuanian, not to be confused either with Poland or Soviet Russia; the country became a part of Europe, both geographically and spiritually. The model of a national state designed by President Smetona and the priorities of his regime – creating national culture and a Lithuanian-speaking Lithuania – were generally achieved. Neither regulated, nor restricted in any major way, the national culture flowered. There was a new generation of educated, talented people who were able to open up to the world's values and interpret them on the Lithuanian plane. Treasured since the times of prohibition of Lithuanian press (1864–1904), the book still remained a thing of value (and so was

the press), and illiteracy had mostly been banished. The year 1931 saw the launch of a multi-volume Lithuanian Encyclopaedia, which spoke of the level of maturity of Lithuanian science. In 1937, there were 150 periodicals in Lithuanian, Hebrew, Russian in Lithuania, their total circulation standing at 930,000 copies. In 1938, the country had 2,312 schools that employed 5,110 teachers; elementary schools alone were attended by 283,000 children.

The studies offered by the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas were enhanced by the Agricultural Academy in Dotnuva and the Veterinary Academy in Kaunas training agricultural specialists. Teachers were prepared at Klaipėda Educational Institute, while the Kaunas-based School of Applied Arts and Conservatory were turning out artists. Some 1,500 young Lithuanians were granted national scholarships and graduated from engineering, navigation (Klaipėda seaport was building a trade fleet and even had a small warship), medical, language and history, military schools abroad. One of the lucky to study in Europe was the artillery officer Jonas Žemaitis.

Young couples considered it an honour to get married in Paris (marriages in Lithuania would only be registered in church, for absence of a registry office), get to know the world literature and art. So professional Lithuania art, architecture, unique school of philosophy, and literature was born, some writers even going so far as to experiment with styles previously unheard of, psychological novels, historical and realistic plays were being written. The bias was alternating between German and French cultural phenomena, although the artists were trying to avoid the influence of all cultural giants without discrimination.

Since Germany was under the rule of Hitler, who had his sights set on Klaipėda and Klaipėda region, after 1933 most of the Lithuanian officers would be sent to seek further professional development at military schools in France and Prague (Czechoslovakia).

3

STUDIES OF ARTILLERY WARFARE IN FRANCE


1. - FONTAINEBLEAU.

Studies of Artillery Warfare in France

The gifted officer caught the attention of the commanders of the regiment and the armed forces alike. On 9 January 1936, the artillery regiment received a letter from the Military Headquarters with a call for French-speaking artillerymen who wanted to study at the French Fontainebleau School of Artillery (*École d'Application d'Artillerie de Fontainebleau*). A competition for those who wanted to study in France was announced. Of the officers serving in the regiment, Lt Jonas Žemaitis and Lt Jonas Tumėnas responded to the invitation.

Lt Žemaitis successfully took the competition exams and on April 20 got a letter from the Artillery Inspectorate informing him that the commander in chief had made a decision to send him to France.

In his preparations for the studies, Žemaitis hired a teacher and took an intensive course in French and German. Before leaving to study abroad, Lt Žemaitis was assigned to a range weather station supervisor's duty during an artillery range target practice in 1936. On July 14, Lt Žemaitis, owing to his being dispatched to study abroad, was made subordinate to the head of the Press and Education Department of the Military Headquarters; on July 25 he received a foreign passport and the necessary visas from the Foreign Ministry and left for France.

Yet the studies did not start right away. To begin with, Žemaitis had to do a two-month internship at the 35th artillery regiment of the French armed forced deployed in Vannes, Brittany. On July 31, Lt Žemaitis reported to Col Bailly, commander of the 35th artillery regiment, who assigned him to the 5th 155-millimetre howitzer group, and on August 2 already Žemaitis left for the Champ de Coëtquidan range. There the very same day, Žemaitis met the Latvian officers who were doing internship in the regiment; they helped him find his way around in the new setting. He remained on the range until August 15, attending tactical exercises and artillery target practice. The manoeuvres were followed by a shooting contest for the officers; after that, a special ceremony was held and the regiment's commander awarded the insignia

of the regiment to foreign interns, Žemaitis included, which meant that the officer holding it is accepted to active service in the regiment. As a thank-you, Žemaitis hosted a reception – a so-called vin d'honneur – for the regiment's officers.

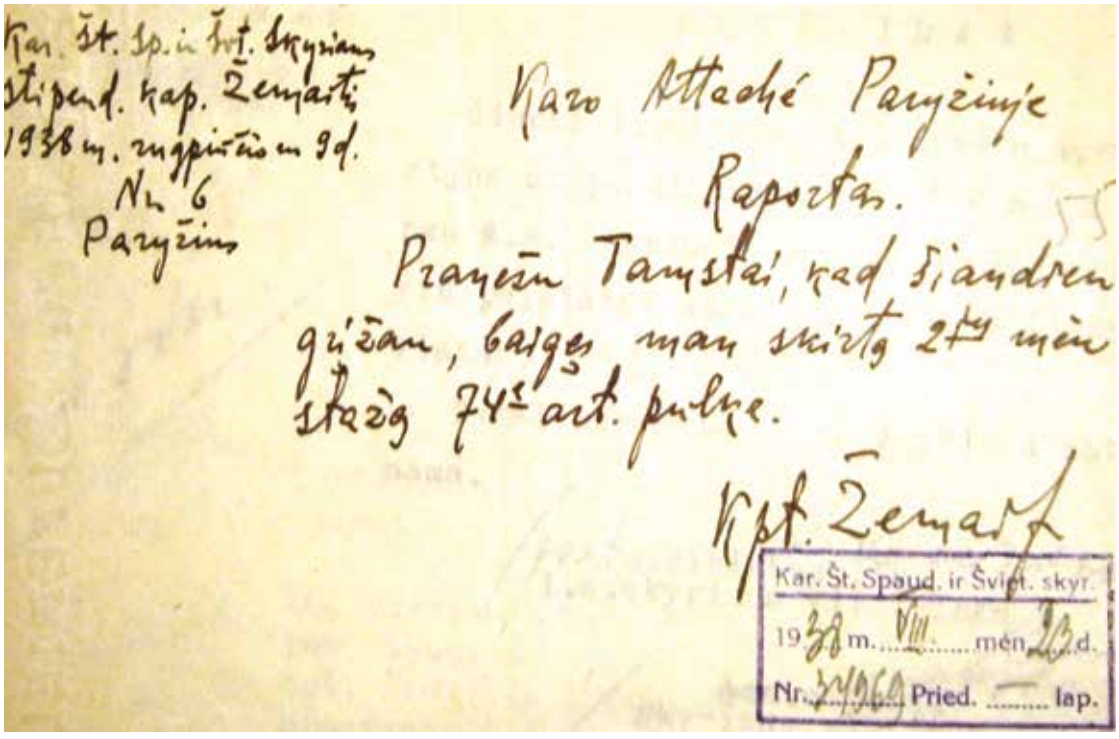
Between 28 August and 3 September 1936, Žemaitis participated in the manoeuvres of the French 21st infantry division in the region of Vannes – Rennes. He spent the rest of his internship at the permanent headquarters of the regiment in Vannes, where he learned about the activities, work, internal operating procedure of the French artillery regiment both at the venue of permanent deployment and on the range. Upon returning from the manoeuvres, time permitting, he visited the famous Brittany landmarks of Bell-Ile, Mont St Michel, Nantes, Brest. He made friends with some of the regiment's officers. On departure from the regiment, the junior officers of the regiment held a party to Žemaitis. At the time, Žemaitis was a young man taking joy in his life and excited about learning, but home was best: in his letter to painter Petras Kiaulėnas, who also lived in France, he asked: *'Do tell me, how do you feel having returned to Lithuania? The spirits must be high as hell. I can see it in myself, for whenever I returned, the mood would always be special.'*

On 1 November 1936, Lt Žemaitis as a scholar of the Lithuanian armed forces signed a pledge that until he completed his studies, he would follow any and all instructions from the Ministry of Defence.

Jonas Žemaitis (first on the right) in Venice, 1938.

Should the defence minister demand so, he would return to the homeland right away, would steer clear of any political parties or secret organisations, and for every six months of studies would spend eighteen months serving in the Lithuanian military. Lithuania was paying 3,425 francs for every semester of Žemaitis's studies at the Fontainebleau School of Artillery. On top of that, Žemaitis was granted a scholarship in the amount of 800 Litas per month. For the studies at the Fontainebleau School of Artillery, Cpt Žemaitis had to serve in the Lithuanian military for 6 years and 6 months.

Upon arrival at the School of Artillery, he was assigned to the 8th brigade of Group X. The studies at the School of Artillery kicked off with difficult artillery manoeuvres, and the first transmission exam (which he took splendidly) was scheduled for the middle of October already. During his first year, he had to make a lot of time to study French; year two was easier, because Žemaitis was already fluent in spoken and written French, and only had to take extra classes in mathematics, a subject in which his fellow students from France had already made a much bigger progress. Lt Žemaitis therefore asked the head of the Press and Education Department of the Military Headquarters to be released from lessons and exams in Interior Service and Disciplinary Statutes, but the head of the Military Headquarters denied his request, and as a result Žemaitis had to study the subjects that he believed to be of little use. While Žemaitis had some problems with math, he was quite good in subjects such as the rules of firing, transmission, horse riding,


Kar. Št. Sp. ir Švt. Skyrius
Stipend. kap. Žemaitis
1938 m. rugpiūčio m 9d.
Nr. 6
Paryžius

Karo Attaché Paryžiuje

Raportas.

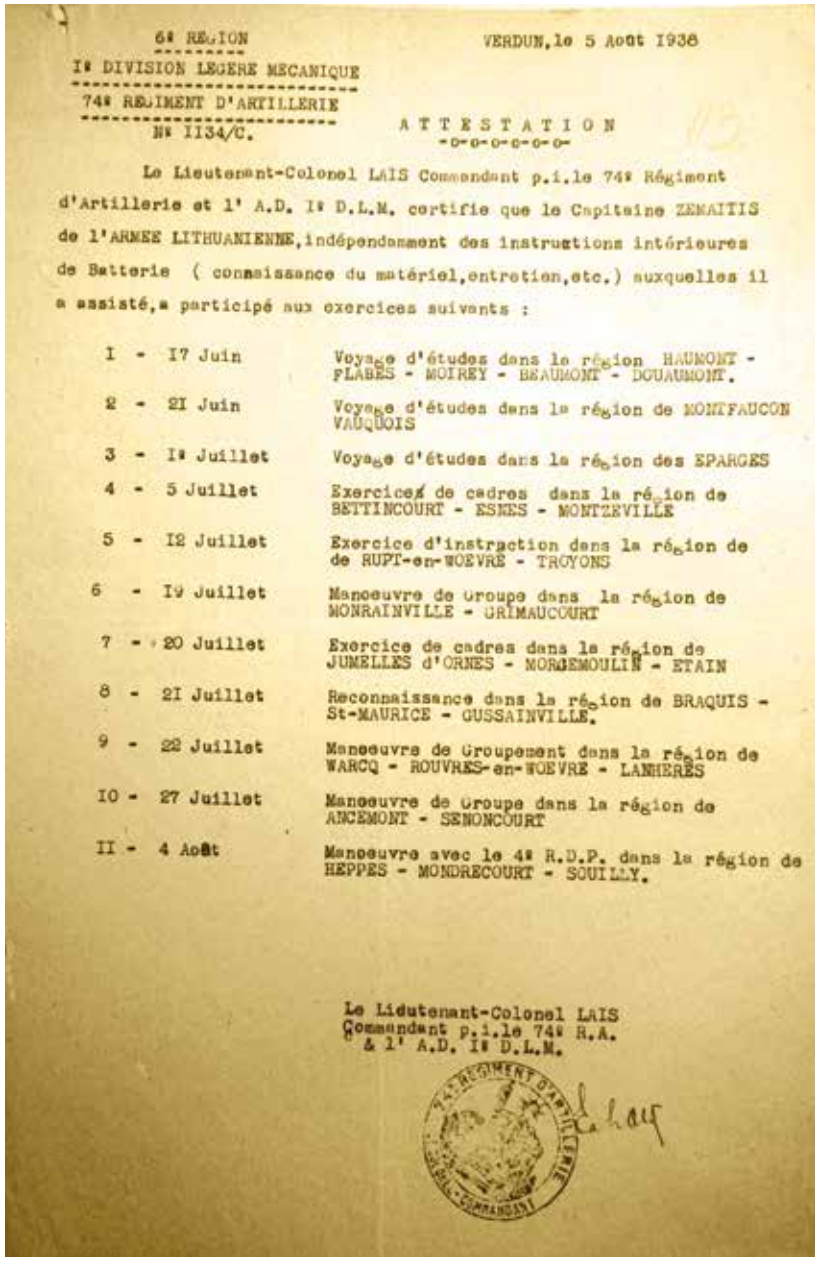
Pranešu Tamstai, kad šiandien gyvenau, baigęs man skirtą 2-rų mėn. stažą 74-os art. pulke.

Kpt. Žemaitis

Kar. Št. Spaud. ir Šviet. skyr.
19 38 m. VIII mėn. 13 d.
Nr. 3960 Pried. ..... lap.

Jonas Žemaitis' report to the Lithuanian Military Attaché in France after his internship at the 74th French Artillery Regiment in 1938

The assessment of Jonas Žemaitis' internship at the 74th French Artillery Regiment



6e RÉGION
I1 DIVISION LEGERE MECANIQUE
74e REGIMENT D'ARTILLERIE
N° 1134/C.

VERDUN, le 5 Août 1938

ATTESTATION

Le Lieutenant-Colonel LAIS Commandant p.i.le 74e Régiment d'Artillerie et l' A.D. I1 D.L.M. certifie que le Capitaine ZEMAITIS de l'ARMEE LITHUANIENNE, indépendamment des instructions intérieures de Batterie (connaissance du matériel, entretien, etc.) auxquelles il a assisté, a participé aux exercices suivants :

I -	I7 Juin	Voyage d'études dans la région HAUMONT - PLABES - MOIREY - BEAUMONT - DOUAUMONT.
2 -	2I Juin	Voyage d'études dans la région de MONTFAUCON VAUQUOIS
3 -	I1 Juillet	Voyage d'études dans la région des EPARGES
4 -	5 Juillet	Exercices de cadres dans la région de BETTINCOURT - ESNES - MONTZEVILLE
5 -	I2 Juillet	Exercice d'instruction dans la région de de RUPT-en-WOEVRE - TROYONS
6 -	I9 Juillet	Manoeuvre de Groupe dans la région de MONRAINVILLE - GRIMAUCOURT
7 -	20 Juillet	Exercice de cadres dans la région de JUMELLES d'ORNES - MORGEMOULIN - ETAIN
8 -	2I Juillet	Reconnaissance dans la région de BRAQUIS - St-MAURICE - GUSSAINVILLE.
9 -	22 Juillet	Manoeuvre de Groupement dans la région de WARCQ - ROUVRES-en-WOEVRE - LANHERES
I0 -	27 Juillet	Manoeuvre de Groupe dans la région de ANCEMONT - SENONCOURT
II -	4 Août	Manoeuvre avec le 4e R.D.P. dans la région de HEPPES - MONDRECOURT - SOUILLY.

Le Lieutenant-Colonel LAIS
Commandant p.i.le 74e R.A.
& l' A.D. I1 D.L.M.

topography, tactics. In his letter to the head of the Press and Education Department of the Military Headquarters of 7 November 1936, he wrote *'When you are studying like that, there is little time left for Paris, which is only 50 minutes away from here. I have only been to the National Opera once yet.'*

Even though the studies were intensive, Žemaitis and Jurgis Polujanskas, who attended the same school, would still manage to find time to travel around France, and also visited Italy, Belgium and their

historical landmarks. Between 23 March and 3 April 1937, he returned to Lithuania for Easter, and then in late December, for Christmas. While he was still attending the school in France, on 23 November 1937 Žemaitis was promoted by the President of the Republic of Lithuania to captain.

The studies in Western Europe both allowed Žemaitis to gain specialist knowledge and expanded the horizon of the young officer: he got to learn about the European culture, meet Lithuanian diplomats working in France,as well as talented interns or students.

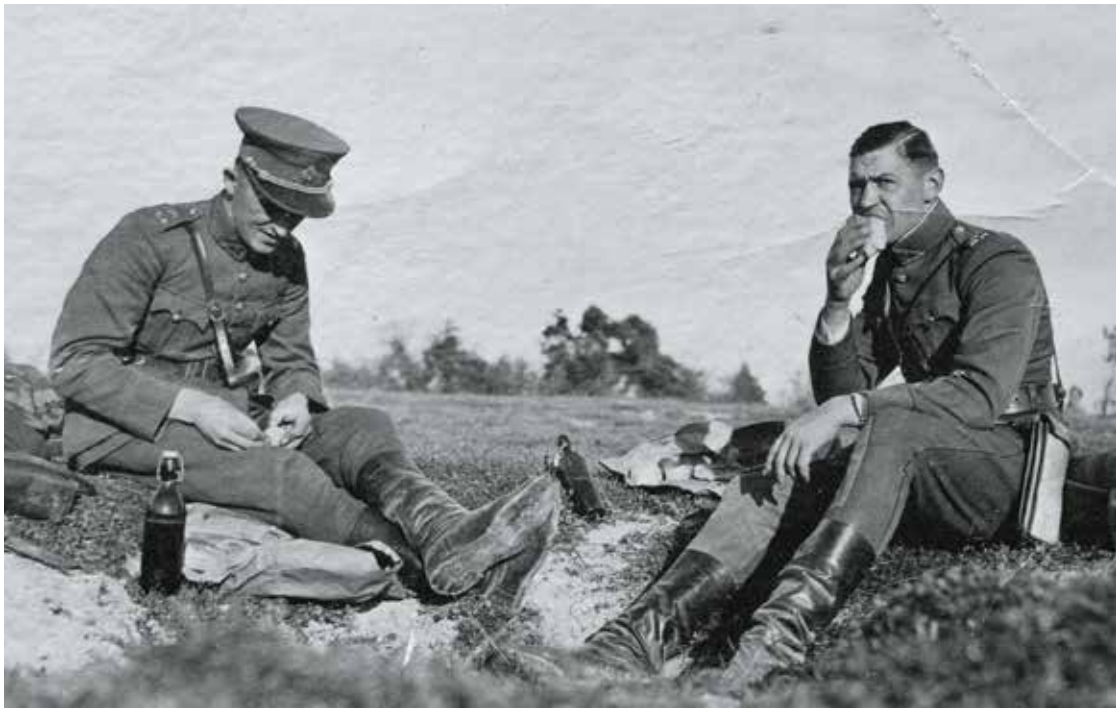
With his studies approaching their end, on 1–18 May 1938 Cpt Žemaitis attended his last artillery target practice and tactical manoeuvre on Mailly range. Having finished the studies, he bade a final adieu to the Fontainebleau military school on 31 May 1938. Yet Cpt Žemaitis did not return to Lithuania just yet. As per his request and with the mediation of the Lithuanian military attaché to France, by decision from the Lithuanian military command Cpt Žemaitis was sent for 2 months of internship at the 74th French artillery regiment in Verdun. During the time, the regiment took part in a series of manoeuvres and exercises, which was very good for Žemaitis. He finished his internship on August 9.

Having completed his studies in France, on 20 August 1938 Žemaitis returned to Lithuania and was released on holiday, yet on August 7 he was recalled and detached to the First Artillery Regiment in Panevėžys to participate in the fall military manoeuvres under the regiment's commander. On August 18, Žemaitis resumed his holiday.

4

LAST YEARS IN THE LITHUANIAN MILITARY. OCCUPATIONS

Last Years in the Lithuanian Military. Occupations



Jonas Žemaitis (first on the right) in the Lithuanian military, ca 1938.

When he returned from holiday, on 3 October 1938 he was detailed to serve in the First Artillery Regiment in Pajuostis near Panevėžys. To put his new knowledge to use, on October 4 he was appointed the commander of the Instructional Battery, which trained non-commissioned officers. There they were taught to operate cannons, command a battery so they could substitute for the commanding office of the battery during a battle. On 6 January 1939, in addition to his direct duties, he was appointed chief educational officer of the regiment and regional head of the anti-air and counter-chemical defence of the regiment's 2nd group. On January 10, he was elected to sit on the regiment's judicial panel for the first six months of 1939.

In the meantime, the situation in Lithuania had become complicated, with Germany issuing an ultimatum on 20 March 1939 demanding that Lithuania returned Klaipėda and Klaipėda region to it. Lacking any international assistance, Lithuania did not resist. Both Lithuanian civil establishments and Lithuanian military units deployed in the region had a couple of days to leave Klaipėda and its region. The loss of Klaipėda brought gloom to the public and the military.

On 1 June 1939, Žemaitis was transferred to the 4th Artillery Regiment in Samogitia. The regiment's commander, Col Jonas Juodišius assigned Cpt Žemaitis to be the chief of the 1st Training Battery in Šiauliai. This was a position he knew well, for when he was serving in the First Artillery Regiment, he had already graduated a crop of non-commissioned artillery officers that had been very well received. Upon arrival at the Training Battery of the 4th Artillery Regiment, he found it at the range, and service there was much more exciting and intricate. After he returned from the manoeuvres to Šiauliai, he was in for routine work, plus Žemaitis was tasked to be the head of education at the regiment. During the period between the two world wars, developing, educating, training troops and organising their leisure activities in the Lithuanian military was a duty that cultural education commissions had to perform, and the post of the regimental head of education entailed a high degree of responsibility and import. Besides, Cpt Žemaitis also gave lectures to officers, including 'Practice. Mastering a Cannon', 'Relocating

Jonas Žemaitis with family. Standing, left to right: father Jonas Žemaitis, mother Petronėlė Žemaitienė, Jonas Žemaitis, brother-in-law Rapolas Juška, uncle Antanas Žemaitis. Sitting: sister Kotryna, nanny with children. Ca 1939.

Žemaitis with family, ca 1939.

At the family house, ca 1938-1939. From left: Jonas Žemaitis, his father and mother, uncle Antanas, sister Kotryna. In front: brother-in-law Rapolas Juška.

Fire with a Universal Protractor', 'Planimetry Corrections', 'Practice with High Explosions', 'Artillery Tactics', and so on.

In cafés of Kaunas, the provisional capital, and other towns of Lithuania, people had already started to talk about a looming war and to speculate who would be the one to start it, and so on; articles of that ilk were starting to appear in the press, too. Indeed, the situation at the Lithuanian borders was intensifying. Walking a tightrope between Germany and the USSR, the Lithuanian diplomacy was helpless to do anything when the two powerful neighbours entered into secret agreements (the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact), dividing the regional countries between themselves into spheres of influence. 1 August 1939, Germany invaded Poland; a couple of days later, the Second World War started. Even though, in compliance with the law on neutrality, Lithuania declared its neutral status in the conflict between its neighbours, this did not save it. Under pressure from the Soviet Union, on 10 October 1939 the Agreement on the Transfer of Vilnius and Vilnius Region to the Republic of Lithuania and on the Mutual Assistance between Lithuania and Soviet Union was signed, and the capital city of Vilnius and part of its region was returned to Lithuania; in return, the country had to sacrifice part of its sovereignty by agreeing to let into Lithuania Soviet military bases manned by 20,000 Red Army troops and officers. The joy of having Vilnius returned was the only thing that pushed the appearance of foreign military units in Lithuania into the background. Many residents, troops from the Training Battery under Cpt Žemaitis among them, rejoiced over the return of Vilnius; on November 19, the Training Battery troops visited the Aušra museum in Šiauliai, where they saw a themed exhibition on the region of Vilnius and listened to lectures on the region of Vilnius, and everyone could not wait to be able to go visit Vilnius.

Cpt Jonas Žemaitis, ca 1938.

Having deployed 20,000 of its troops in Lithuania, the USSR was waiting for the right moment, and the 'creeping' Soviet occupation gained momentum in about a year, when at 11 p.m. on 14 June 1940 the government of the Soviet Union delivered an ultimatum to Lithuania. In it, the government of Lithuania was falsely accused of default under the

agreement of 10 October 1939 and, in violation of every agreement made with Lithuania, a demand was made in the form of an ultimatum to allow arbitrary 'sufficiently large' Soviet military units to enter Lithuania. The Lithuanian political leaders submitted to brute force and decided to accept the ultimatum: the Lithuanian military were ordered to offer no resistance.

On June 15, the Soviet military units stationed at the bases on Lithuania's territory were the first to make a move: around 6 p.m., the garrison deployed in Gaižiūnai base took Kaunas. The garrison at Prienai and Alytus bases marched all the way to the riverside of the Nemunas near Kaunas and deployed there, blocking the troops from the Kaunas garrison of the Lithuanian armed forces from retreating to Germany. The garrison at Naujoji Vilnia already took Vilnius at 10 a.m.

The first thing that the Soviets achieved with their march was to sever any ties between the Baltic states and Germany. In addition to the 16th Special Rifles Corps that had already been stationed in Lithuania, a cavalry corps, 4 tank brigades, and 7 rifles brigades took part in the occupation of Lithuania. In addition to the 20,000 troops deployed at Soviet bases since 1939, the Lithuanian armed forces consisting of 31,000 troops had to face two more armies of 150,000 soviet soldiers.

On June 16, the Soviet troops had already occupied the entire territory of Lithuania, and the sovietisation of the land began; the national army was soon eradicated as well. After a mock election to the People's Parliament, Lithuania was incorporated into the USSR;

Jonas Žemaitis (sitting, second on the right) during his service in the Lithuanian military in Šiauliai, 1940.

Bolshevik single-party press and radio replaced all media, chaplains were replaced by political commissars. On 30 August 1940, the LSSR Council of People's Commissars resolved to reform the People's Army into the 29th rifles corps of the Red Army, Žemaitis found himself relocated to the 184th Division's 617th Artillery (Howitzer) Regiment under Col Alfonsas Sklėrius. The regiment was stationed in Lentvaris near Vilnius, and Cpt Žemaitis was assigned the duty of the head of the regiment's school. A lot of Lithuanian officers were considered untrustworthy and were therefore released into reserve. The uniforms were changed, the Lithuanian epaulettes were torn off (the Red Army had no epaulettes, officers only had stripes in the shape of a diamond sewn on their collars), and so were Lithuanian buttons. And the officers had their souls torn wide open, wondering why no one offered any armed resistance to the Soviets. After arrests and crimping of Lithuanian officers started, soldiers began fleeing their units.

There was however a joyful moment in the personal life of Žemaitis: he got married to Elena Valionytė, a girl who worked at the Chamber of Books.

Jonas Žemaitis, 1940–1941.

The Soviet repressions against untrustworthy civilians touched his dearest and nearest. During the mass deportations in June 1941, the family of Žemaitis's sister, Rapolas and Kotryna Juškai and their three children, were deported to Siberia. The Soviet authorities considered them as 'socially dangerous'. Back when Lithuania still had its independence, Juška was commander of a rifles platoon, his wife Juškienė a teacher and a member of the Lithuanian Riflemen Union (the family returned from the exile only in 1963). That June, a total of 17.6 thousand Lithuanian people were deported, and the last trains with exiles on board were bombarded by German warplanes.

The USSR-Germany war that began on June 22 caught Žemaitis when he was at a summer camp in Varėna. The 617th Artillery Regiment was ordered to retreat with the Red Army units to the east of the USSR. Near Valkininkai, Žemaitis and a band of soldiers lagged behind the regiment and surrendered to the Germans. He and other Red Army servicemen who surrendered to the Wehrmacht on a massive scale were brought to the Vilnius POW camp on June 29. The next day, nearly fifteen

hundred Lithuanian soldiers were separated from Red Army prisoners and marshalled at a barracks on Kalvarijų Street. Later, after he had started on the partisan path, Žemaitis wrote about his time at the prisoner camp: 'when I was in German captivity, I got robbed by German soldiers on several occasions.' Also, someone had accused Žemaitis of being a Bolshevik, but since the rest of the officers who were in captivity with him did not uphold this allegation, Žemaitis avoided further repressions.

The soldiers were made an offer to join self-defence battalions that were being formed. But Cpt Žemaitis had a score to settle with the Nazis and refused to join a battalion and was placed on the reserve roster as a result. At the time of his release, he was told that an order on the formation of Lithuanian units was due, so he was not to leave town. Žemaitis stayed in Vilnius, but in late July the headquarters of self-defence units announced that no Lithuanian units would be established. The Germans were proud: the Wehrmacht would not share the glory of its impending victory over Bolshevism with units of other nations...

Žemaitis left to see his pregnant wife in Lentvaris. In August 1941, the young family moved to live in Kaunas. Žemaitis found work at the Kaunas Energy Board as a peat extraction technician. In December, they had a son, Jonas Laimutis. Life in the Germany-occupied Kaunas was hard, and so in June 1942 the Žemaitis family moved to their home country, Village Kiaulininkai. Having spent the summer at his parents', in fall Žemaitis found work as the head of the agricultural cooperative society of Šiluva. There he worked until March 1944.

It soon became obvious that the new occupation would not be any easier than the Bolshevik occupation, and so, the process of formation of underground resistance organisations, such as the Lithuanian Freedom Army (LFA), the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (SCLL), and the Lithuanian Freedom Defenders' Union (LFDU), which started in 1940, continued. Committees were being established in Šiluva and Tytuvėnai volost to rally patriotically-minded residents to resist the invaders.

5

THE ROAD TO RESISTANCE

O, skambink per amžius vaikams Lietuvos,
Kad laisvės nevertas, kas negina jos!

Garbingoje ir teisingoje kovoje dėl Lietuvos Laisvės ir Nepriklausomybės Tautvydas GEV

Už drąsą, narsumą ir atkaklumą kautynėse

BALTIJOS Apygardos įsakymu Nr. 18 § 2

1947 m. rugsėjo mėn. 8 d.

Apdovanotas

PASIŽYMĖJIMO ŽENKLU

Lai būna garbė tiems, kurie pasišventusiu, atkakliu ir ryžtingu darbu, nebodami nei kieto vargo, nei kančių, nei mirties pavojaus, eina Laisvės ir Nepriklausomybės keliu!

BALTIJOS Vadas

PASIŽYMĖJIMO ŽENKLO LIUDIJIMAS

Nr. 62

1948 m. kovo mėn. 11 d.

A partisan award for bravery in the battle signed by J. Žemaitis (Tylius)

The Road to Resistance

Once in Šiluva, in the spring of 1943, Žemaitis got involved in the activities of an underground volost committee founded by Rev Antanas Kazlauskas. Its other members were the organist Pranas Stankaitis and one Leonas Žukauskas, who was the bookkeeper of the volost's self-government. With the help of this latter, a similar organisation was established in Tytuvėnai. They would receive issues of the SCLL's underground paper *Nepriklausoma Lietuva* (Independent Lithuania) delivered to them by the bookkeeper of the agricultural cooperative society of Raseiniai County Elzbergas, distribute anti-Nazi press, discuss matters of restoration of the state of Lithuania.

In the fall of 1943, General Stasys Zaskevičius, a resident of Raseiniai, invited Cpt Pranas Gužaitis, deputy administrator of Raseiniai County, Cpt Jonas Žemaitis of the cooperative society of Šiluva, Lt Vytautas Digrys, 2nd Lt Bronius Urbutis, and other Lithuanian officers to join the Freedom Riflemen Organisation. Žemaitis was tasked with organising underground rifles platoons in different volosts. Gužaitis started working on a Vytautas Magnus Rifles Company that every active resident of Šiluva joined. The prevalent attitude was that Germany would lose the world war; therefore, they had to stay in Lithuania and resist the impending second Bolshevik occupation.

After a series of massive defeats on the Eastern Front in late 1942 and early 1943, the German army found itself short on troops; as a result, units were being made in regions under occupation, consisting of local men. Lithuanians also were ordered to establish an SS legion and declare a mobilisation of the Lithuanian youth. All regions occupied by the Germans had a legion like that, but the Lithuanians refused to fight for Germany's interests, which they considered alien. Lithuania's anti-Nazi resistance staged an effective boycott of mobilisation of Waffen SS units. The Nazis took this personally and retaliated by closing colleges, taking Lithuanian intellectuals and professors hostage; later, in the spring of 1943, they were taken to the Stutthof concentration camp. However,

failures on the Eastern Front were making the Germans change their tactics and show more lenience.

During a meeting that took place on 23–24 November 1943, Lithuanian general councillors (Lithuanian self-government officials under the Nazi administration) and the People's Council dismissed the idea of organising the Lithuanian armed forces in the form of an SS legion to be run by Lithuanian officers and the Lithuanian commander in chief and consisting of all kinds of units combined into a single formation, as proposed by the Germans. This would only operate on the territory of Lithuania, defending it against an invasion by the Red Army. The proposal went further to permit all Lithuanians already serving in various German military and police units to join the forthcoming Lithuanian unit. This military formation was slated to constitute a wartime corps (around 60,000 troops).

After protracted negotiations and coordination, on 6 January 1944 General Povilas Plechavičius received a proposal to begin establishing Lithuanian military units. On January 9, Gen Plechavičius agreed to organise the units, provided he would be allowed to do so independently. In January, Gen Plechavičius and councillors reached an agreement with Hermann Harm, chief of the Lithuanian SS and police force, and Obergruppenführer Friedrich Jeckeln, chief of the Ostland SS and police force on partial organisation. The military formation was named the Lithuanian Local Brigade (LLB; the Germans called it *Litauische Sonderverbande,* Lithuanian name *Vietinė rinktinė*).

On 3 February 1944, Gen Plechavičius began organising the brigade headquarters in Kaunas. County commandants were assigned to take charge of establishing brigade companies in their counties. On February 13 in Riga, Gen Plechavičius signed agreements establishing the Local Brigade with F. Jeckeln, chief of the Ostland SS and police force, and H. Harm, chief of the Lithuanian SS and police force; the Lithuanian Local Brigade was tasked with combating banditry. That was its sole purpose. Besides, all units of the Local Brigade were directly subordinate to the commander of the Local Brigade and would carry out orders from the commander and his staff. The Brigade would only operate on the territory of Lithuania. The Germans undertook to fully supply the military units with weapons, gear, food.

On 16 February 1944, Gen Plechavičius addressed Lithuanian men over the radio, urging them to join the Local Brigade. This time around, 20,000 men took Plechavičius for granted and joined to restore what they believed the Lithuanian armed forces. On February 21, volunteer registration began. Jonas Žemaitis was among those who organised this military group. He recruited around 150 men in Šiluva and Tytuvėnai volosts and on 15 March 1944 was appointed chief of the 310th Battalion of the Lithuanian Local Brigade in Seredžius. Some of these men were members of an underground riflemen association.

However, the German authorities were not pleased with that and they decided to take over the reigns of the Local Brigade. On 15

April 1944, Jeckeln signed an order instructing that 7 battalions of the Local Brigade should be transferred to his command. The rest of the battalions, as well as county commandants and their offices were to be made subordinate to German county commissars. As of April 15, the battalions were renamed 'auxiliary police battalions' with an 'honour' to wear the SS police uniform. That means that the LLB was due to be transformed into SS units. So far, this decision was kept secret.

On May 9, Brigade Gen Plechavičius received the above order that had been signed by Jeckeln on April 15, and responded by ordering the battalions to only obey his orders and to disband the newly restored Military School in Marijampolė. On May 15, the Brigade staff, Gen Plechavičius, and the staff chief, Col Oskaras Urbonas were summoned to the headquarters of the chief of the SS and police force, where they were arrested. On May 23, all Lithuanian officers were transported to the Salaspilis concentration camp near Riga. Around 50 Lithuanian officers were kept prisoners there, and on May 17, 18, and 21, the Germans executed 84 LLB soldiers by firing squad in Paneriai (Vilnius) and in Marijampolė.

The Germans had managed to disarm a total of four battalions. The troops of the remaining battalions took their arms and fled into hiding.

Cpt Jonas Žemaitis was on holiday at the time; on his way back to the unit on the day the arrests were made, he met Lt Viktoras Savėnas in Kaunas who told him about the arrests of the Local Brigade officers and about the Brigade being eliminated, and so he decided to retreat from Kaunas post-haste. Near Seredžius, he changed into civilian clothes and returned to Šiluva. Žemaitis had escaped arrest, but went into hiding. A new phase in his life had begun.

6

THE BEGINNING OF ANTI-SOVIET PARTISAN WARFARE

You're Lithuanian. Your fate is a grave or the forests,
Or the vast Siberian lands,
Or steel chains on your wrists,
Or a hardened cot in a prison.

A Samogitian partisan song

The Beginning of Anti-Soviet Partisan Warfare

In pursuit of the German Wehrmacht forces, in July 1944 the Red Army occupied part of Raseiniai region with Šiluva and its surroundings (which is to say, the residence of Jonas Žemaitis) in it; in August, the frontline settled in the county until early October. That summer and fall, tens of thousands of Lithuanians (mostly intelligentsia, officers, former state officials, and so on) escaped from Lithuania to the West in a bid to avoid real repressions from the Soviet authorities, and deportations into Siberia first and foremost. There are no data of Jonas Žemaitis having had any plans to retreat westwards – he stayed in his place and watched the frontline move by. His staying in his home country was also due to his obligations to the underground movement.

After the Red Army had entered Lithuania and as Soviet rule was being imposed, a hunt for young people began for the purpose of mobilisation to the Red Army (around 100,000 Lithuanians were mobilised). Men went into hiding and took to the woods. A repressive policy against those who would show disobedience began, complete with arrests, imprisonment, interrogations of actual or suspected antagonists, plunder of the local people, even murders. The first arrests were made and the crimping of people for secret work was started by SMERSH[1] of different Red Army units; later, this job was picked up by county

1 SMERSH (Russ. short for *Смерть шпионам* – Death to Spies), USSR military counterintelligence that carried out the first repressions in Lithuania in 1944.

branches of the Soviet NKVD[2] and NKGB[3] security organisations, with subdivisions or representatives in volost seats. NKVD staff (mostly probably from rearward military units) started taking interest in the persona of Žemaitis (whom they believed to have deserted the Red Army), his neighbours were questioned. In September 1944, his wife was arrested; however, after having been kept in prison and interrogated for eight days, she managed to convince them she did not know the whereabouts of her husband, and was released.

Žemaitis retreated to stay with his cousin Marijona Blužienė in Village Meiliškės, Dotnuva volost. At the time and later, relatives and acquaintances would often help Lithuanian people who were illegally at large, and partisans used this kind of relations to build their network of signallers and supporters. Žemaitis spent two months living in a hideout in bushes at his cousin's place. He realised that his hiding could not last long, because Soviet security personnel were intensifying their efforts to spy on the local populace, looking for people who were unfriendly towards the regime. With the weather turning cold, in November Žemaitis returned to his home village of Kiaulininkai, where he set up a hideout.

Anti-Soviet armed resistance that had began back in late summer and early fall of 1944 was spreading across Lithuania at the time. Some of its fighters had been preparing for this fight back in the days of the Nazi occupation, setting up underground structures (the largest underground organisation being the Lithuanian Freedom Army), drafting normative documents, stockpiling arms, and so on. But the biggest factor driving new recruits to join the partisan ranks were the brutal actions of the Soviet authorities in Lithuania. Armed resistance emerged in response to the forced mobilisation of Lithuanian men to the Red Army, the arrests, and the imprisonment. These were the common trends of the partisan resistance that began in Lithuania at the time. In 1944–1945, the partisan movement spread almost across the entire territory of Lithuania save for the regions of Vilnius, which was largely inhabited by Poles, and Klaipėda, which had been emptied by the German evacuations, with varying degrees of intensity. The aim of organised partisans was to restore independent Lithuania after the West starts a war on Bolshevism.

All sorts of rumours were spreading across Lithuania; usually, they were not supported with any real facts. Even before the end of

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2 NKVD (Russ. short for *Народный комиссариат внутренних дел* – People's Commissariat of Interior Affairs) was renamed MVD (Russ. short for *Министерство внутренних дел* – Ministry of Interior Affairs) on 15 March 1946. Below it were the interior and frontier army, militia, prison and camp supervisory service, and other bodies. As of 1947, many of its functions had been transferred to MGB. In 1944–1947, NKVD (MVD) structures were the main suppressors of partisan resistance in Lithuania. In March 1953, MVD and MGB were merged, MVD being the surviving ministry.

3 NKGB (Russ. short for *Народный комиссариат государственной безопасности* – People's Commissariat for State Security) was renamed MGB (Russ. short for *Министерство государственной безопасности* – Ministry of State Security) on 15 March 1946. In 1947, it started taking over many of MVD's structures, including the interior and frontier army, militia, and so on. In 1944–1947, NKGB (MGB) took part in suppressing partisan resistance, and in 1947 assumed the functions of first repressor. In March 1953, MVD and MGB were merged, MVD being the surviving ministry. In 1954, KGB (Russ. short for *Комитет Государственной Безопасности* – Committee of National Security) was established.

the hostilities in Europe, the German troops were believed to force the Red Army to retreat, something that was just not possible from the military point of view. A lot of people were thinking about the future of the independent Lithuania in terms of some would-be help from the West. Another wide-spread sentiment was that the allies in the West (the US and Great Britain first and foremost) would not allow the Soviet Union to entrench in Lithuania, that they would remember the provisions of the 1941 Atlantic Charter that sort of promised that the pre-war borderlines would be restored. The partisans would listen to foreign radio stations (a radio was a highly coveted item in any partisan environment) and would coin their own interpretations of the news, stretching it to accommodate their preconceptions. Back then, there were few people who could understand a foreign language well, besides, the Soviets would seize radios from civilians. This was the environment and atmosphere in which Žemaitis lived in, listening to the radio with his companions and catching any uplifting news.

While the Lithuanian anti-Nazi underground mainly operated in cities, committing acts of sabotage, publishing and distributing underground press, then the Lithuanian anti-Soviet underground was born in rural areas, where its members could hide in the woods or in hideouts set up at sparsely situated homesteads. After all, the Soviets kept towns and cities under meticulous control, spying on people, checking their documents, making arrests. That way, while hiding in his home village, Žemaitis soon met Cpt Pranas Gužaitis of a similar fate, who told him to wait and prepare for the right moment. Yet Gužaitis did not actively engage in armed resistance but was rather hiding alone only to be arrested and sentenced by MGB in 1948.

Žemaitis's loyal companion, Petras Bartkus.

In January 1945, Žemaitis established a connection with the local partisans. One of them was Petras Bartkus, his remote relative and later brother in arms. Bound by his wife and kid, Žemaitis would not take strong action as yet; besides, he was expecting orders from the underground organisations in which he used to belong. The very month of January, NKVD personnel, hoping to find him, arrested his wife Elena again, but she managed to escape the prison. After Elena and son went to hide in Kaunas, Jonas Žemaitis felt he had more freedom to make crucial decisions.

The greatest influence on resistance in the county Žemaitis lived in started coming from the Lithuanian Freedom Army (LFA), the largest underground organisation in Lithuania and a major influence on the anti-Soviet armed resistance in Aukštaitija (Higher Lithuania) and Žemaitija (Samogitia); its influence on the partisans in Southern Lithuania was somewhat smaller. Even though, due to mass arrests, the high command of the LFA had been scattered back in the spring in 1945, members of the organisations laid a foundation for resistance in separate Lithuanian regions. In the spring of 1945, Žemaitis established a close relationship with the LFA's members. Former lieutenant of the Lithuanian armed forces and member of the LFA's high command Algimantas Zaskevičius-Vasaris (son of General Stasys Zaskevičius) moved to Raseiniai County, where he met with local partisans members of the LFA, including Juozas Čeponis, commander of the Raseiniai territorial unit.

On 31 March 1945, fugitive Žemaitis had a long conversation with Zaskevičius and Petras Bartkus who came to visit him. That day, Žemaitis took an oath and joined the LFA – he was longing for action. His oath was administered by Zaskevičius as a member of the LFA's command. Bartkus became the closest and most probably the most trustworthy companion to Žemaitis, one that he appreciated a lot. Bartkus assisted with many things and in doing so had a major influence on Žemaitis, something that Žemaitis was not too ashamed to admit. Žemaitis often managed to find reliable and loyal companions and supporters, which to some extent might account for the rather long period of time he spend as a partisan. His companions helped him with his organisational efforts, and would give him timely warning of impending threats.

On 2 June 1945, Žemaitis was visited by Zaskevičius and Bartkus; the three of them went to Bedančiai forest (Raseiniai County, some 6 km away from his home). That was how Žemaitis started on the partisan path. He joined the LFA territorial unit of Žebenkštis (*Weasel*), where he was promoted head of staff by order from the commander Juozas Čeponis-Budrys. The staff also included the above-mentioned Zaskevičius, Bartkus, and others. This is how the partisan structure was being built in Raseiniai County; the establishment of partisan structures in other regions of Lithuania followed more or less the same pathway. The founders were relying on LFA programmes, orders, and other documents. Fighters were split into two groups: the active (a.k.a. the hawks, or active partisans) and the organisational (supporters, signallers) sectors. Resistance platoons would amalgamate into territorial units, these latter, into districts. As a result of the difficult situation, the factual number of districts established was above that envisioned by the original LFA commanders, and many changes had to be made in their structures to adapt to the circumstances of the underground.

In 1944–1948, 9 districts were established in Lithuania, each of them typically consisting of two or three territorial units. Lower-ranking formations were called platoons, companies, and so on. Districts were regional partisan formations. Their areas of action differed; one district

could cover the territory of one or several counties, and with the number of fighters diminishing, partisan territorial units and districts would merge and rearrange their areas of action. Estimating the number of partisans per district is difficult as it would vary from one period of strife to another, sometimes even depending on the landscape (wooded areas would accommodate larger platoons). If in 1945 hundreds of partisans might be active on the territory of certain districts, after 1950, as the strife was approaching its end, the number of partisans per district was just a few dozens or even less. Žemaitis joined the fight when partisan formations were just taking shape, which required establishing mutual contacts, overcoming personal disagreements, addressing matters of merging into one single structure, dodging threats from the Soviet security agencies. Being perfectly aware of the significance of undivided strife, Žemaitis devoted his attention and strength to efforts to unite the partisans.

As soon he joined a partisan platoon, Žemaitis was promoted to commander, owing to a shortage of commanding officers. A mere 107 former officers of the Lithuanian armed forces or so were involved in the 1944–1953 armed resistance. That is just a drop in the total partisan population. It is estimated[4] that the total partisan force during that period could have possibly consisted of around 30,000 people, not counting signallers and supporters. The partisan platoons were the largest in 1945 (consisting of up to 50 persons or even more); these would decline by the year, and at the end of the resistance, the platoons only had 2–3 fighters each. The lack of officers hit the partisans really badly. In 1946, Justinas Lelešius-Grafas, Chaplain of the Tauras Partisan District, made this entry in his journal: *'We, partisans, are missing officers amidst our command. They took a solemn oath to defend the Motherland and never to abandon it. Where are they now, how did they dare break the oath when the whole nation was watching? We will find them everywhere: abroad, in the Russian and German army, in the service of the Bolsheviks, even at NKVD structures; but they are scarce in the ranks of the partisans, for death awaits you here every minute,'* During the first year of the struggle, many officers involved in armed resistance were killed or arrested. In 1949, they were fewer than ten. From this perspective, Žemaitis was a unique officer of the Lithuanian army from the period before the war, one who managed to grasp the fine points of partisan warfare and go on fighting until the very end of organised resistance.

Why there were so few Lithuanian officers fighting among the ranks of the partisans? The reasons were two: Soviet repressions and emigration to the West at the end of the war, besides, a fraction of officers retreated to the East with the Red Army. Others would not attach any particular value to the partisan warfare at all. Surviving witnesses to the struggle maintained that there had been no experience in waging a partisan war:

4 There are no exact data and the precise number is difficult to calculate.

no one had been prepared for such a long-lasting and gruelling fight. Before the strife began, the fighters had known nothing about the Soviet security apparatus trained to suppress the freedom movement, and its modus operandi. Apart from military knowledge, the fight also required mastery of conspiratorial tricks, which was not a subject that had been taught before. Lithuania's territory does not favour partisan actions on account there being no mountains or massive woods or marshlands. Forest fighters were learning through tremendous losses. However, the resistance gave birth to new leaders who were tempered by the grievous combat conditions and had learned from mistakes.

When he joined the partisan platoon, Jonas Žemaitis picked the alias of Darius, his LFA alias Liudas. For conspiracy reasons, partisans used pseudonyms to conceal their identities. These would be changed as necessary, even though some fighters would never do that. Žemaitis had verbal aliases (that he would change as the circumstances dictated) and written pseudonyms (that he used to sign documents with), which he would usually change moving from one position to another. There are a total of over 10 known verbal (Darius, Romas, Andrius, Varis, Simas, Jocius, Matas, Tomas, Lukas, Šermukšnis, Uosis, Klebonas, Senis, etc.) and close to 10 written (Atomas, Aistis, Ilgūnas, Tylius, Skirgaila, Žaltys, etc.) aliases of Žemaitis. In 1948, he chose the alias of Vytautas[5] that he used to on documents; this alias never changed, even though his verbal pseudonyms still continued to vary. This was a symbolic name, because the Soviet security had already decrypted the identities of partisan commanders, and changing aliases might have caused a bit of confusion amidst the partisans as such. Conspiracy was required in other affairs. After he became commander, Žemaitis encouraged others to choose national names or the names of persons connected to Lithuanian freedom fights as alias.

5 The name of Lithuania's Grand Duke Vytautas, who ruled in the 15th century.

7

THE FIRST YEAR AS PARTISAN

'...I often think of the fallen. My Lord, so many of them. Our motherland is so small, and, with small exceptions, it is the best men that are getting killed; young, full or resolve, brave... Oh, how Lithuania will need them in future.'

From the journal of Baliukevičius-Dzūkas, commander of Dainava Partisan District partisans.

The First Year as Partisan

Established by Vėgėlė (*Ling*; as of 1945, alias Žebenkštis (*Weasel*)) (the LFA recommended units take animal names), the territorial unit headquarters operated independently, for, as it was already mentioned, there were no organisations with plans to offer centralised leadership for the resistance movement remaining. After an attempt to unify the resistance from the top had failed, a bottom-to-top organisation was started. In the spring of 1945, the chiefs of the Territorial unit of Vėgėlė (Žebenkštis) undertook an effort to establish a partisan district that was first named Vytis (*Knight*), then Žaibas (*Lightning*). Žemaitis was slated to become its commander. The goals of the district were to unify partisans for joint fight, to build networks of mutual communications, to proceed with the structuring of the resistance movement. Originally, the plan was to merge the partisan platoons operating in Raseiniai County and the neighbouring counties of Šiauliai, Kėdainiai, Tauragė and to go on with the unification, as well as to set up OS (organisation section, which included signallers and supporters) groups. The chiefs at Vėgėlė's territorial unit (which in the early summer of 1945 consisted of 4 platoons – a total of about 60 men) started issuing practical orders regarding discipline, camp security, interactions with the local residents, collaborators, and so on. Even though the statutes, normative papers, and other documents were hard to square with the requirements of conspiracy, Žemaitis most probably believed that partisan units simply required order and discipline lest they broke apart. And there were internal and external reasons for this to be the case.

The work of partisan organisations was hampered by the unending prosecution by the Soviet security and interior military. Despite the failure to suppress the resistance by the beginning of 1945 (even though the Soviets had unrealistic plans, which sometimes would even come from Moscow, regardless of the situation and without any real understanding of the nature and extent of the resistance, to do just that), the pressure on the partisans did not subside. The partisans faced the vast

forces of the interior USSR military. Back in June 1944, the 4th NKVD division was sent to Lithuania to eventually (and particularly from the fall of 1945) become the main military force tasked with suppressing partisan resistance. Also, in 1944 to 1945 the partisans in Lithuania were intermittently persecuted by 12 NKVD frontier rear-guard regiments, 6 or 7 NKVD frontier platoons (despite their main function being to protect the USSR's external borders, they were also involved in counter-partisan actions nonetheless), not counting the additional interior military or individual Red Army units engaged for that purpose on a case-to-case basis. That was the time of struggle at its most brutal. The interior military units would stage large-scale manhunts, laying siege on and combing isolated locations. Persecution took place wherever any partisan activity was observed. Unarmed citizens would be slaughtered (referring to every person so executed as a 'bandit'), among other things, people would be arrested, plundered, shot, their homesteads and even villages burned on a massive scale.

The fight on resistance was organised and supervised by NKVD officers, who started to knit an ever-growing agency network. Secret collaborators were tasked with snooping out partisan locations, signallers, and supporters; some of them were issued weapons and authorised to eliminate a particular partisan, and so on. People were often being crimped using compromising material or threats against them, and often had to choose between secret collaboration or repressions for them or their families. Not every one so crimped worked earnestly; many of the collaborators would try to evade working and supplying information, although there were those who were quite active and could be relied upon. With the partisan warfare becoming increasingly hard and the spirit of liberation waning, the ranks of active collaborators grew. Some information would be obtained by interrogating captured members of the resistance, even though the intelligence they divulged could hardly be seen as a betrayal, for they were under enormous physical and moral coercion that hardly anyone would withstand, if at all.

To fight the partisans, large NKVD forces were deployed, totalling up to 20,000 troops in the summer of 1945 and nearly 14,000 soldiers in 1946. NKVD and NKGB departments scattered across all counties coordinated and supervised punitive operations, manhunts, interrogated those captured, crimped new agents. Besides, to combat Lithuanian partisans, the occupation authorities set up 'destroyer battalions' under NKVD, dubbed *stribai* by Lithuanians (from the Russian word istrebitel – destroyer), and were canvassing local people to join them. Between 1944 and 1954, more than 20,000 individuals (including nearly 16,000 Lithuanians) became members of such territorial units: they were released from service in the Red Army, were paid salaries and given clothes. Even though some of them deserted to fight alongside the partisans and provide them with necessary knowledge, taking their weapons with them, a lot of the *stribai* were individuals of dubious morals, had no authority, and soon an idea hatched to rename them from 'destroyer battalions' to

'people's defenders' (for they were allegedly defending the people from 'the bandits'). Deployed in every volost, the stribai were protecting Soviet activists and local authorities, taking part in deportations, collection of food supplies, marshalling farmers into kolkhozes, and so on.

An auxiliary part in the fight against the partisans was also played by the militia and armed activists. So, the superiority of power was huge, with the forces covering all cities and villages and allowing NKVD and interior army to muster a large force on a certain territory on short notice.

1945 saw the largest number of fighters killed and arrested. According to Soviet security data, more than 9,000 partisans were killed in 1945. Although this figure can be inflated, because it includes all unarmed residents shot dead (quite often the quantities of the fallen and the arms taken would not match in the descriptions of specific events).

Žemaitis and his companions soon began to feel the pressure of the powerful force that was NKVD and interior army. In July 1945, the partisans of Vėgėlė's territorial unit took part in the liberation of an injured Juozas Kasperavičius, aviation lieutenant of the Lithuanian armed forces and a future partisan commander and Žemaitis's companion, as well as another fighter from a hospital. This caught the attention of the Soviet security. In June, the partisan platoon with Žemaitis moved from Bedančiai forest to Virtukai forest (both of them were in the same Raseiniai County, some 13 kilometres apart). In doing so, they were hoping to get in touch with the partisans operating in Šiauliai County. Once in Virtukai, the partisans established another forest camp but were unable to fully set up their fortifications. It was most likely that some partisans with no battlefield experience thought that if they were properly entrenched, they would be able to fend the enemy's attacks and felt rather at ease. There was a lack of conspiracy, too, the camp would be visited by signallers and supporters: on July 21, Rev. Bronius Gaižutis of Lyduvėnai (a village near the forest; he was later sentenced to prison camp) came to the camp on invitation from Žemaitis to hold a mass and give a patriotic sermon and his blessing. Just like many of the partisans, Žemaitis, too, was not immune to religious feelings, he often prayed and carried prayer books and rosaries with him. He drew strength from his faith, especially as the fight grew harder.[6]

Vytulis, a Soviet security agent who had infiltrated the partisan platoon, leaked the location of the partisans in Virtukai. On the eve of the July 22 events, there might have been 54 fighters deployed at the camp. NKVD mustered a much larger force from the 31st NKVD frontier regiment. At around 10 a.m. on July 22, the troops of the frontier regiment surrounded the camp and started their assault. The fierce battle lasted until approximately 1 p.m. The fighting partisans were led by Čeponis, Žemaitis, Zaskevičius. Žemaitis himself later admitted he had been slightly shell-shocked by a hand grenade exploding nearby,

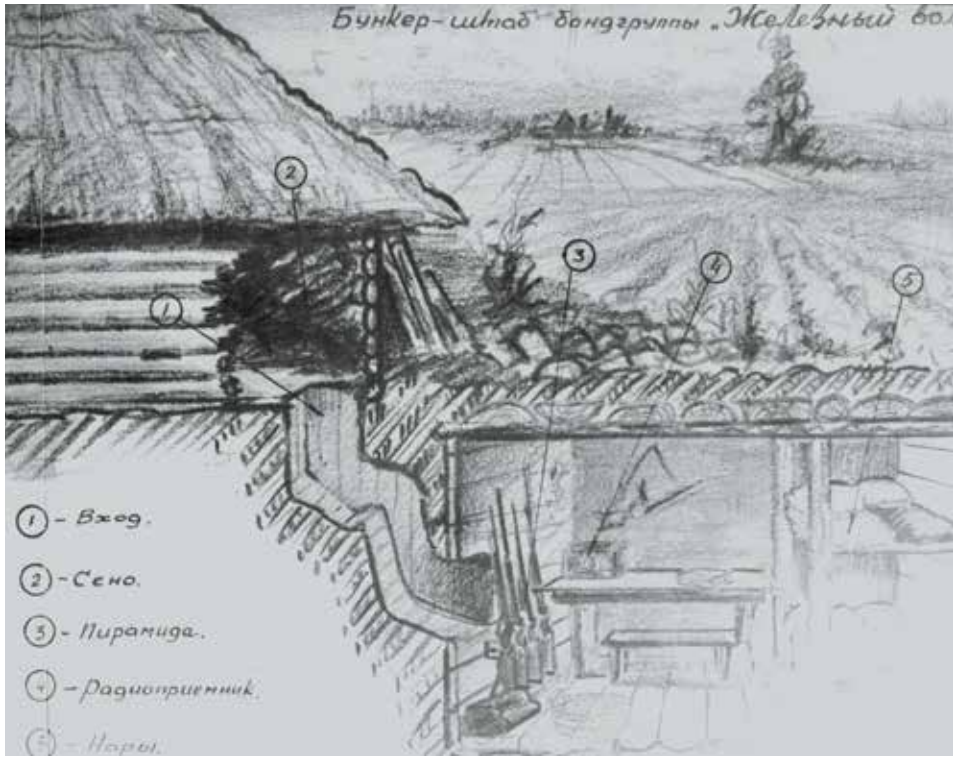
6 When MVD searched Žemaitis after he was arrested, they found a religious medallion on him.

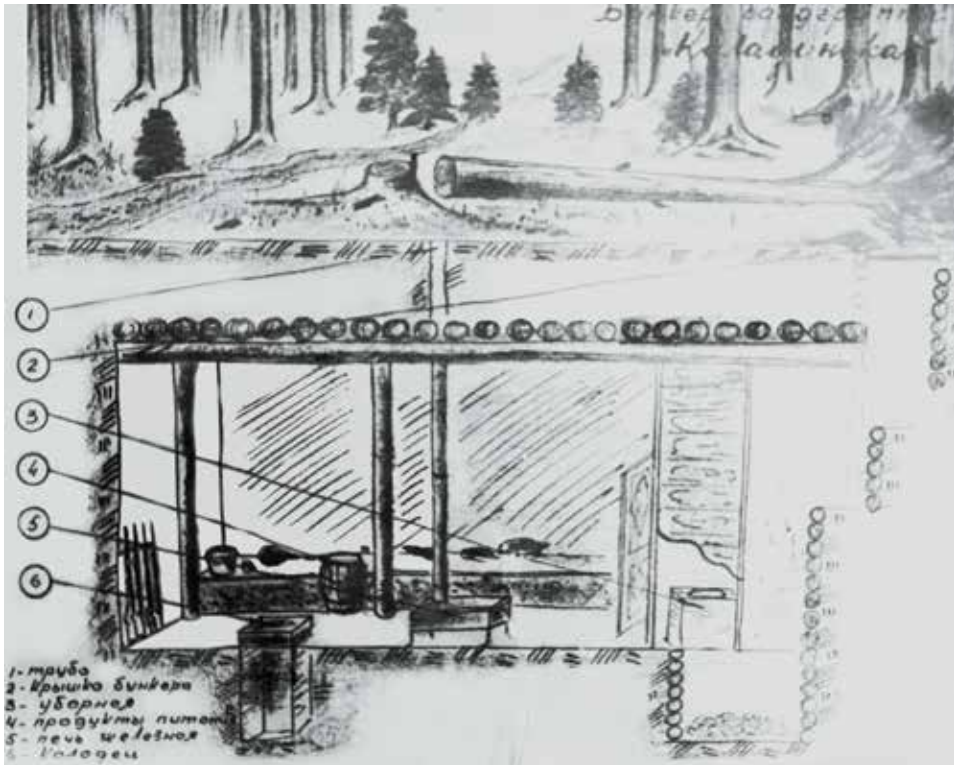
causing him to lose consciousness for a spell and resulting in a hearing impairment. The surrounded partisans could not offer lasting resistance on account of quickly running out of ammo. They gathered all their strength and managed to break through the NKVD siege; however, they lost around 15 to 16 fighters, including several women. The fallen were taken by the NKVD forces and brought to the central square of Raseiniai, where they were laid down, allegedly, for identification purposes, but in fact this was supposed to serve as a measure to intimidate the others. This form of defilement of fallen partisans was a common practice throughout Lithuania that started in 1944–1945 and continued for at least several years thereafter. Such a public display would be followed by a secretive interment. The public defilement of the bodies of the fallen has left a deep mark in the memory of the coevals.

The battle of Virtukai baptised the partisan warfare of Žemaitis and many of his companions, just as it taught them an important lesson. Partisans from nearly all Lithuanian regions were suffering larger or smaller losses in open combat against the NKVD forces. The surviving partisans learned to avoid forming larger units and engaging in open skirmishes with the USSR interior troops.

Žemaitis himself claimed that it was the battle of Virtukai that forced them to change their tactics, break down into smaller platoons and groups, hide in isolated homesteads and bushes more. Although there were still cases of merging into larger platoons at forest camps whenever it was necessary.

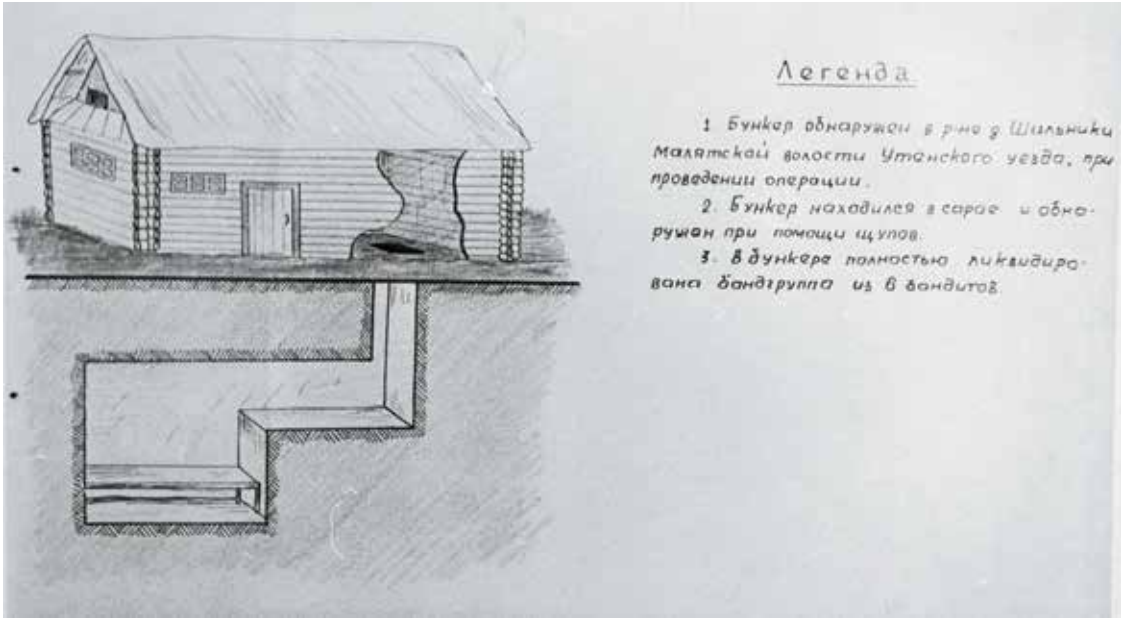
Partisans took to living in concealed underground bunkers. These were small subterraneous spaces (usually 2 x 3 metres in size), built in forests, homesteads of trustworthy villagers, places the enemy would consider the least likely: sometimes even in wells, beneath country roads, even tillable fields. These spaces were not fit for any kind of defence and the partisans hiding in them would be killed or arrested if discovered as often as not. The bunkers were usually cold and damp, which had an effect both on the health of the partisans and on the condition of their weapons, which would rust and not work at the crucial moment, plus the ammo would get wet. The partisans would spent months on end, and even years in bunkers, not just hiding but working from them as well (for instance, printing proclamations and press). According to one of them: *'I cannot make myself write. It is rather cold inside the bunker. Yesterday, Žaibas brought an electric capsule. We will place one antipersonnel mine above. If the Russians discover the bunker, the mine could be detonated with batteries. We will place the mine when it is snowing; otherwise, there will be footprints.'* Žemaitis had his own share of living in a bunker, where he would write his orders and decrees. Strict conspiracy was a major requirement, the location of the bunker had to be known by as few people as possible, moving to and from bunkers in winter was a dangerous endeavour as it left footprints on the snow: that is why partisans were the most active during the warm season. Such hideouts had their codified names as well.





Drawings of partisan hideouts (bunkers) by Soviet security.

In 1945, the Lithuanian partisan forces were largely scattered around, the number of partisans diminished, and not only owing to deaths and arrests. That was the year when the Soviet authorities published proclamations calling for those who were hiding to come out and become legal. Some displaced or disorganised partisans would take this offer, especially after a battle. According to the Soviet security, around 36,000 persons might have legally come out of hiding in Lithuania in



1945, including 6,000 partisans (the number being relatively the lowest in the Samogitia region), of which number 190 were partisans in Raseiniai County (out of the 637 people who did so in that county); the legalisation tapered off considerably in later years. The fates of those who became legal varied from person to person: some of them were arrested and sentenced, others crimped for secret work, some went back into hiding, others yet lived a relatively quiet life without hiding. The developments showed that the partisan commanders who allowed their people to legalise themselves were right in doing so, for it was impossible to keep fighters in the forest under coercion. There were fewer partisans who were undecided remaining, even though some partisan commanders considered leaving the forest an act of treason. In 1946, MVD tried to forward a letter to Žemaitis via someone who knew them, offering him to legally come out and negotiate. Such personal offers made to partisan commanders were quite common, and were largely declined.

The losses of human lives and property did not cool the desire of Žemaitis and his companions to unite and built joint structures to oversee the resistance. Publishing and disseminating underground press and proclamations was an inseparable part of partisan operations. With the fighting power constantly decreasing, this tool was becoming increasingly relevant. Vėgėlė's territorial unit published an underground paper and proclamations. Žemaitis contributed to spreading these publications among the platoons. The articles would often be written on a typewriter, multiple copies made with shapirographs or mimeographs. The publishers of underground press were constantly low on paper, dye, and printing and copying equipment.

The approaching winter of 1946 brought a halt to the unification and other efforts, because partisan movement in the wintertime was rather limited. Nonetheless, Žemaitis and Čeponis toured the platoons under their command, talked to the fighters, instructed and mentored them, tried to raise their combat morale, appointing leaders and procuring anti-Soviet press and proclamations for them. Žemaitis would often stay in Šiluva Volost. There, the fighters lived at a forest camp, where buildings were constructed from the handy forest materials; there were even some fortifications installed in case of a possible assault. Food and other supplies would be delivered by the families of trustworthy supporters, which were still abundant back then, the largest amount of support coming from the families that had their members involved in the partisan movement. The partisans would keep in touch with the territorial unit commanders hunkering down for the winter in other locations via signallers.

In February 1946, the partisans under Žemaitis held their first anti-Soviet campaign that year. Every year, the Soviet authorities would hold elections to one or another governing body. Of course, everything was but a formality and a propaganda stunt by the authorities, who were imitating a democracy. Realising that, the partisans engaged in a fight to counter the elections, aiming to disrupt this governmental action in

villages whenever possible. They published proclamations that spoke against the elections, encouraged people to boycott them, hindered the work of polling-stations. During the 1946 elections to the USSR Supreme Council in Lithuania, Žemaitis wrote: *'this election is a clear departure from the principles of democracy and an affront to human rights.'* That is why they tried to disrupt the elections campaign, especially in rural areas, threatening people (even those who did not want to vote) with executions by firing squad so they would have an excuse for not voting. On the eve of the elections, the partisans of Žebenkštis's territorial unit fired shots at two polling-stations. Žemaitis took part in one of the sallies, together with some 15 partisans.

When he reinstated the Soviet rule in Lithuania, Stalin kept his promise to US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945), who was sick at the time, to allow the people of the Baltic countries to 'speak their mind'; this might have been the reason why elections to the supreme occupation government structures – the USSR Supreme Council, the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR (the first elections into these two bodies taking place in 1946 and 1947), the local councils – were held in Lithuania during the entire period of occupation with such zeal: after all, the USSR was formally ruled by councils (or soviets). The Communist Party was the only one that could nominate candidates in all elections, and the election results would be falsified, with the authorities

The first photograph as a partisan. Left to right: Jonas Žemaitis and Jonas Jasinevičius-Margis, commander of the Kovas territorial unit, 1946.

claiming that the turnout had been over 90 per cent even before the votes were even counted, and that the absolute majority of the voters had voted for their nominees.

Although Lithuania was a full-fledged USSR republic, the LSSR institutions did not have any real power: even the LCP (Bolshevik) Central Committee (CC) only enjoyed the rights of the political party committee of an ordinary Russian district. Antanas Sniečkus, the First CC Secretary who held the position of the LCP(b) head for a massive three decades, was but a puppet: his activities were 'supervised' by the Second CC Secretary from Moscow of strictly non-Lithuanian origin. The LCP(b) had 3.5 thousand members in 1945, 22.2 thousand in 1948, 36.2 thousand in 1953, yet Lithuanians only accounted for 18 per cent of all Communists.

Warfare was not an end in itself to Žemaitis and his closest companions. Žemaitis always made tremendous efforts to unify the resistance, and was able to continue this work throughout his years as partisan thanks to his organisational abilities. Even though the Žaibas Partisan District was not established in 1946, efforts were made to get in touch with the partisans operating in the neighbouring counties and to share areas of action with them. Čeponis and Zaskevičius had to negotiate the merger with the territorial unit of Lydys (*Pike*) territorial unit that operated in the adjacent Tauragė County, and Žemaitis and Bartkus started looking for contacts in the direction of north and east of their partisan base of operations – in Šiauliai and Kėdainiai county.

In May 1946, Žemaitis and other partisans set up camp in Palapišiai (Pyragiai) forest in the same county of Raseiniai – or rather two camps fortified with trenches. The lower camp consisted of 14 bunkers with trenches, the upper camp, 13 bunkers circled with trenches. Some sources say that these trenches were a World War II relic. The fortifications were an indication that the partisans were planning to hold this position for a long time. In the forest they started publishing the Alio, a newspaper with a circulation of 20–25 copies.

Žemaitis would not spend a lot of time in one place: he would look for contacts and people to staff the county headquarters that the partisans were setting up. In June 1946 in Žaiginys forest, Žemaitis met with Jonas Jasinevičius-Margis, commander of the LFA Kovas (*Rook*) territorial unit who operated in Kėdainiai County. But Kovas's territorial unit would not join the county that was being set up. In May, Bartkus reached out to Jonas Belaglovas-Algis, commander of the Vytautas Magnus territorial unit operating in Šiauliai County. Žemaitis himself met with him that summer to negotiate the territories of territorial unit operations and establish points of communication.

In the meantime, Žemaitis was in for yet another ordeal on the battlefield. On July 5, having interrogated a captured partisan, the MVD learned about the partisan camp in Palapišiai (Pyragiai) forest, which then housed around 26 (some sources point to about 30) fighters. On July 6, 62 MVD servicemen and 12 stribai were sent to that location.

They lay siege and quickly captured the lower camp, forcing the partisans to retreat to the upper camp and take a defensive position there. The defence was led by Žemaitis, who had not lost his self-control. The skirmish lasted several hours and was a bigger success than the one in Virtukai forest. The main partisan force managed to successfully break through the siege, losing their machine gunner in the process. The Soviets' casualties were 1 officer and 5 soldiers, another 6 were injured. The camp fortifications impressed the enemy: the MVD believed they were state-of-the-art. After the fight, the partisans scattered in smaller groups and were never found despite there being 700 soldiers from the 4th MVD division assigned to the manhunt.

This was the last major combat for Žemaitis; later, there were but brief occasional skirmishes with units of the USSR interior army. These skirmishes would only show that the partisans did not stand a chance to resist this kind of military power; in long battles, they would run out of ammo while the Soviet troops could receive reinforcements at any time, which could be used to surround the entire battlefield.

PERSONAL DRAMA

The bunker's walls are smothering the youth
Those faces, full of longing... Who will understand?
Oh, how one'd wish to go there, to pursue,
To have the fire warm your hands.

Diana Glemžaitė, partisan poetess

Personal Drama

The Soviet security tracked and persecuted the family members and closest relatives of those who had gone into the forest. They would be taken, interrogated, crimped, used as an instrument to work on the fighters. Some of them were simply sentenced and dispatched to camps and, by way of joint liability, in 1945 already the families of partisans (both those who had been killed and who were still fighting), active signallers, and supporters were being deportated to Siberia, their homesteads seized. Such deportations went on virtually on an annual basis until 1953. Žemaitis's wife and parents caught the eye of the Soviet security as well.

The house in Village Kiaulininkai was nationalised, property plundered, and his parents Jonas and Petronėlė fled to hide in Palanga, where they found shelter at the place of their own acquaintances – they were being tracked at their old place of residence. Later, the seized house was broken apart. When in Palanga, the Jonas and Petronelė Žemaitis were once robbed, then moved to live in Klaipėda region, where they settled in a restored storage shed. They subsisted with the help of caring individuals. One of those was Kazimiera Rašimaitė-Stankienė, a relative who had found them. Still later, the parents of the partisan commander settled at the Klaipėda home for the disabled in Laugaliai. Having fled home, they never saw their son again – Jonas Žemaitis, too, tried not to see them, knowing the price his parents might have to pay if he did. And the Soviet security failed to track the partisan down through his parents, even though they tried. It was in that state-run establishment that Žemaitis's father died in 1952; his mother Petronėlė, who had depression at the time, passed away in 1961.

In 1948, Žemaitis sister Kotryna's daughter Aušra escaped from deportation in Siberia and went into hiding in Lithuania. The MGB tracked her to see if she was keeping in touch with her uncle. In 1949, she was arrested and sent back. In an attempt to find Žemaitis, an MGB staffer visited the Juška family in exile. Once there, he asked them about

Žemaitis, promising to return the family to their homeland, to no avail.

Žemaitis had even bigger trouble about his baby son Laimutis. In July 1946, his wife Elena, who was hiding in Kaunas and would see her husband now and then, died in a hospital – most probably due to pregnancy complications. No one had ever seen Žemaitis as devastated as he was grieving the loss of his wife. Once the disaster struck, his son Laimutis urgently needed care. It was clear that he could become an instrument of coercion in the hands of the MVD. Signaller Nina Nausėdaitė-Rasa was dispatched to Kaunas; she took the boy and found him a provisional guardian after a while. Later, the partisan's son was taken in by Ona Liubinavičienė, a teacher. Žemaitis kept in touch with her via signallers. The partisan commander Žemaitis only met his son directly on several occasions. Reluctant to be discovered, Liubinavičienė would move from one residence to another, hiding any items that could have had anything to do with Žemaitis. In turn, the MGB used its network of agents to track them down and in 1950, managed to do just that. While Žemaitis kept thinking about his son even as he was living in his last bunker.

Despite the family situation, Žemaitis did not renounce his fight, did not opt for an easier, more comfortable way of life. He did not place the wellbeing of his family above his oath. He saw that he could not find a better guardian for his son than Ona Liubinavičienė; he felt that the lady was expecting something more than just gratitude at their meetings, that that beautiful woman was coming to see him not only for his child. He did not make any promises to her, did not assume any commitment. Once, after a meeting, he was surprised at himself: '*I must have gotten very old. I told her: "I should kiss you for such kindness", but I did not grab her into my arms and did not kiss her all over.'* He was forty but he felt his soul had become rugged. He saw his son for the last time in the summer of 1948… He was becoming rather reclusive, silent, he did not like to have fun or joke around, but he loved to listen to the others clamouring; some of those who had spent some time in the bunker with him said he was a boring person to be around in winter – he was all about work.

Jonas Žemaitis, 1946.

His stoic character and qualities of a true leader, as well as the abandonment of the joys of personal life were probably further reinforced by his responsibility towards the partisans – just as it was the thing that weighed him down considerably. He suggested that the partisans should address each other 'brother'. The address soon spread across the platoons and partisan districts. For a couple of decades thereafter, underground youth organisations would open their proclamations with the words 'Brother Lithuanians!'

9

TERRITORIAL UNIT COMMANDER

'There's violence, fear, blood, suffering all around. More than 100,000 believers have been tortured to death or have starved or frozen to death in Siberia. New victims every day. There is not one home that would be devoid of tears. 40 per cent of the priests, which is more than 400, are in servitude in Siberia or hiding in the underground.'

(From the letter of Lithuanian Roman Catholics to the Holy Father Pius XII in Vatican dated 20 September 1947)

Territorial unit Commander

Due to various internal squabbles and a lack of communication, the Žaibas Partisan District was never established. Owing to in-fighting, Čeponis-Tauragis and some of the partisans split off the territorial unit of Žebenkštis (the territorial unit of Šernas *(Boar*) as of August 1946) and set up the Žaltys (*Adder*) territorial unit. So, the divisions grew in number, but there was no central unit to unite them, until representatives from 4 territorial units met on 12 September 1946 to establish a United Kęstutis[7] Partisan District (UKPD). On September 21, Juozas Kasperavičius-Angis, former aviation lieutenant of the Lithuanian military, was elected district commander. The formation has its own publication titled *Laisvės Varpas* (the Bell of Freedom). Later on, it was joined by another two territorial units. The area of its operations grew to include the territory of South Samogitia and some of Central Lithuania. Žemaitis regarded the commander elect an authority and agreed to most of his decisions. Being a territorial unit leader, Žemaitis would send reports and moneys collected to the UKPD headquarters, and would receive orders and the underground paper Laisvės Varpas from there. The territorial unit itself would print proclamations now and then.

UKMD commander Juozas Kasperavičius-Visvydas. Photograph taken before the war.

The process of partisan unification was

7 Named after the Grand Duke Kęstutis, who ruled Lithuania in the 14th century.

taking place in other regions of Lithuania as well. In 1945–1946, the Tauras and Dainava partisans districts were established in Southern Lithuania; in 1946, these were united to form the Southern Lithuania region. At the same time, the partisans districts of Vytautas, Vytis, Didžioji Kova (*Great Fight*) were already in place in Higher Lithuania, and, even though these districts were keeping in touch with each other, there was still a lack of unity.

The matter of unifying the pan-Lithuanian partisans had to be addressed, but in 1946 this initiative was undertaken by the Soviet security. Its goal was to unify the partisans and destroy them with a single blow. The MGB used its agents (the most prominent of them being Ąžuolas (*Oak*), who was known in the underground circles as Erelis (*Eagle*); he was in fact Juozas Markulis, professor with Vilnius University and an active and enterprising secret collaborator who had his own philosophy of life) to begin spreading the idea of unity of the fighting Lithuania, accompanied by a concept of the so-called passive resistance. In a nutshell, the idea was to refrain from active operations (for they only resulted in unnecessary repressions and casualties without palpable results), to lay down the weapons and wait for an opportune moment – a war between the West and the East – to rebel. This would preserve the strength for future battles. Partisans who would agree to step down from active strife were being promised fake documents. The idea of passive resistance was not something new in the underground: it was promulgated by underground organisations, only in doing so, the underground sought to preserve the vital strength of the nation, while the Soviet security pursued the purpose of stomping out armed resistance. In the spring and summer of 1946, the MGB searched for and found contacts with many partisans districts and territorial units, the territorial unit of Šernas among them. Having learned that an underground hub was being established in Vilnius, Zaskevičius, then the commander of the Šernas territorial unit, departed for the city. On 20 August 1946, he assigned his duties to Žemaitis. The MGB did not arrest the partisans who had settled in Vilnius straight away but rather spied on them, hoping for a bigger catch.

Having returned from Vilnius to the United Kęstutis Partisan District, Zaskevičius told them about the establishment of the United Democratic Resistance Movement (UDRM) and invited the district to join in. This he told Žemaitis on November 1 (offering him a set of fake documents), and district commander Kasperavičius on November 9. The budding UDRM was supposed to unify the partisans, but the leaders of United Kęstutis Partisan District were cautious in their approach towards the new structure: although they were for unification, they objected the partisan demobilisation, wanted to find out more about the new structure. For the sake of networking, on December 22 the UDRM president Markulis-Erelis himself visited the district, inviting the heads of the district to a partisan convention scheduled for 18 January 1947. Erelis commanded a certain degree of confidence among the partisans.

Thus, covering its true goals, the MGB started organising a convention of the Lithuanian partisan commanders. The commander of the United Kęstutis Partisan District began drafting proposals to the convention.

In the meantime, Žemaitis formed a new staff of the territorial unit, merging several individual partisan groups with the territorial unit. In November 1946, the territorial unit was renamed the Savanoris (*Volunteer*) territorial unit and, with the change in his position, Žemaitis also took a new written and verbal alias. At the end of the year, the territorial unit had 73 armed partisans who were supported by 452 members of the Organisation Sector (OS); that year, 16 partisans were killed. In early 1947, the entire UKPD had 515 partisans and 1,799 legal OS members. These relative figures indicate the amount of supporters it took to supply the partisans. The personal bodyguard of the territorial unit commander consisted of 3 fighters; since there was no fixed command post, they travelled all the time.

Realising the damage that the disorder was doing to the partisan movement, Žemaitis tried to invoke discipline, especially when it came to punitive partisan actions, for lack of responsibility and lawlessness in that particular field could undermine the partisans' image in the eyes of the people. His interrogation report reads that he had never been involved in any 'act of terror' before `1947, but assumed responsibility for the 'murders' by the partisans under his command. If he really spoke to that effect, this defines him as a commander who was willing to assume responsibility for the acts he might not have been able to control. He also encouraged fighters to quit drinking without measure, for consumption of alcohol did a lot of damage and had its toll. In his order dated 20 December 1946, he wrote: '*This habit leads our nation to its ruin and gradual extinction off the surface of the earth. Let us be merry without vodka, let us not drink ourselves, and Lithuania and its name, away in our celebrations.*' Discipline and abstinence were the key conditions of partisan warfare, especially with the strife becoming harder.

After the war, people in rural areas lived in poverty and could offer little to the partisans in the way of food and clothes. The partisans often found themselves short on weapons and ammunition. Forest fighters used such firearms as they could get their hands on – these usually were Russian and German weapons left from the 1941–1945 hostilities in Lithuania, and using them would cause some compatibility issues in terms of cartridges. Žemaitis carried a German Stg 44 sub-machine gun and a German-made handgun until his arrest. The partisans were likewise in need of clothing. They tried to wear Lithuanian military uniforms from before the war or uniforms made after the model of one year or the other with Lithuanian military, historic, and national symbols sewn on.

In addition to the usual pressure from the Soviet security, various provocations were a thing to avoid as well. For instance, in 1946 the MVD Raseiniai department schemed to compromise the territorial unit commander. Someone planted a letter reading that Žemaitis was a Soviet

security collaborator. If the plan worked, they expected the partisans to liquidate their own leader; however, the provocation fell through. So did another provocation staged by the MGB, this one even larger in scale. Due to mistakes on the Soviet security's part, partisan representatives in Vilnius exposed Erelis as a Soviet security agent. Signaller Nausėdaitė notified the chiefs of the United Kęstutis Partisan District to the effect without delay. After partisans uncovered the MGB's intentions with regard to the alleged assembly of partisan commanders, the event never took place.

Having evaded the Soviet security trap, the fighters assembled on January 15 in Tauras Partisan District. The UKPD's chief Kasperavičius could not make it to the meeting, and only sent in a latter in which he shared his thoughts on the would-be united organisation. The title 'Freedom Fight Movement' he used in his latter later caught on. Said assembly resolved to form a UDRM Presidium and cut the ties with abroad that the MGB was monitoring anyway. The unification initiative was put into motion thanks to efforts from the Tauras Partisan District partisans. However, Higher Lithuanian partisans still had faith in the UDRM and Erelis, until they themselves exposed him in 1947. In establishing the UDRM Presidium, the Tauras Partisan District usually kept correspondence with the United Kęstutis Partisan District.

Žemaitis kept in touch with the partisans district's command and would be continuously updated on the centralisation matters. He agreed with the ideas that Kasperavičiaus-Visvydas laid down in his letter to the assembly. In the opinion of Žemaitis, establishing leadership did not have to rely on former political party affiliation; instead, people should be assessed on their ability to work and the leadership should only consist of armed partisans while those who lived legally could only offer their assistance. The partisans would have the decisive vote, owing to them bearing the biggest load of underground struggle. Žemaitis critiqued that the decisions at the assembly of 15 January 1947 were made with partisans from just two districts in attendance, as well as the imperative tone of the founders of the UDRM Presidium. He suggested that the would-be organisation be renamed the Movement of Lithuania's Resurrection and that it should fight to restore Lithuania's independence *'on the basis of democratic freedoms'*.

Continuing his correspondence with the Tauras Partisan District, which was then preparing to dispatch its representatives abroad, the UKPD's commander Kasperavičius-Visvydas nominated Žemaitis for the position, on account of his being able to speak foreign languages and his knowledge of the situation in Lithuania. Žemaitis agreed and wrote in his reply to the commander, *'I can depart overseas at any time'*.

A council with the commanders of the Tauras Partisan District was scheduled, and Žemaitis was nominated as a UKMD representative. But the situation basically changed by the week. In March 1947, Zaskevičius was arrested, broken during interrogation, crimped by the MVD, and began working against the partisans. The trip to the council with the

commanders of the Tauras Partisan District was a failure from the word go, what with Bartkus, who was travelling with Žemaitis, getting injured when a weapon misfired (which was not such a rare occurrence, because the partisans were often carrying loaded weapons in light of constant threat), and Žemaitis never met Kasperavičius, for he was killed on April 9. The district was left without a head and a new command had to be established.

The Tauras Partisan District prepared and sent an envoy abroad. In May 1947, Juozas Lukša-Kęstutis and Jurgis Krikščiūnas-Vytautas went on a round trip to Poland. In December that year, Lukša-Skrajūnas, Skirmantas and Kazimieras Pyplys-Mažytis, Audronis were sent West for an extended stay. Also, the Soviet-controlled connections with Lithuanian emigrant organisations operating in the West were terminated.

10

PARTISAN DISTRICT COMMANDER

'The secret press is the soul of the entire underground movement'

The Laisvės Varpas, 25/11/1946. No 108

Partisan District Commander

The council of partisan district commanders of 20–25 May 1947 elected Žemaitis commander of the United Kęstutis Partisan District. His responsibilities grew even though, as the district commander, he had pretty much the same tasks as the territorial unit leader, only on a much broader scale that often transcended the boundaries of his partisan district. Žemaitis proceeded with the unification efforts.

In the meantime, the pressure from the Soviet security was relentless. Efforts to find the partisan commander continued using agency and persons '*in the dark*' (meaning ones that were being manipulated without themselves knowing it), which meant that the

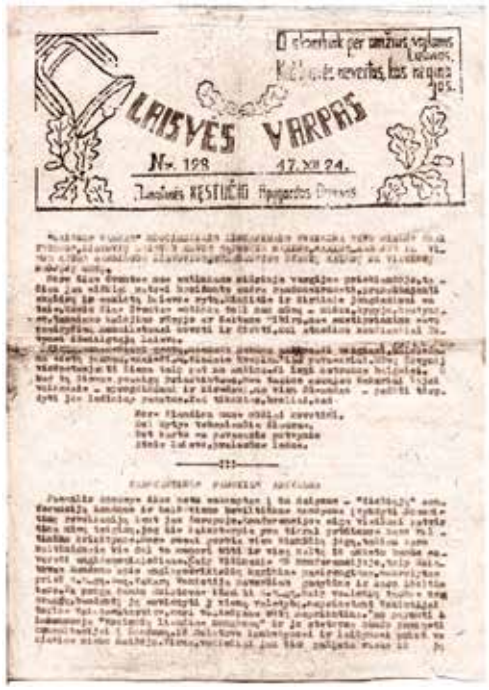
The command of the Kęstutis Partisan District, 1947. Standing, left to right: 1. Antanas Liesis-Tvanas, 2. Partisan District chief Jonas Žemaitis-Tylius, 3. Jonas Nuobaras-Lyras, 4. Member of district staff Vytautas Gužas-Kardas, 5. Mečys Orlingis-Ričardas.

Kęstutis Partisan District partisans, 1947. Reclining, left to right: Povilas Mačiulis–Robertas, Bronius Neverdauskas–Papartis, Alfonsas Pakarklis-Kilpa. Sitting, left to right: Jonas Žemaitis–Tylius, Edmundas Kurtinaitis–Kalnius, Teofilis Pakarklis–Algis. Kneeling: Petras Bartkus-Dargis.

level of conspiracy simply had to go up. The names of the territorial units were changed again, and the partisan district itself was referred to as Baltija (*the Baltic*) in documents. Its commander started signing as Tylius, moved to live in the bunkers built near Stulgiai (currently the districts of Kelmė and Tauragė). These hideouts were linked to form a particular system. Four bunkers were established within a 7–8 kilometre radius from one another (one of them was found to be inadequate due to its being flooded, another one was too remote) and had their own codenames. Such hideouts took a couple of nights to install (dig out, build, camouflage). But the builders had to work (obtain wood, hide the soil, and so on) under complete secrecy. The location of the hideout and in fact its very existence had to be known to a very limited number of people – preferably, just a few. That was the only security guarantee. Other precautions were taken as well. Efforts were made to ensure that no armed partisan actions are carried out, disorganised looting done, or proclamations distributed in the vicinity of the bunkers. To that end, a 5-man headquarters protection group was set up in 1947. The partisans painstakingly tried not to attract the Soviet security's attention to this location.

With warfare not a priority, Žemaitis and others highlighted the importance of underground press, which often offered more benefits than an armed assault on a village, store, or dairy, an ambush of soviet activists or agitators. They had to fight for people's consciousness in response to the rapid sovietisation of Lithuania, and put a stop to infocide – the blockage of people from world news and events. The circulation of the partisan district newspaper *Laisvės Varpas* reached 600–800 copies – a relatively large number, because the several issues sent from the headquarters to territorial units would be multiplied there. The early issues featured news from Lithuania and abroad (based on foreign radio broadcasts) and the partisans' own work.

Underground partisan publications.


LAISVĖS VARPAS

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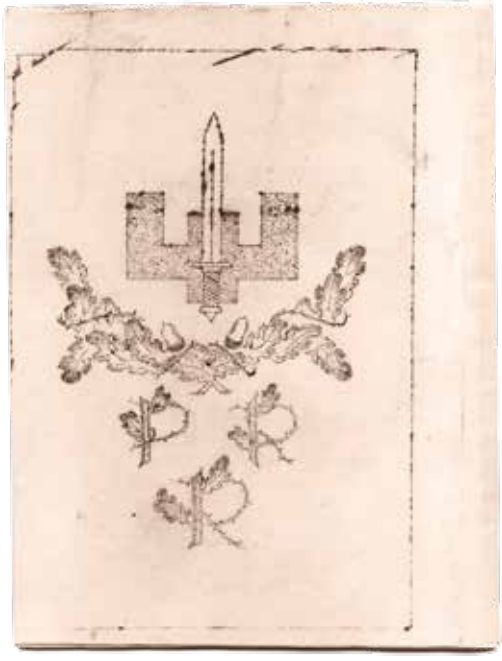


The command of the Kęstutis Partisan District, 1947. Sitting: Mečys Orlingis-Ričardas. Standing, left to right: 1. District commander Jonas Žemaitis-Tylius, 2. Antanas Liesis-Tvanas, 3. Jonas Nuobaras-Lyras, 4. Member of district staff Vytautas Gužas-Kardas.

To prepare the publications, legal residents were engaged as well; Dominykas Steponaitis, former Colonel of the Lithuanian army, was one of them. Virtually every partisan district (and sometimes even separate territorial units) in Lithuania had its own periodical. A total of 100 individually titled underground periodicals were issued over the entire period. Of course, their period of publication (ranging from months to 5 years and more) and circulation (from dozens to nearly a thousand copies) varied depending on the reproduction facilities. The intellectual capacity to prepare articles for partisan publications was very limited. Žemaitis saw to the distribution of press, and the district headquarters issued the necessary instructions that distributing the press alone was not enough: the more important articles had to be explained. Publishing and distributing periodicals was a risky endeavour.

The commander of the United Kęstutis Partisan District had to keep in contact with both its subordinate partisan platoons and the neighbouring districts. This required a communication system, which had to be established and maintained under incessant persecution. There were several ways of keeping communications inside and outside of the partisan district: using a chain of communication (from formation to formation), via selected signallers, and during personal meetings of relevant officers. The most dangerous thing was potentially involving an enemy agency in the communication system, which may bring about the collapse of a particular headquarters. Signallers were indispensable helpers, carrying the press, documents, verbal information from one

formation to the next. There was also a network of communication points, where one signaller (or partisan) would leave a set of documents to be picked up by another one. The communication points used different passwords, and the lines of communication would be changed routinely. When a signaller got arrested, the entire communication system had to be replaced; learning about the arrest on time was critical so that previous communications could be severed.

Žemaitis often relied on female signallers who took tremendous risks to travel dozens of kilometres. They caused less suspicion in the Soviet authorities than their male counterparts. His reliable signallers at different times were Nina Nausėdaitė-Rasa, Leonora Grigalavičiūtė-Vida, Rožė Jankevičiūtė-Jurgis, Elvyra Pliupelytė-Zita, among others. After years of imprisonment in camps, they had preserved warm memories of the partisan commander. Nausėdaitė-Rasa: *'The commander of the Kęstutis Partisan District was Captain Žemaitis-Darius, Vytautas. A quiet, peaceful man, always composed. Not only was he the commanding officer; he also had to draft statutes, train young partisans who had just picked up their first weapon. He was a good tactician, one who knew how to organise people.'* Jankevičiūtė-Jurgis: *'I had never, and I have never met a person of such broad erudition and profound intelligence as district commander Jonas Žemaitis. In reference to his co-workers, Žemaitis would speak with deep regret: "It is such a shame to subject the best of people to great danger, but we must. We need the press, we need people to spread it around, we need people to understand and to be able to be human at all times and in any conditions."'* Leonora Grigalavičiūtė: *'I had many interactions with*

Kęstutis Partisan District partisans 1947. First row, left to right: Vladas Pečkauskas-Gegužiukas, Albertas Norkus-Starkus, Jonas Žemaitis-Tylius, Pranas Strainys-Pranciškus, Kazimieras Ruibys-Inžinierius. Second row, left to right: Steponas Venckaitis-Bijūnas, Mečys Orlingis-Ričardas, Jonas Nuobaras-Lyras, Aleksas Jurkūnas-Valeras, Aleksas Jucius-Gylys, Aleksas Miliulis-Neptūnas, Antanas Seneckis-Žaibas, Antanas Liesis-Idenas, Petras Bartkus-Žadgaila, Vytautas Gužas-Kardas, and Česlovas Remeikis-Plienas.

Žemaitis, he was a big patriot just as he was a great warrior, an excellent strategist. /…/ Žemaitis was a very quiet man, he really put his soul and body into his work. I felt great respect, sometimes even awe for him.' Joana Dijokaitė-Žara: *'He was a very friendly and intelligent man.'* Žemaitis could not have done without reliable signallers. Owing to them, partisan correspondence and intelligence would quickly reach the necessary addressees.

Žemaitis redid the structure of the partisan district. He staffed the district headquarters with reliable fighters that he knew, and split territorial units into regions based on their territories. The area of operations of one region was supposed to cover the territory of 4–6 volosts, and there were 2–3 regions per territorial unit. In 1947, the district merged with the Territorial unit of Duke Žvelgaitis operating in Joniškis County, and was joined by partisans from Šiauliai and Radviliškis counties, as well as fighters who resided legally in Klaipėda. The area of the partisan district under Žemaitis grew, and in early 1948 the district formally had 7 territorial units, which spawned the idea of establishing another district.

Žemaitis was as increasingly concerned with the idea of „pan-Lithuanian" partisan unification. On that matter, he kept correspondence with the Tauras Partisan District, which was then establishing the UDRM (United Democratic Resistance Movement) Presidium. Žemaitis could not meet with the Tauras partisans in person, and sent an emissary from his county to do council with them instead. The Tauras Partisan District prepared material to be sent abroad, expecting some assistance in return for the intel. Foreign (in this case, British) intelligence was keen on political, military, economic information about the USSR. After the partisan envoy returned from Poland in June 1947, an instruction on collecting intelligence was released. Of course, the partisans were not equipped to gather the specific data (regarding Soviet troops, nuclear energy, and so on) that the intelligence was expecting. The partisans were able to collect information on Soviet repressions, something they could relate to; all the more as they believed that this intel would have an effect on the opinion of the Western society, who would then lend a substantial amount of assistance to the partisans. The instruction for the collection of intelligence was sent to the UKPD commander, who then forwarded it to the territorial units. Later, information collected at the district was forwarded to the Tauras Partisan District, and some of it definitely reached the intended recipients in the West with the partisan emissaries who travelled there in December 1947.

Žemaitis mostly kept correspondence with Antanas Baltūsis-Žvejys, commander of the Tauras Partisan District, discussing the matters of establishing a joint command with him. Having given the situation some thought, Žemaitis asked that the United Kęstutis Partisan District be admitted to the UDRM Presidium as of 1 October 1947; however, he had his own suggestions. He proposed a draft statute of the UDRM, one of its items being to '*organise, prepare, and preserve the living forces*

of the Lithuanian nation for the final objective of the fight: the restoration of a free, independent state of Lithuania governed under the principles of democracy.' In his opinion, the organisation had to have separate divisions and subdivisions. Under Žemaitis's project, just one central command would not do; there had to be a command for three regions each that would serve as fall-back points to lead the fight for freedom in case the central command is scattered or destroyed. He also suggested that said Col Steponaitis-Taurius from the United Kęstutis Partisan District be included in the UDRM command.

Commander of the Tauras Partisan District Baltūsis-Žvejys disagreed with his proposals, because his character required that there be only one commanding centre. In turn, Žemaitis had his own doubts about the UDRM. He wrote in a letter to Steponaitis that the associations that were being set up were *'weak and not in line with the spirit, views, and expectations of the nation that is fighting a fight to the death, and most importantly, not in line with the reality in which this fight is taking place in Lithuania today,'* and that is why a reorganisation was required. Despite the difference of opinions, Baltūsis-Žvejys offered Žemaitis a position at the UDRM Presidium. In January 1948, Žemaitis accepted the offer.

In late 1947 – early 1948 the MGB managed to track down and arrest legally residing members of the UDRM Presidium, and the killing of the most active contributors from the Tauras Partisan District, Baltūsis among them, in 1948 effectively put a stop to the unification efforts.

11

ŽEMAITIS'S EFFORTS TO UNIFY THE PARTISAN MOVEMENT

'...good intentions alone are not the only thing that can bestow democratic rights upon Lithuania; this requires appropriate examples and efforts.'

(An extract from the MSFL newspaper Prie Rymančio Rūpintojėlio, 1949, No 2.)

Žemaitis's Efforts to Unify the Partisan Movement

In the fall of 1947, Žemaitis and his companions began implementing the plan to establish the supreme partisan command. A meeting of the United Kęstutis Partisan District dated 8 September 1947 resolved that a new partisan district needed to be established to ensure a successful communication among the territorial units. In the words of Žemaitis himself, *'the Kęstutis Partisan District had spread its boundaries too far: I think merging eight territorial units under a single command is not aligned with the most elementary of the requirements for underground operations.'* The surroundings of Šiauliai—Radviliškis were chosen for the command post location. For all practical purposes, it is the geographical middle of Lithuania, making it easier to communicate with other districts. This location was also slated to be used as a base of operations for networking with partisans operating in Latvia, but no contacts were established.

In the fall of 1947, members of the UKPD staff Bartkus-Sąžinė and Bronius Liesis-Kaukas as well as fighter Povilas Cibulskis departed for the Šiauliai–Radviliškis region over matters of establishing a new district and preparing a command post. Once there, they found the necessary persons and were provided with 3 fighters to assist them. After most of the assignments were completed, the Prisikėlimas (*Resurrection*) Partisan District was founded on 1 April 1948, with Bartkus appointed its commander (in the summer of 1948, this position was taken over by Leonardas Grigonis-Danys). Eventually, the district consisted of 3 territorial units. Also, conditions were created for the future partisan high command to settle around the Duktas forest (in Šiauliai County), with 3 bunkers installed within 5–7 km from each other (according to the plan, another 3 hideouts had to be established at least 10 kilometres away from the ones already in place), and communication points were set up in supporters' homesteads.

In 1948, as the Soviet persecution and repressions continued 1948, the partisans lived under a constant threat of getting killed or arrested. Early that year, Čeponis, one of Žemaitis's first companions,

was killed, and the print shop of the Laisvės Varpas was discovered and destroyed. May 1948 saw mass deportations of Lithuanian people to Siberia under the codename Vesna (Spring (Russ.)). With nearly 40,000 people deported, the ranks of partisan supporters diminished still; on top of that, the additional internal army units brought to the country to organise the deportations further constricted partisan operations.

A new disaster struck when agricultural farms were subjected to collectivisation in Lithuania in 1948. The establishment of kolkhoz farms and expropriations of private property from peasants weakened them further, undermining their ability to support the partisans with food and clothes; people were unwilling to provide shelter to partisans for fear of repressions. However, despite the difficult conditions, Žemaitis did not lose his self-control and continued the work he had started.

Žemaitis was eager to form a partisan region in Samogitia. His focus lay on the Žemaičiai (*Samogitia*) Partisan District in North Western Lithuania, which was largely disorganised and in shambles due to the MGB operations in 1947. After Žemaitis met with district representatives (Vladas Montvydas-Etmonas, Aleksandras Milaševičius-Ruonis) in 1947–1948, they managed to reconstruct the Žemaičiai Partisan District headquarters and reach an agreement on establishing the region. On 1 May 1948, Žemaitis took on the position of the commander of the fledgling Western Lithuanian region (codename Jūra (*Sea*)). That way, by the spring of 1948, Lithuanian partisan formations became more or less structured. In 1948, there were 3 partisan regions active in Lithuania, each with its own headquarters and divisions:

The Western Lithuanian region (est. 1948) covered the partisans districts of Kęstutis (est. 1946), Žemaičiai (est. 1945), and Prisikėlimas (est. 1948);

The Northeastern Lithuanian region (est. 1947) covered the partisans districts of Vytautas (est. 1945), Algimantas (est. 1947), Vytis (est. 1944), and Didžioji Kova (est. 1945);

The Southern Lithuanian region (est. 1946) covered the partisans districts of Tauras (est. 1945) and Dainava (est. 1946). Each district consisted of 2 to 3 territorial units. They all differed in their organisational capacity, some of them had suffered major casualties. The highest level of organisation at that time was amidst the partisans under Žemaitis's command.

Owing to his unification initiative, in 1948 Žemaitis ascended as a unifier of partisan warfare, one who had the right qualities of a commander and leader; moreover, his initiative was driven by encouragement from other regions and districts. Commander of the Tauras Partisan District Jonas Aleščikas-Rymantas wrote in his letter of 16 April 1948 to Žemaitis: '*I suggest you should organise a larger congress to finally resolve and close the centralisation matters.*' In May that year, he received a letter from Vincas Kaulinis-Miškinis, chief of the Vytautas Partisan District, and Antanas Slučka-Šarūnas, chief of the Algimantas Partisan District, supporting the establishment of a supreme

command. Should one be established, they would join in and cooperate. Žemaitis decided to work actively in that direction, assigning his job as the commander of the Jūra Region to Milaševičius.

On 20 June 1948, Žemaitis issued Order No 1 of the United Freedom Fight Movement Organisation (UFFMO), declaring in it that '*As of today, I am assuming the post of the head of the United Freedom Fight Movement Organisation*.' It was the first time he used Vytautas, his permanent alias, in signature. Žemaitis appointed regional commanders as his deputies. The order was dispatched to the districts.

On the night from 26 July to 27 July 1948, Žemaitis arrived in Duktas forest (Šiauliai County), where work to install hideouts for the supreme command had been going on since 1947. Once Žemaitis settled there, the local partisans were banned from engaging in active operations in the area.

A congress of partisans of the Eastern Lithuanian region was held on 4 August 1948. It resolved to send the following representatives to the Supreme Command: regional commander Jonas Kimštas-Žalgiris and head of the Didžioji Kova Partisan District headquarters Juozas Šibaila-Diedukas. Among other things, a declaration was passed that the supreme command '*cannot be a political or party organisation but rather the guide of the nation to an independent and completely free life*.' Žemaitis was looking forward to the arrival of the representatives from the Eastern Lithuanian region and wrote in his letter to them: '*sending representatives from Eastern Lithuania and accommodating them at the organisation's headquarters is a necessity*,' asking them to bring material (in the form of various documents) for future joint work. Žemaitis sought for as broad a representation of all Lithuanian partisans at the supreme command as possible.

In late October, Kimštas and Šibaila, accompanied by signallers, arrived at Duktas Forest to see Žemaitis. On 10–12 November, meetings took place at the forest camp. A resolution was adopted to reconstruct the UDRM Presidium in its minimum constitution. Žemaitis was appointed acting chairman of the Presidium. He was also elected Commander in Chief, while Kimštas was appointed Head of Staff, Šibaila Head of the Public Section, Bartkus Secretary of the Presidium. The post of a permanent chairman was to be offered to Col Steponaitis, subject to his moving underground. This latter was in a different situation. In December that year, Steponaitis was arrested and crimped by the MGB; however, he managed to disappear from the security's radar for a while. Of course, this kind of a situation meant that he could not assume the chairman's position and was dropped as a candidate. After the meeting, Žemaitis as the Chairman of the UDRM Presidium, began issuing orders but still needed broader recognition among the partisans across Lithuania.

Žemaitis and Šibaila went to live in an underground hideout. Living together, they had a chance to exchange information and their views of their work and its outlook. Following a suggestion from Žemaitis,

Šibaila started preparing a programme of social work, while Žemaitis was working on the statute of the organisation.

Realising that it was dangerous for the commanders to gather in one location, in January 1949 Žemaitis decided to issue an in-house publication titled *L. Tarybos Biuletenis* (The Council Bulletin of L) to keep members of the command updated of the pressing matters. According to the plan, the bulletin was supposed to offer criticism of actions, misdemeanour, all the while suggesting ways to improve the situation. '*A failure to voice your own clear opinion would indicate a lack of concern for the movement's affairs, and a non-critical following of others' ideas, a lack of effort to ensure the most perfect operation of the movement,*' said the founders of the bulletin. Such ideas portray Žemaitis as a democratic thinker even in underground conditions.

Still, the most convenient way to reach an agreement on or to discuss all matters of armed resistance was during direct meetings, and the best way of doing things was to have uniform regulations, a single command and chief who would speak on behalf of all partisan units both inside the country and in dealings with the outside world.

A chance to do just that presented itself in February 1949.

12

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MOVEMENT OF THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM OF LITHUANIA AND THE DECLARATION OF 16 FEBRUARY 1949

A fighting nation will not perish

From Order No 34 of the Tauras Partisan District dated 26 October 1947

The Establishment of the Movement of the Struggle for Freedom of Lithuania and the Declaration of 16 February 1949

With the unification processes afoot in Samogitia, in November 1948 the Southern Lithuanian partisan region received documents from the Northeastern and Western regions; having read them, Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas, commander of the Dainava Partisan District, consulted with the district officers and decided to go to a meeting in the Western Lithuanian region. In his words, '*to directly clarify the situation in different areas and discuss a series of relevant questions in joint meetings.*' He travelled a very long way to the meeting (his journey took from 15 November 1948 till his return on 21 April 1949). On December 5, he met with Aleksandras Grybinas-Faustas, commander of the Tauras Partisan District, and they continued on the road together, accompanied by Tauras Partisan District partisans Juozas Jankauskas-Demonas and Urbantas Dailidė-Tauras. Led by signallers, they travelled from one partisan territorial unit to another. Sometimes they had to wait for a week until connections were established.

In early February 1949, the chiefs of Southern region partisans reached the location where Žemaitis was camped. Šibaila-Merainis wrote, *'As we were deep in our work, representatives from N[emunas region][8] finally arrived.'* To begin with, the meeting was intense: Grigonis and Šibaila suspected they had been met with narks; in turn, Žemaitis was of a like opinion. Ramanauskas-Vanagas wrote that the atmosphere was thick with suspicion and everything was on a verge to collapse; however, a solution was found with Vytautas Gužas, head of staff of the Western Lithuanian region vouching for the visitors with his life.

Even though the trip of the Southern region partisans proceeded in conspiracy, the travellers took many pictures. For instance, the partisans from the Southern Lithuanian region took pictures with individual territorial units, chiefs of partisans districts and regions. Although this

8 Codename for the Southern Lithuanian region.

was not excusable for conspiracy reasons, as of 1947 Lithuanian partisans took a liking to, and allowed taking pictures. Commander Žemaitis posed for pictures quite a lot himself: his first photographs as a partisan were taken in 1946. This penchant for having one's picture taken was a wilful aspiration to leave a memento of oneself for future generations, for many felt that every picture could be their last. The participants at the February 1949 meeting had group pictures of themselves taken as well, although the pictures and the films have vanished without a trace.

That was the first meeting of virtually all commanders or representatives of all Lithuanian partisans districts. In mid-February 1949, partisans held council in the bunker at the homestead of Stanislovas (alias Gailutis) and Antanina Miknius in Village Minaičiai (currently Radviliškis district). During their meetings in February 1949, district commanders or representatives were solving important issues of pan-Lithuanian partisan operations.

Šibaila-Merainis wrote about how things were done: '*We worked in commissions. Having agreed on commission tasks at joint meetings, we would approve them. The success of our labour was largely driven by the material gathered by the J[*ūra region*] and N[*emunas region*] for that purpose, and the experience available.*' The meetings would be attended by 8 partisan commanders or authorised representatives: Žemaitis, Šibaila, Ramanauskas, Grybinas, Grigonis, Bartkus, Liesis, Vytautas Gužas-Kardas, head of staff of the Western Lithuanian region. No such representation of all partisans districts had existed before. Not all documents had been prepared in time for the meeting; Žemaitis had drafted 2 sections of the organisational statute, Šibaila, a chapter of the social programme. These draft documents were approved by the meetings.

At the very first meeting, the UDRM Presidium was renamed the Movement of the Struggle for Freedom of Lithuania (MSFL), after the title proposed by Kasperavičius back in 1947.

The minutes of the meeting evidence a discussion and a lack of any key, irreconcilable controversies, for those in attendance grasped the importance of the event. Under the approved statute, the MSFL was *'a military social volunteer organisation,*' its object being to '*restore a free, independent, democratic Republic of Lithuania .*' The MSFL had to manage the Movement's council via its presidium.

During the meeting, Žemaitis-Vytautas was elected chairman of the MSFL Council Presidium and awarded the rank of partisan general. No one objected his nomination, for it was thanks to him that the meeting took place. For all practical reasons, Žemaitis became the commander in chief of the Lithuanian anti-Soviet armed resistance. He was now obligated to take care of and to lead a force of around 2,000 fighters.

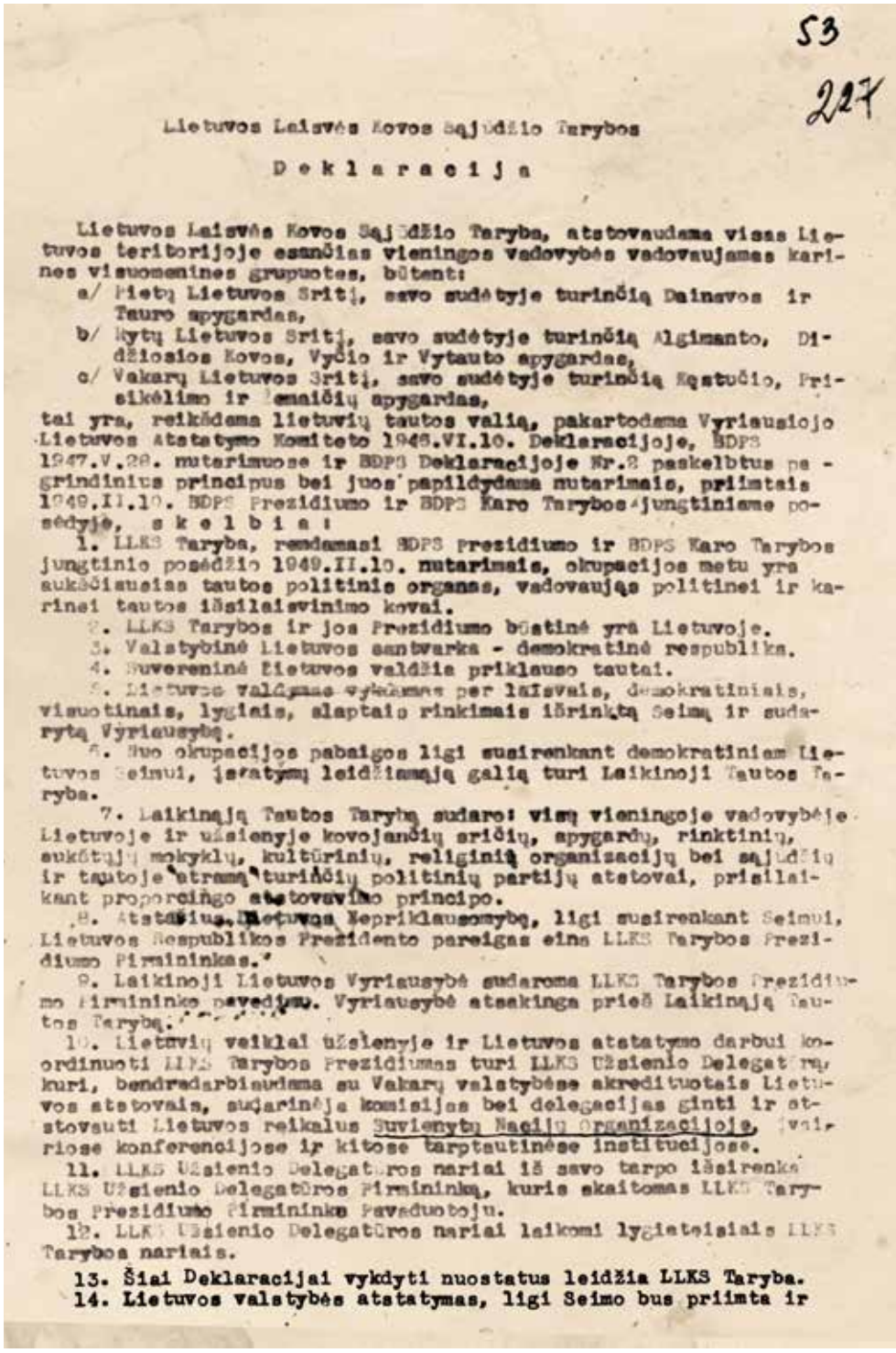
The meeting dealt with various matters relating to the partisan movement. Its key document was the MSFL declaration, which was symbolically signed on February 16 (it was on 16 February 1918 that the independence of Lithuania had been declared). The main points

of this document had virtually been brewing since 1946, when Juozas Vitkus-Kazimieraitis, commander of the Southern Lithuanian region, drafted the first declaration envisaging a democratic constitution of the state of Lithuania. These points were later reiterated in the declarations that followed. The declaration accentuated that Lithuania had to be a democratic republic, its sovereign governance in the hands of the people, with bias towards the 1922 democratic Constitution of Lithuania. Governance would be done by a parliament elected in a democratic election, as well as a government. The document also reflected the social aspect of the future: '*social care is not just a matter of individual citizens or organisations; it is a primary task of the state.*' These ideas show that the partisans did not want to rebuild the Lithuania that had existed prior to 1940, when the Soviet authorities managed to find sympathisers amidst the poor[9]. The partisans had a lot of criticism for the 1926–1940 authoritarian regime in Lithuania, first of all due to the restrictions of democracy, the abundance of social issues, and segregation of the populace by wealth. The partisans sought to create a much better and, in their opinion, more equitable independent Lithuania. The declaration envisioned that once the independence is restored, the chairman of the MSFL Council Presidium would sit as the President of the Republic until a parliament is elected.

The partisan commanders were and felt part of the democratic world that wanted peace, justice, and freedom, a world that was grounded on the principles of true democracy ensuing '*from the understanding of Christian morality and anchored in the Atlantic Charter, the Four Freedoms, the 12 points of President Truman, the Declaration of Human Rights, and other declarations of justice and freedom, asking the whole democratic world for assistance to achieve their goals.*'

In addition to the MSFL declaration and draft statute, the meetings also considered matters of the Movement's ideology, mutual relations and potential foreign connections, cooperation, and so on. Various verbal or written resolutions were passed. For instance, the meetings adopted resolutions on the relationship between Freedom Fighters and the population, as well as an address to the residents of the region. The fighting tactics were defined as follows: '*ground the operating tactics on developing social activities supported with arms.*' Because armed strife alone did not play out under the existing conditions. A decision was made to only recruit those who had been helping the underground actively while residing legally, and were forced to delegitimise themselves, and to provide others with fake documents. Žemaitis's suggestion was to make do with organic additions to the partisan ranks without actively seeking to enlarge the partisan presence.

9 The commanders were well aware of the views of their fighters. For instance, chaplain Rev. Lelešius, chaplain of the Tauras Partisan District, wrote in his journal in 1946: 'I conclude that the social status of the poor at the times of our independence was unbearable [...] And our officialdom would scold, berate the illiterate villager, and send him to hell. The people were full of malice. Some were looking towards Moscow, some, towards Berlin, others yet, towards Warsaw.'



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Lietuvos Laisvės Kovos Sąjūdžio Tarybos

D e k l a r a c i j a

Lietuvos Laisvės Kovos Sąjūdžio Taryba, atstovaudama visas Lietuvos teritorijoje esančias vieningos vadovybės vadovaujamas karines visuomenines grupuotes, būtent:

a/ Pietų Lietuvos Sritį, savo sudėtyje turinčią Dainavos ir Tauro apygardas,

b/ Rytų Lietuvos Sritį, savo sudėtyje turinčią Algimanto, Didžiosios Kovos, Vyčio ir Vytauto apygardas,

c/ Vakarų Lietuvos Sritį, savo sudėtyje turinčią Kęstučio, Prisikėlimo ir Žemaičių apygardas,

tai yra, reikšdama lietuvių tautos valią, pakartodama Vyriausiojo Lietuvos Atstatymo Komiteto 1948.VI.10. Deklaracijoje, BDPS 1947.V.28. nutarimuose ir BDPS Deklaracijoje Nr.2 paskelbtus pagrindinius principus bei juos papildydama nutarimais, priimtais 1949.II.10. BDPS Prezidiumo ir BDPS Karo Tarybos jungtiniame posėdyje, s k e l b i a :

1. LLKS Taryba, remdamasi BDPS Prezidiumo ir BDPS Karo Tarybos jungtinio posėdžio 1949.II.10. nutarimais, okupacijos metu yra aukščiausias tautos politinis organas, vadovaująs politinei ir karinei tautos išsilaisvinimo kovai.

2. LLKS Tarybos ir jos Prezidiumo būstinė yra Lietuvoje.

3. Valstybinė Lietuvos santvarka - demokratinė respublika.

4. Suverenine Lietuvos valdžia priklauso tautai.

5. Lietuvos valdymas vykdomas per laisvais, demokratiniais, visuotinais, lygiais, slaptais rinkimais išrinktą Seimą ir sudarytą Vyriausybę.

6. Nuo okupacijos pabaigos ligi susirenkant demokratiniam Lietuvos Seimui, įstatymų leidžiamąją galią turi Laikinoji Tautos Taryba.

7. Laikinąją Tautos Tarybą sudaro: visų vieningoje vadovybėje Lietuvoje ir užsienyje kovojančių srėvių, apygardų, rinktinių, sukčiųjų mokyklų, kultūrinių, religinių organizacijų bei sąjūdžių ir tautoje stiprią turinčių politinių partijų atstovai, prisilaikant proporcingo atstovavimo principo.

8. Atstovaujant Lietuvos Nepriklausomybę, ligi susirenkant Seimui, Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidento pareigas eina LLKS Tarybos Prezidiumo Pirmininkas.

9. Laikinoji Lietuvos Vyriausybė sudaroma LLKS Tarybos Prezidiumo Pirmininko pasiūlymu. Vyriausybė atsakinga prieš Laikinąją Tautos Tarybą.

10. Lietuvių veiklai užsienyje ir Lietuvos atstatymo darbui koordinuoti LLKS Tarybos Prezidiumas turi LLKS Užsienio Delegatūrą, kuri, bendradarbiaudama su Vakarų valstybėse akredituotais Lietuvos atstovais, sudarinėja komisijas bei delegacijas ginti ir atstovauti Lietuvos reikalus Suvienytų Nacijų Organizacijoje, įvairiose konferencijose ir kitose tarptautinėse institucijose.

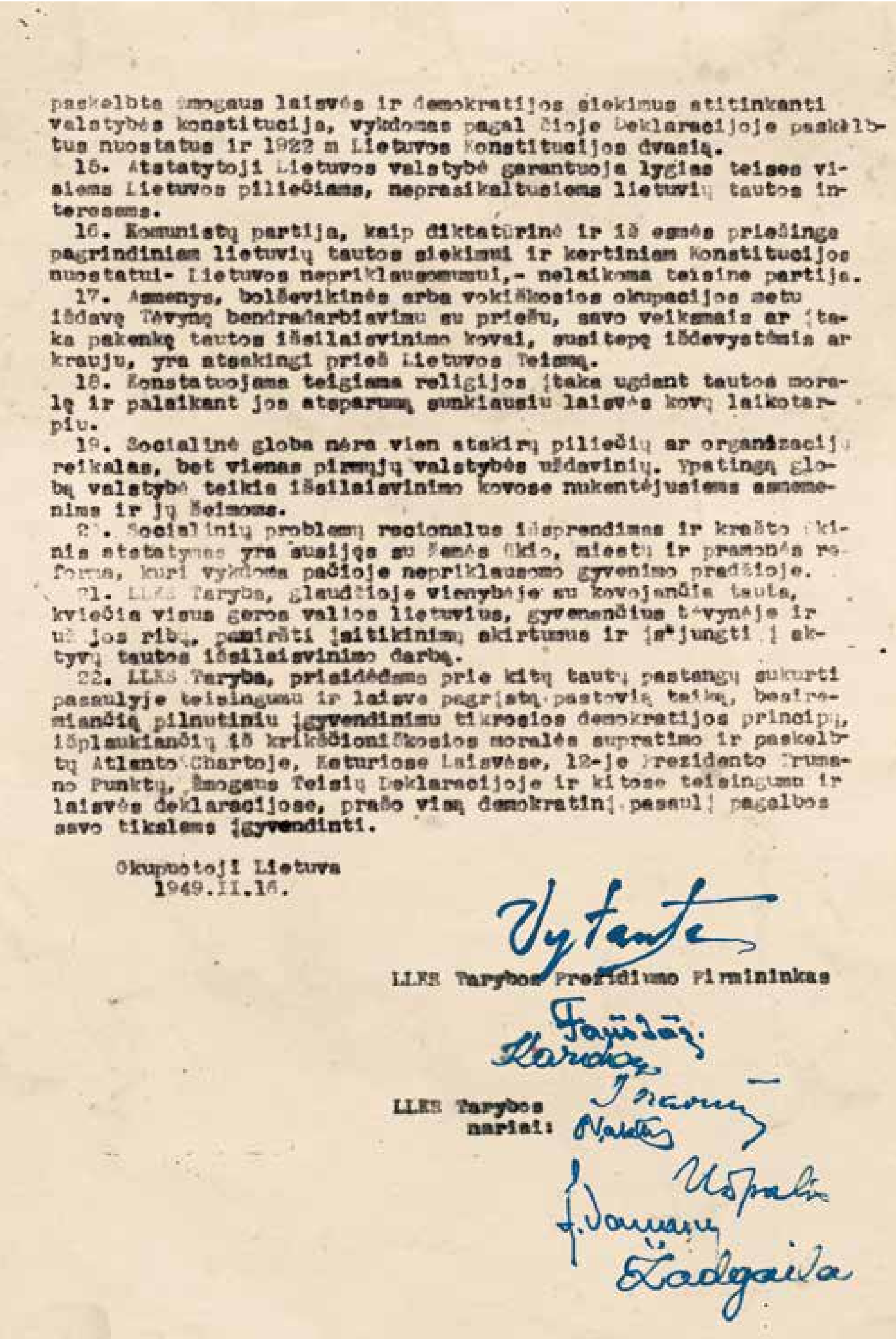
11. LLKS Užsienio Delegatūros nariai iš savo tarpo išsirenka LLKS Užsienio Delegatūros Pirmininką, kuris skaitomas LLKS Tarybos Prezidiumo Pirmininko Pavaduotoju.

12. LLKS Užsienio Delegatūros nariai laikomi lygiateisiais LLKS Tarybos nariais.

13. Šiai Deklaracijai vykdyti nuostatus leidžia LLKS Taryba.

14. Lietuvos valstybės atstatymas, ligi Seimo bus priimta ir

The declaration of 16 February 1949.


paskelbta žmogaus laisvės ir demokratijos siekimus atitinkanti valstybės konstitucija, vykdomas pagal šioje Deklaracijoje paskelbtus nuostatus ir 1922 m Lietuvos Konstitucijos dvasią.

15. Atstatytoji Lietuvos valstybė garantuoja lygias teises visiems Lietuvos piliečiams, neprasikaltusiems lietuvių tautos interesams.

16. Komunistų partija, kaip diktatūrinė ir iš esmės priešinga pagrindiniam lietuvių tautos siekimui ir kertiniam Konstitucijos nuostatui- Lietuvos nepriklausomumui,- nelaikoma teisine partija.

17. Asmenys, bolševikinės arba vokiškosios okupacijos metu išdavę Tėvynę bendradarbiavimu su priešu, savo veiksmais ar įtaka pakenkę tautos išsilaisvinimo kovai, susitepę išdavystėmis ar krauju, yra atsakingi prieš Lietuvos Teismą.

18. Konstatuojama teigiama religijos įtaka ugdant tautos moralę ir palaikant jos atsparumą sunkiausiu laisvės kovų laikotarpiu.

19. Socialinė globa nėra vien atskirų piliečių ar organizacijų reikalas, bet vienas pirmųjų valstybės uždavinių. Ypatingą globą valstybė teikia išsilaisvinimo kovose nukentėjusiems asmenims ir jų šeimoms.

20. Socialinių problemų racionalus išsprendimas ir krašto ūkinis atstatymas yra susijęs su žemės ūkio, miestų ir pramonės reforma, kuri vykdoma pačioje nepriklausomo gyvenimo pradžioje.

21. LLKS Taryba, glaudžioje vienybėje su kovojančia tauta, kviečia visus geros valios lietuvius, gyvenančius tėvynėje ir už jos ribų, pamiršti įsitikinimų skirtumus ir įsijungti į aktyvų tautos išsilaisvinimo darbą.

22. LLKS Taryba, prisidėdama prie kitų tautų pastangų sukurti pasaulyje teisingumu ir laisve pagrįstą pastovią taiką, besiremiančią pilnutiniu įgyvendinimu tikrosios demokratijos principų, išplaukiančių iš krikščioniškosios moralės supratimo ir paskelbtų Atlanto Chartoje, Keturiose Laisvėse, 12-je Prezidento Trumano Punktų, Žmogaus Teisių Deklaracijoje ir kitose teisingumo ir laisvės deklaracijose, prašo visą demokratinį pasaulį pagalbos savo tikslams įgyvendinti.

Okupuotoji Lietuva
1949.II.16.

LLKS Tarybos Prezidiumo Pirmininkas

LLKS Tarybos
nariai:

(Translation)

Declaration of the Council of the Movement of the Struggle for Freedom of Lithuania

The Council of the Movement of the Struggle for Freedom of Lithuania, representing all of the military public formations present within the territory of Lithuania and headed by a united leadership, namely:

a) the South Lithuanian Region including the Dainava District and the Tauras District,

b) the East Lithuanian Region including the Algimantas District, the Didžioji Kova District, the Vytis District and the Vytautas District,

c) the West Lithuanian Region including the Kęstutis District, the Prisikėlimas District and the Žemaičių District,

that is to say, expressing the will of the Lithuanian Nation, reiterating the fundamental principles of the 10 June 1946 Declaration of the Supreme Committee for the Restoration of Lithuania, the 28 May 1947 UDRM decisions and the UDRM Declaration No. 2, and supplementing them by the decisions adopted on 10 February 1949 at the joint meeting of the UDRM Presidium and at the UDRM Military Council, declares:

1. Relying on the 10 February 1949 decisions by the UDRM Presidium and UDRM Military Council joint meeting, during the occupation period, the MSFL Council shall be the supreme political body of the Nation, in charge of the political and military fight for the liberation of the Nation.

2. The headquarters of the MSFL Council and its Presidium shall be located in Lithuania.

3. The State system of Lithuania shall be a democratic republic.

4. The sovereign authority of Lithuania shall belong to the Nation.

5. The governance of Lithuania shall be exercised by the Seimas elected through free, democratic, universal, and equal elections by secret ballot and by the formed Government.

6. The Provisional National Council shall have the legislative power during the period from the end of the occupation until the democratic Seimas of Lithuania is convened.

7. Observing the principle of proportional representation, the Provisional National Council shall consist of the representatives of all the regions, districts, groups, high schools, cultural and religious organisations and movements and political parties having national support, under a united leadership fighting in Lithuania and abroad.

8. Upon the restoration of Lithuania's independence until the Seimas is convened, the Chairman of the MSFL Council Presidium shall hold the office of the President of the Republic.

9. The Provisional Government of Lithuania shall be formed upon the assignment of the Chairman of the MSFL Council Presidium. The Government shall be accountable to the Provisional National Council.

10. For the coordination of the activities by the Lithuanians abroad and the restoration of Lithuania, the MSFL Council Presidium shall maintain the MSFL Delegation Abroad that, in co-operation with the representatives of Lithuania accredited to the Western States, shall establish commissions and delegations to defend and represent Lithuania's interests before the United Nations Organisation, at various conferences and other international institutions.

11. Members of the MSFL Delegation Abroad shall elect of their number the Chairman of the MSFL Delegation Abroad, who shall be considered the Deputy Chairman of the MSFL Council Presidium.

12. Members of the MSFL Delegation Abroad shall be considered full and equal members of the MSFL Council.

13. To implement this Declaration the MSFL Council shall issue regulations.

14. Prior to the Seimas adopts and promulgates the State Constitution complying with human freedom and democracy aspirations, the restoration of the State of Lithuania shall be implemented in accordance with the provisions declared by this Declaration and in the spirit of the 1922 Constitution of Lithuania.

15. The restored State of Lithuania shall guarantee equal rights for all of Lithuania's nationals who have not committed any crimes against Lithuanian national interests.

16. As dictatorial and in essence contrary to the principal aspiration of the Lithuanian Nation and the cornerstone of the Constitution, that is Lithuania's independence, the Communist Party shall not be considered a legal party.

17. Persons who have betrayed their Homeland during the Bolshevik or German occupation by collaborating with the enemy, having by their actions or influence undermined the Nation's fight for liberation and have been stained by treason or blood, shall be held responsible before the Court of Lithuania.

18. The positive influence of religion in developing the Nation's morality and sustaining its strength during the most difficult period of the freedom fights is underlined.

19. Social care is not just a matter of individual citizens or organisations; it is a primary task of the state. Particular care shall be provided by the State to the victims of the liberation fight and their families.

20. A rational settlement of the social problems and the reconstruction of the State economy are linked to the reform of agriculture, municipalities and industry, which shall be implemented at the very outset of independent existence.

21. In close union with the fighting Nation, the MSFL Council invites all the Lithuanians of good will, residing within the Homeland and outside its borders, to forget the differences in their views and to join the activities of national liberation.

22. Contributing to the efforts of other nations to establish the world over a constant peace founded on justice and freedom and based on a full implementation of the principles of real democracy following from the understanding of Christian morality and anchored in the Atlantic Charter, the Four Freedoms, the 12 points of President Truman, the Declaration of Human Rights, and other declarations of justice and freedom, asking the whole democratic world for assistance to achieve their goals.'

Occupied Lithuania
16 February 1949

Chairman of the MSFL Council Presidium

VYTAUTAS

Members of the MSFL Council

FAUSTAS
KARDAS
MERAINIS
NAKTIS
UŽPALIS
VANAGAS
ŽADGAILA

The text of the declaration based on translation by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania

The meeting was a relatively short one and not all of the necessary organisational documents were prepared and adopted. According to the plan, those were to be further developed in different partisans districts, all the while trying to maintain communications. Important documents such as the statute of discipline, the regulations of partisan insigne, and so on, were prepared later. For instance, following the departure of the partisan representatives from Southern Lithuania, a decision was made on February 25 to launch *Prie Rymančio Rūpintojėlio* (By a Pensive Christ), the underground MSFL periodical. Šibaila-Merainis, head of the MSFL Public Section, was appointed its editor. This periodical was in circulation until 1953, when its editor was killed in action. The newspaper would be distributed across all partisan partisans districts where it could be reproduced appropriately.

So, the year kicked off on a merry note. In its issue No 1 of 1949, the underground *Kultuvas* (The Flail), '*a newspaper of cheerfully straightforward thought,*' addressed the enemy: '*On April's Fool, may the Comintern and the politburo with comrade Stalin at its forefront quickly obtain visas for a trip to Beelzebub's kingdom,*' while Lithuanian

Partisan's underground periodical „Prie rymančio Rūpintojėlio" (By the Pensive Christ)

communists, stribai, and their lackeys were offered to find a dry tree branch well in advance, *'so there isn't much of a jam and you don't have to wait in line later.'*

Jonas Žemaitis was concerned with the serious press; the partisan command had their own MSFL Council bulletin that only the commanders had access to. The bulletin was edited by Žemaitis himself. By the way, its 3rd issue contained an instruction that, in the event of a conflict between the East and the West, the partisans were to take care of the anti-Soviet-minded Jews. It implied the USSR's ban on repatriation to Israel for the Jews and the resulting conflicts between the Jews and the authorities. This was also a statement against the 1941 antisemitism and the mass murders of the Jews by the Nazis and the involvement of some Lithuanians in them.

The news of the establishment of a unified organisation soon travelled to reach the partisans districts. The MSFL's leadership was recognised by all partisan formations operating at the time. In 1951, the joint structure was joined by the partisans from the Biržai region, who had been operating separately until then. This shows that the decision was welcomed and recognised by the partisans without any major modifications. The MSFL assumed leadership over the entire armed resistance. The partisans believed the meeting to have been a legitimate one. The fighters considered themselves the only legitimate authority in Lithuania, despite the country's being under a foreign rule. It is a known fact that Lithuania's sovereignty was represented abroad by a Lithuanian diplomatic service in exile, run by its chief, former Foreign Minister Stasys Lozoraitis, preserving Lithuania's missions and embassies in the capitals of the states that did not recognise Lithuania's occupation and mustering the Lithuanian diaspora.

Even though a substantial organisational victory had been achieved in the form of establishing the MSFL, at the time the partisan movement was continuously waning due to partisans getting killed in action or arrested. Out of the eight signatories of the MSFL, four (Gužas, Bartkus, Liesis, Grybinas) were killed in 1949. Officers getting killed made it increasingly difficult to find substitutes. On the other hand, recruiting new people to territorial units let alone installing them in decision-making positions was dangerous, for the MGB used this to infiltrate quite a few agents in the resistance movement to help liquidate fighters at an opportune moment. Žemaitis, with his knowledge and experience, made this recommendation in his May 1949 letter to the regions: *'All new recruits, and those who raise any doubt in particular, should be vetted by giving them life-threatening tasks. Furthermore, every step should be taken to vet veteran partisans should their conduct give cause to suspicion.'*

Of course, the infiltrators came with a plausible legend and were trained in conduct and other matters that would not raise suspicions, rendering the agent difficult to recognise as such.

13

COMMANDER OF THE FREEDOM FIGHTERS

'The key evidence that we are expressing the will of the nation is that the nation did not cast us out – on the contrary, it has no cold feelings for us, and any gaps in the ranks of fighters are filled in by new recruits.'

(From Order No 3 of the Prisikėlimas Partisan District of 1951)

Commander of the Freedom Fighters

Partisan chevron

To answer the question of how Žemaitis managed to design a united partisan organisation, we will highlight his positive personal traits, such as self-discipline, open-mindedness, democratic views, ability to muster loyal companions and secure their support. Owing to that, Žemaitis-Vytautas became a big authority amidst the partisans.

The Soviet repressions against civilians did not end: in March 1949, yet another mass exile was organised under the codename *Priboy* (*Breaking Waves* (Russ.)). This coincided with deportations of people in Latvia and Estonia to Siberia. That time, more than 32,000 people were deported from Lithuania. The MGB's pressure on the partisans did not weaken either, and the agency-informer network grew to penetrate the ranks of the members of the resistance. Nonetheless, such conditions did not break Žemaitis and his companions. May 1949 saw Kazimieras Pyplys-Mažytis return from the West (having departed in late 1947, he managed to dodge being arrested on his return, while his fellow travellers were arrested and used by the MGB). Pyplys wrote a letter to commander Žemaitis, informing him on the general situation abroad. The letter read that foreign resistance was represented by an organisation of Lithuanian emigrants, the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (SCLL), although there was some disagreement in this regard among the Lithuanian diaspora of the Christian democrat as opposed to liberal, laicist inclination. Having received news from the West, Žemaitis wrote several letters to the SCLL asking for tangible assistance (in terms of weapons, cash, communication equipment, and so on) and moral support (through anti-Soviet radio broadcasts for Lithuania) for the resistance, but the letters went unanswered. Pyplys was killed in September.

In the spring of 1949, the partisans from the Southern region dispatched one of their number, Jurgis Krikščiūnas-Rimvydas, with escort to the West. Having reached Poland, he only managed to pass on part of the information to Lukša, the partisan envoy who lived overseas

at the time (as an approved SCLL overseas representative), while most of the information vanished and Krikščiūnas and his companion were killed in action in Poland in December 1949. These examples indicate that the partisan connections with foreign countries were fragmented and expecting some palpable assistance was not a realistic thing to do. The fight went on in sole reliance on the resources at hand.

Žemaitis travelled from one place to another, issuing various orders and keeping in touch with the districts. But the communication was irregular and would increasingly be broken for longer periods of time. Despite that, partisan commander Žemaitis proceeded with establishing the MSFL command. In 1949, he appointed Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas chief of the MSFL Defence Forces and his second in command. His other assistants were Šibaila and Grigonis. The commander had plans to disperse the command so it cannot be wiped out in a single blow.

Žemaitis spent the winter of 1949–1950 in Vytis Partisan District (mainly in Ukmergė County) of the Eastern Lithuanian region (which suffered great losses in the fall of 1949). Hiding in bunkers posed its own threats. Sometimes Žemaitis would get sick and have to move slowly, while someone had to carry his gun. That was not a good sign.

Considering the shifting situation, in 1950 Žemaitis decided to reform the MSFL's structure and replace the Defence Force and Public Section with three MSFL Council sections, one for military operations (Section 1), one for public work (Section 2), and one for organisational

Prisikėlimas Partisan District, 1950–1951. Left to right: Vytautas Sankauskas–Daukantas, Prisikėlimas Partisan District Commander Povilas Morkūnas–Rimantas, Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas, Maironis Territorial unit Commander Juozas Paliūnas–Rytas.

A photograph taken with partisans of the Prisikėlimas Partisan District, 1950–1951. Kneeling, left to right: 3. Vytautas Sankauskas–Daukantas, 4 Aleksas Šniukšta–Aras; standing, left to right: Kazys Šniukšta–Sakalas, Maironis Territorial unit commander Juozas Paliūnas–Rytas, Prisikėlimas Partisan District commander Povilas Morkūnas–Rimantas, Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas.

work (Section 3). According to his plan, the three sections were to be headed by Ramanauskas, Šibaila, Kimštas, respectively. The sections were to be established in different regions. The chief of the region was supposed to be directly subordinated to the head of the section; in that case, if the communication among the sections is broken and no communication can be restored with the supreme commander for a long time, the section and the regional command would become independent commanding units. Which means that Žemaitis had envisioned scenarios of the supreme command collapsing, but, according to the plan, the fight had to go on with the remaining fighters taking over the command. In April 1951, he spoke about this during his meeting with Kimštas. Of course, this project was never carried out completely, nor did it reach all of the formations, and was limited to some start-up activities in the Western and Eastern partisan regions.

With the MGB continuing to intercept partisan correspondence, conspiracy had to be tightened further still. Material sent to Žemaitis was addressed to some make-believe Jonas Petkus (Jonas Šimkus as of 1949); any material addressed to Antanina Petkutė was supposed to be delivered to Šibaila, head of a section. To assure a higher level of conspiracy, Supreme Command communication proxies were instructed to limit the size and weight of their parcels to ten grams.

Žemaitis spent the winter of 1950 and 1951 in the Maironis territorial unit of the Prisikėlimas Partisan District (the districts of Kėdainiai and Dotnuva), the communications were maintained via Juozas Paliūnas-

Rytas, the partisan district commander. Lukša, who had departed for the West in 1947, and his two companions Benediktas Trumpys and Klemensas Širvys returned to Lithuania in the fall of 1950. They were assisted on their journey by the American intelligence. No hopeful news came. Foreign Lithuanian figures urged them to preserve the vital strength of the nation. They would not deny the possibility of a future war, but were unable to give a precise date. Having returned to Lithuania with an assignment from the CIA, Lukša wrote a memo on the situation abroad and sent it to Žemaitis, and split the assistance he brought from America among the regions (500 US dollars each) and partisans districts (650 US dollars each). He brought home a total of 10,000 US dollars. Žemaitis received his own 500 dollar donation. This meagre assistance, moral in nature more than anything else, could not help in any material way, all the more as exchanging foreign currency in Lithuania would draw the attention of the relevant authorities. Žemaitis agreed with the suggestions by Lukša (who was killed in 1951) to collect intelligence and issued an order to do so.

Žemaitis continued drafting MSFL regulations and expected assistance from other partisan chiefs. That summer, Žemaitis moved to the woods in Jurbarkas district, where he had Juozas Palubeckis-Simas, a local partisan, as a bodyguard. Žemaitis had meetings with the heads of the Jūra Region, while communication with the rest of the regions was lagging. He was still hoping to get in touch with the West and had plans to send Ramanauskas and Šibaila there. In September 1951, he was visited by Širvys, who had returned from the West together with Lukša in 1950. But Širvys had fallen out of touch with foreign countries. Having spent a month or so at the forest camp, the two parted ways.

With winter just around the corner, Žemaitis decided to move to the Southern Region for the sake of better communication, but failing to agree on the date and place of the meeting, the move never took place. At the end of November, Žemaitis settled in a small bunker in Šimkaičiai forest (Jurbarkas district) for a short period of time. In November 1951, this hideout had been established by the partisans from Vaidotas territorial unit of Kęstutis Partisan District with the assistance of the local Skrickai family. A total of 4 partisans, Juozas Palubeckis one of them, were planning to spend the winter in this 2 by 3 bunker, its ceiling about 1.8 metre high.

Žemaitis's temporary stay at the hideout dragged on, even though it was too small and therefore not suitable as a command post.

14

SERIOUS ILLNESS

Only one out of every hundred has lived
But the fight is still going on unremitting

From a sonnet by partisan poet Bronius Krivickas

Serious Illness

During his stay in the bunker, on the night of 8 December 1951, Žemaitis went outside for a walk and collapsed shortly after. This did not come as a surprise: many would experience a fainting spell when they stepped outside after spending a lot of time in an underground bunker, their faces grey and swollen. The difficult years of partisan warfare, the various personal experiences had taken their toll on his health. It turned out the commander had been paralysed and could not walk. He was discovered and dragged back into the bunker by Juozas Palubeckis, who had become Žemaitis's most loyal companion. He had been a partisan since 1944 and knew his way around the forest well. Palubeckis's family had been hit by Soviet repressions. His father Rapolas died in prison, his brother Stasys and family and his sister Apolonija had been deported, his sister Julija sentenced to 10 years in prison; Elena was hiding with the partisans, brother Vytautas had been killed as a partisan, his home had been burned down back in 1945. It would have been difficult to find a partisan that would be more reliable. Palubeckis and his sister Elena did their best taking care of the ill commander, but as neither of them was a medic, they could not help him overcome the sickness. It was wintertime, which meant limited mobility, yet Palubeckis would still walk around the surrounding area seeking assistance, hence taking immense personal risks.

On 30 January 1952, Žemaitis as the chairman of the MSFL Council Presidium issued a brief statement: '*Due to an illness, today I stepped down from the office.*' This came into attention of Antanas Bakšys-Germantas, commander of the Western Lithuanian region, but electing a new commander was an impossible thing to do for want of solid connections among the districts, and the news travelled very slowly.

In spring, Palubeckis managed to get in touch with Marijona Žiliūtė, a medical nurse and a partisan helper, who was living in hiding. When asked, she moved in the bunker with Žemaitis and Palubeckis and his sister. After consulting a doctor, Žiliūtė began providing medical

assistance to Žemaitis. The treatment took place in the bunker, where the living conditions were hardly bearable even if you were healthy and well: it was damp and the air was stale because of the small vents, which slowed down the convalescence of the partisan commander considerably. The nurse would massage his arm and leg, give him intravenous and intramuscular injections provided by people they could trust.

Palubeckis-Simas was taking care of the communications with the outside world and the minimum level of provisions to accommodate living inside the bunker. In November 1952, he and another partisan dug out another spare bunker. Palubeckytė-Liudas would cook. The diet of the bunker dwellers was poor and mainly consisted of bread, potatoes, soup with grease, lard, and so on; however meagre they might be, such products were hard to get at the time. The water came from a nearby spring, or from a tiny well inside the bunker at times of danger. The daily routine in the bunker was something like this: they would not sleep at night, keeping the bunker lid open for ventilation, some would go out for a stroll, then close the lid in the morning and go to sleep, have lunch at daytime; then it would be sleep again until dark.

Still, they did not completely succumb to apathy during their time in the bunker. Žemaitis could not travel himself, but he would still receive letters from other chiefs, besides, once he got a bit better, he had to resume his duty as the commander; sometimes he would be visited by other partisans. In October, Bakšys came by and spent about a week in the bunker. He was considering establishing a Knights' Union (Lith. *Vyčių Sąjunga*). That organisation would continue the MSFL's work, only without the use of any arms. Žemaitis himself most probably approved of unarmed resistance, too. Bakšys drew the statute of the organisation and started publishing *Vyčių Keliu* (On the Road of Knights); however, he did not manage to accomplish much for he was killed in January 1953.

In 1952, organised armed resistance was winding down. That year, the MGB tracked down and eliminated many districts, territorial unit headquarters operating in Lithuania; their commanders were killed or arrested. Of partisan structures, only the names had remained. The surviving platoons operated without any contacts among themselves. Such news would come to Žemaitis, too. Still, there were fighters who continued the work and cherished visions of the future. In the spring of 1953, he would be visited by Jonas Vilčinskas-Algirdas, commander of the Vaidotas Territorial unit of Kęstutis Partisan District. He and Povilas Morkūnas-Rimantas, commander of the Kęstutis District, managed to release the 176th issue of *Laisvės Varpas*. Morkūnas was struck by an idea (which Vilčinskas passed on to Žemaitis) that, to rebuild ties with the SCLL and foreign agencies and obtain tangible assistance, they should travel West not through the territory of Poland, the way it had been done until then, but by the USSR-Finland border. Once in Finland, they would get in touch with the underground organisation (there had been reports on the radio about one operating there), and use it to contact the SCLL. The border was scheduled to be reached by way of

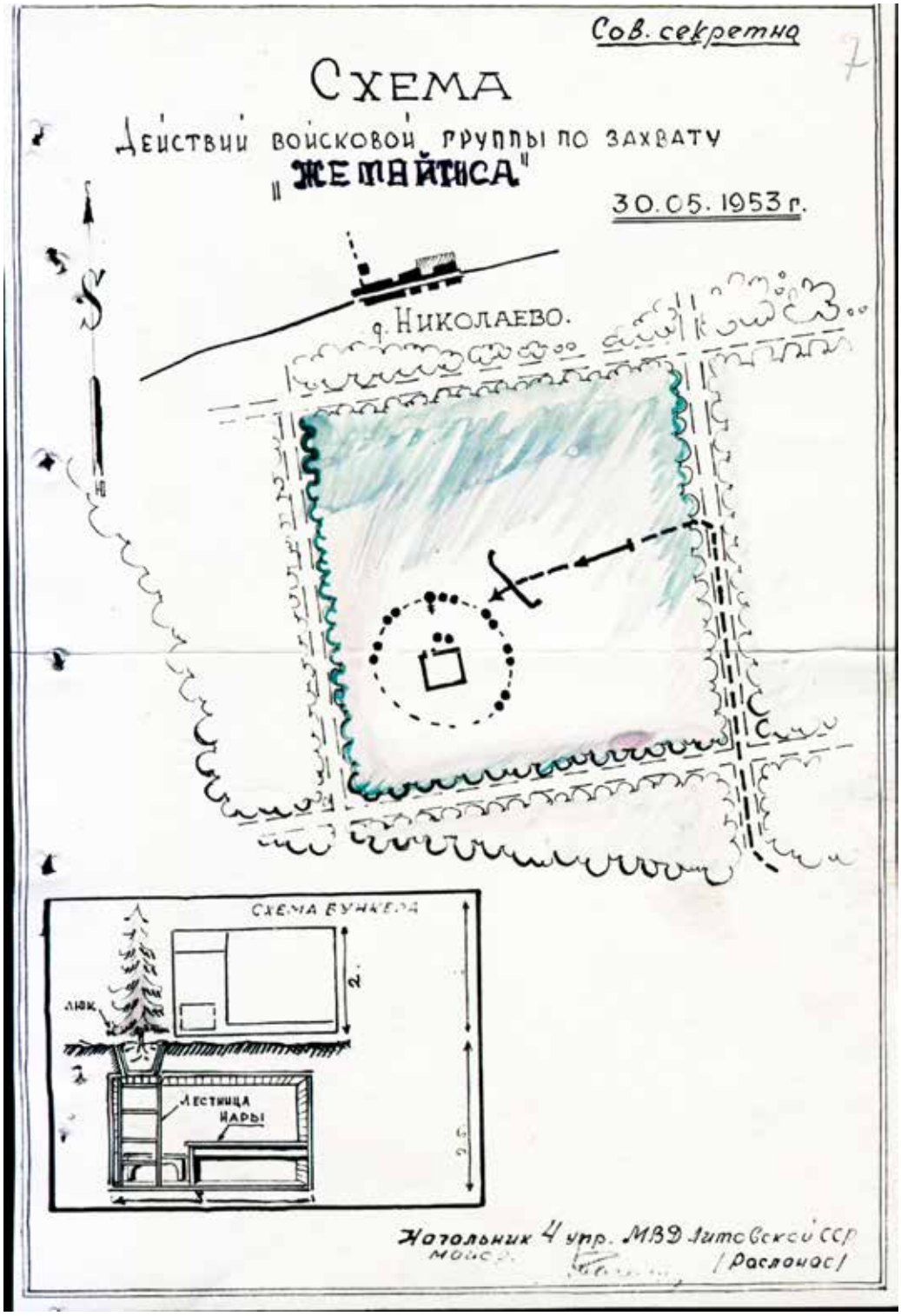
Latvia and Estonia, keeping to the right of Leningrad. It was believed that the border security was more lax at that point, although they made plans to break through with guns blazing, if need be. These were not just musings: real preparations for the journey began and Vilčinskas was learning Russian. The partisans thought they could be helped by former paratrooper Širvys; little did they know he had already been arrested.

Unfortunately, these plans would not be brought to life, although they do show that the fighters still had hope, all the more as Žemaitis got a little bit better in the spring of 1953. As the partisans were trying to design plans for networking with foreign countries, the ties of the American and British intelligence with Lithuania had already been under the control of the LSSR's MGB, which was playing radio games in at least three agency cases (two vs British, one vs American intelligence). The partisans were not directly involved in them. However, the MGB's statements falsely portrayed them as perpetrators of a meaningless fight and destroyers of unity from the underground. One of such 'destroyers' was said to be Cpt Žemaitis. This was done in a bid to discredit the partisans in the eyes of the West.

The Soviet security had been actively on the lookout for partisan commander Vytautas since 1945, but kept looking in the wrong places. An adequate level of conspiracy allowed him to stay hidden for nearly 8 years. Still, in February and March 1953, thanks to testimony by arrestees and data from its agents, the MGB managed to roughly pinpoint the location where the commander was hiding: the forest of Šimkaičiai. The Soviet security dubbed Žemaitis asset 'Peter'. The MGB interfering in the partisan communication line posed the biggest threat. In this case, Žemaitis kept his communications via Palubeckis. The rest of the partisans who had installed the bunker had been killed in action, and those who had been arrested did not know the exact location of the hideout. Granted, Kleopas Skrickis, a partisan supporter who got arrested, knew he had been supplying building materials for the bunker, but never said anything about that. Otherwise the capture of the partisan commander might have happened much sooner.

The MVD envisioned at least several routes that would take them to Žemaitis, but their efforts were focused on arresting Palubeckis-Simas. On 23 May 1953, Palubeckis was secretly arrested with the help of a captured and defecting partisan. The progress of this operation was being tracked in Moscow. Right before the arrest, Lavrentiy Beria, USSR Minister of the Interior, issued an encrypted telegram with instructions not to rush the arrest but rather gather more data instead. But local chekists, either due to not having received the telegram on time or by virtue of pressure from Antanas Snečkus, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) (who had to demonstrate his achievements in waging war on 'bourgeois nationalists'), arrested Žemaitis's companion.

The MVD failed to obtain a testimony straight away, even though his interrogation began at the site of his capture near Šimkaičiai forest. He



The MVD plan how to atack Žemaitis bunker and the plan of the hidout

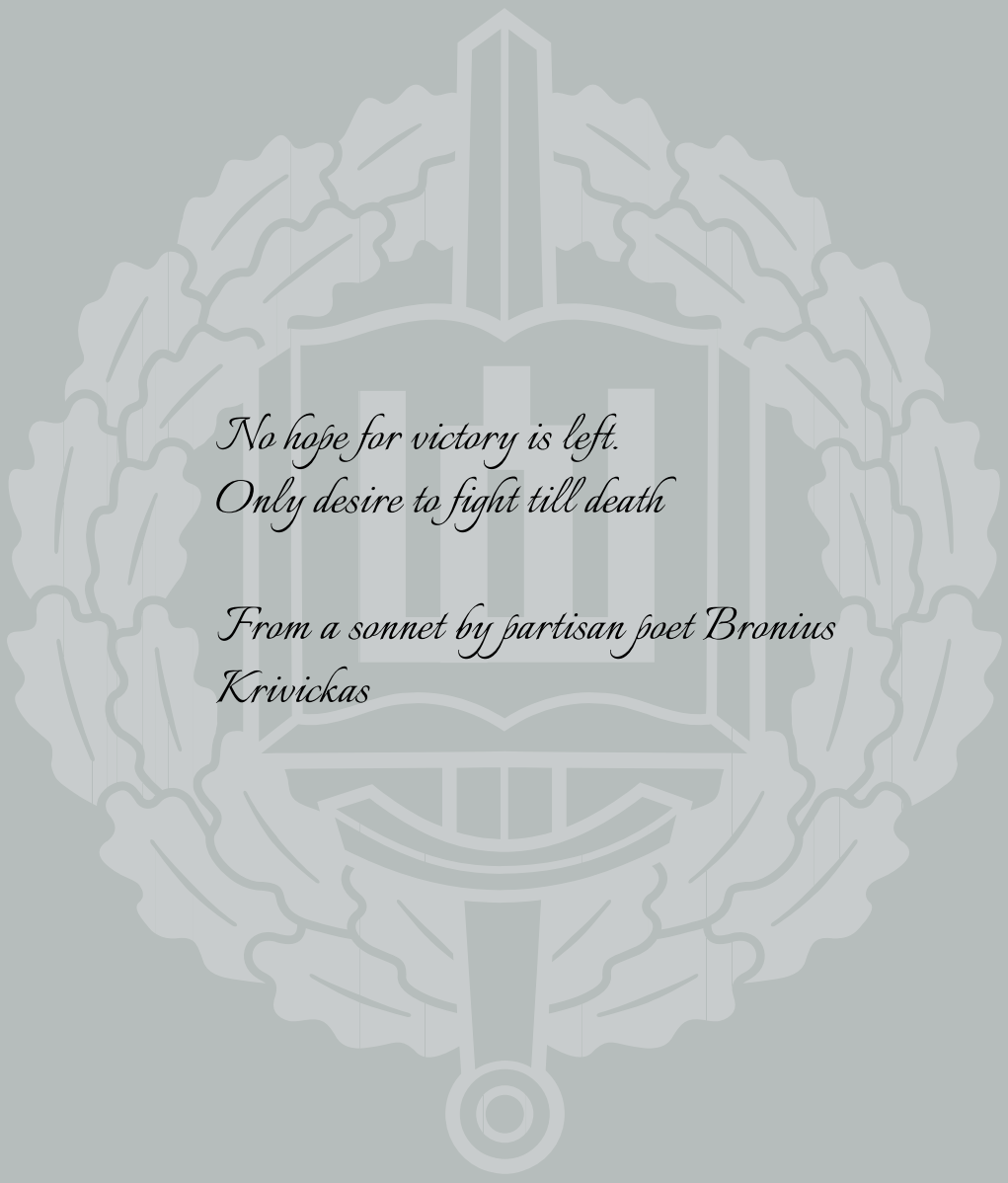
was interrogated intensively day and night, while he was being brought from Kaunas to Vilnius, but still kept his silence. He would refuse to show the location of the bunker pleading oath. It was only on May 29 that he agreed to show the location of the hideout, having succumbed to tremendous bodily and mental torture. This cannot be considered an act of treason, for no man could withstand such torment. Palubeckis demanded a written guarantee from the LSSR MVD stating *'The LSSR Ministry of the Interior hereby guarantees preservation of life, total and complete freedom, and provision of employment also to those people who will be captured with the assistance of citizen Palubeckis J.R., provided they will help remove the rest of the members of the armed nationalist mezzanine from the forest and have them legalised.'* Of course, that was but a letter. Might have been that Palubeckis expected the inhabitants of the bunker to have fled the hideout, because he was supposed to come back on May 24. Such a long absence on Simas's part should have aroused a certain degree of suspicion in them. Which, of course, had been the case; the reasons why they had not relocated are unknown though: could be it was because of Žemaitis's health condition. En route to the bunker site, Palubeckis was playing for time as much as possible, demanding seeing a priest to make a confession and to deliver a copy of the guarantee issued to him (the chekists gave the priest a copy of the document but soon took it away and told him to forget what happened there). It was on around 11:15 a.m. on 30 May 1953 – 7 days after Simas had left – that the MVD forces arrived at the bunker.

They were well prepared to storm the bunker. Grenades filled with sleeping gas where tossed inside through the vents; the inhabitants of the hideout had managed to fire off a couple of shots before that. Unconscious, they were dragged outside with hooks. Žemaitis was lightly injured, Žiliūtė maimed by a hook.

The bunker location was promptly covered straight away in hopes to continue the manhunt for the remaining partisans, and those captured were taken away. So began Žemaitis's time in captivity.

15

IN CAPTIVITY



No hope for victory is left.
Only desire to fight till death

From a sonnet by partisan poet Bronius Krivickas

In Captivity

The MVD tried work on Žemaitis using various methods as soon as he was arrested. They tried to break him with the help of his companions Zaskevičius, Kimštas, and others, who had been arrested previously. Crimped by the Soviets, these tried to talk Žemaitis into changing his views. This was a difficult moment for Žemaitis. The MVD tried to 'reform' Žemaitis without resorting to coercion; he therefore was provided with better conditions of incarceration and better food. The first recorded interrogation took place on May 30.

In addition to the attention from the Soviet Lithuanian leaders, Žemaitis also caught the eye of a high-ranking USSR official. He became the only member of the Lithuanian resistance to be involved in top-tier political games in the Soviet Union. Interior Minister Lavrentiy Beria was making a grab for power in the USSR back then with reforms that did not make much sense back then just as they do not this day. He launched a policy of promoting national cadre to executive positions in the Soviet republics. Lithuania was not an exception. Here, too, strings were being pulled for Lithuanian administrators, even in the Soviet security system that had been predominantly run by Russian-speaking heads. Who knows what the results of Beria's political course might have been, had it been anything but short-lived.

Beria wanted to see the partisan commander, and Žemaitis was flown to Moscow as per his instruction. On June 25, a mysterious meeting between Beria and Žemaitis took place. There is no reliable information as to what was being discussed there. There is but an entry in Žemaitis's criminal case that at 9:50 p.m. the prisoner was taken to Beria and returned to the cell at 10:50 p.m., which means that the meeting lasted less than an hour. According to one version, Žemaitis was offered a position in Lithuania; some say he was being crimped for undercover work. Or perhaps it was just curiosity to see the partisan commander on Beria's part? It is a known fact that apart from Žemaitis, Beria also met with captured members of the Ukrainian resistance. Anyway, the very

Jonas Žemaitis in prison.

next day, on 26 June 1953, Beria was arrested. One of his accusers at the CC CPSU plenum was Antanas Sniečkus, First Secretary of the CC CPL. They had completely different interests with regard to Žemaitis. In his bid for power, Beria was looking for evidence to incriminate Sniečkus and therefore probably needed Žemaitis free, which would have served as another piece of proof that Sniečkus was not keeping a lid on the situation in the republic. Later, Sniečkus paid him back in a way. At said plenum, he spoke: *'Beria's report also mentioned that the Lithuanian underground was run by former captain of the bourgeois Lithuanian military Žemaitis, who was elected "President of Lithuania" in the underground. Of course, it is our fault that we did not deal with Žemaitis straight away, but now he has been arrested. And he was arrested without Beria: our own chekists did that. /.../ Who was that Žemaitis, really? He was just like his promoter Beria. That Žemaitis was hiding deep in the woods, would rarely emerge from his hideout, only had several points of communication, and was completely isolated from the Lithuanian people. But what does Beria do? He orders Žemaitis to be brought to Moscow so he can interrogate him himself. /.../ Žemaitis was delivered by Martavičius, deputy Minister of the Interior of the LSSR. Comrade Martavičius told me that, after he had interrogated Žemaitis, Beria offered establishing, with his assistance, an underground nationalist organisation in Lithuania. You see, first Beria overinflated the role Žemaitis had played, and then*

offered Martavičius establishing a purported underground nationalist organisation run by Žemaitis.' Such were the top-tier political games, and Žemaitis's destiny was being decided at lower ranks.

Žemaitis was interrogated in Moscow again, and at the end of August 1953 was brought back to Lithuania and reached Vilnius on September 5. Later he would speak so about the first interrogations: *'I had not had a chance to adequately analyse my political views and somehow yielded to the pressure from MVD employers and started giving testimony after a week.'* And he would add during his trial: *'at the trial, I saw people who were taking the opportunity to tread the easy path. While in a subnormal spiritual state, I too first walked that road and it was a tremendous folly that did damage to the movement. As a result, I condemn myself to the ultimate punishment. I am pleased that later I got my senses back and managed to return to the right path.'* Speaking about the interrogations in Moscow and in Vilnius, he said that *'during the interrogation, I could not sleep and could not care less what they were writing down in their reports. /…/ My rights were infringed for my inability to speak Russian, I was interrogated in Moscow without an interpreter. /…/ Interrogator Danilchev hurt my national feelings, swore, interrogated me without taking notes, and I was in apathy.'*

At the interrogations, Žemaitis would speak less and less, explaining he could not say one thing or the other lest he commit an act of treason or break his oath. And from 8 October 1953 onward, he refused to sign interrogation reports altogether. The other members of the resistance involved in his case would not cooperate with the Soviet security either.

Before the trial, Žemaitis asked to be allowed to see his mother and son; his request was denied. One story has it that instead of a visit Žemaitis was shown a picture of his son and the son's guardian, in which the son was wearing a red pioneer pin. On 1–5 and 7 June 1954, a closed-door session of the Court Martial of the Baltic Military District took place. All four defendants (Žemaitis, Palubeckis, Žiliūtė, Palubeckytė) stood firm. During the interrogations and the trial, Žemaitis was being accused not only of involvement in the partisan movement, but also of 'espionage', for he had organised collection of material to be sent abroad and was in contact with partisans returning from the West. So, the range of allegations had grown.

In his closing statement, being constantly interrupted by the chairman of the judicial panel, Žemaitis stressed: '*All covert acts directed against the Soviet rule that I was involved in I consider to be just and not a crime. I only wish to note that for as long as I had the chance to lead the fight of the Lithuanian freedom fighters, I did my best to make sure that this fight adheres to the principles of humanity. I did not allow any atrocities. I know what the judgement will be. I still believe that the fight I have been fighting for 9 years will bear its fruit.'* Palubeckis was asking for a lighter sentence for the others, and for himself to be punished in their stead. Both men were sentenced to death by fusillade. Žilūtė was sentenced to 25, Palubeckytė, to 10 years in prison.

As Žemaitis was being tried, the organised resistance was suppressed. Only individual partisans remained. According to the Soviet security, some 20,000 members of alleged members or the armed resistance were killed between 1944 and 1953.

The trial was followed by the last phase in the life of Žemaitis. Both men sentenced to ultimate punishment were transported to Moscow for Lithuania did not have death penalty at the time.

On 23 November 1954, the last search of Žemaitis was done in his prison cell; Žemaitis refused to sign the search report. Žemaitis's sentence was carried out in Butyrki prison on 26 November 1954, and Palubeckis was executed by shooting on December 2. Their exact burial place is unknown.

Monument to Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas in front of the Defence Ministry of the Republic of Lithuania.

There will come a day when a white knight will rise
Amidst a forest of flags to shine bright in the sky!
Our blood will be singing through our motherland's soil,
And on the gaunt grave, bright lilies will grow.

Partisan poetess Diana Glemžaitė, 1949.

AFTERWORD

Afterword

Jonas Žemaitis was a partisan for nearly 8 years, which is a very rare case, because for most armed fighters, their time in the forest amounted to a year or eighteen months. They were tracked, poisoned, snitched on, eliminated, taunted by huge security forces and even the military of a major state, thousands of people were recruited to hunt them down, they were denigrated and accused of crimes they never did, and still they fought. In the beginning, they believed in the support of the West, the impending war of the democratic world against evil – bolshevism; eventually, they could only believe in themselves, and that is a testimony to their strength and courage. Determined to persevere until the very end of the organised movement, they engineered unification plans and scenarios for the liberation of Lithuania, froze in tiny bunkers with enemy troops making noise above, poking the ground with metal spikes in search of bunker lids or vents, listening for the voices of fighters hiding underground.

They were annihilated as bandits; NKVD divisions stationed in Lithuania carried out punitive operations: in July–December 1944 alone, 2,489 people were killed in acts of terror perpetrated by the occupants, some 100,000 Lithuanian residents came under Soviet duress in one way or the other. One measure in suppressing armed resistance was mass deportations to Siberia: about 40,000 people were deported in May 1948, over 32,000 in 1949, nearly 20,000 people in 1951. These enormous deportations broke the resistance of rural populace towards the Soviet policy, people were forced to join kolkhozes, which were being set up under coercion, on a massive scale. In 1944–1953, around 186,000 Lithuanian residents were arrested and imprisoned, another 118,000 were deported.

Soviet governance caused a lot of damage to the people of Lithuania: the occupation authorities ruined thousands of people lives as well as whole social tiers, their culture and property. The rest lived in constant fear for their own safety as well as that of their dearest and nearest. Such

acts on the part of the Soviet authorities brought forth mass armed resistance of the Lithuanian people.

After partisan warfare had ended, the Soviet governmental institutions began publishing books and articles aiming to discredit the partisan movement and belittle its leaders, who were portrayed exclusively in a negative light, referring to them as 'fascist minions', 'bourgeois nationalists', 'bandits'. They were claimed to have first served for the benefit of 'fascist Germany', and then defected for the Western (American first and foremost) intelligence. On top of that, the Soviets tried to fit the Lithuanian partisan movement into the framework of the Marxist theory, depicting it as a 'class struggle', where so called 'kulaks' (rich rural people) allegedly fought for their land and riches against the poor, the peasants with no or little land. The propaganda and even scientific literature of the period used such primitive clichés to deny what was obvious, while works of fiction painted a slightly more diverse picture, describing things that were a bit controversial. The truth was that between 1944 and June 1946, 'kulaks' amounted to a mere 7.5 per cent of those tried by the Soviets for 'crimes against revolution', and 52 per cent of them were average people, farmers with less than 15 hectares of land to their name; 21.4 per cent of the Lithuanians repressed were poor, 15 per cent were intellectuals. The fact that what was happening was indeed a desperate fight of the nation for its freedom became evident even to the soviet executioners: the chairman of the court martial wrote with great astonishment that '*/…/ 7.5 per cent of landlords, kulaks, and clergy sentenced managed to attract 8,226 individuals, or 92.5 per cent of the workpeople – peasants, craftsmen, students, and intellectuals – sentenced.*'

The year 1968 saw the publication of *Kruvinos Žudikų Pėdos* (Bloody Footprints of the Killers), mainly consisting of biased extracts from interrogation records of members of the resistance and featuring excerpts from the interrogation records of Jonas Žemaitis for the first time. Despite its being biased, the information contained in these documents of the Soviet Themis had yet another effect. The work and fight of Žemaitis became known, albeit to a limited extent, to a wider readership, both in Lithuania and amidst the diaspora. The book was also presented as a 'gift' to Žemaitis's son Laimutis, when, in 1968, he was summoned to a military commissariat where a staffer of the Soviet security was waiting for him. This latter was keen to find out the extent of the partisan son's knowledge of his father and whether there had been any attempts by anyone to reach him from Lithuania or America. Laimutis Žemaitis recalled at least several interviews of this or similar kind. Which means that the KGB had its sights on the partisan's son as well.

Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas, an officer of the Lithuania military, graduate of an artillery school in France, husband to his wife and father to his son, was unable to see his parents, wife, or baby son during the fight, virtually losing them in the name of the fight for freedom. Thanks to his selfless strife, he was elected the only partisan general by his brothers in arms, was acting president of the fighting Lithuania from 16

February 1949, and worked unyieldingly and adamantly despite being ill until his very last. And that is why his memory lives on, that is why it is being cherished.

There was a radical shift in the attitude towards the partisans at the time of national renaissance in 1988–1990, and after the 1990 declaration of independence in particular. The overarching extent of partisan warfare in Lithuania is even evident in the data gathered during the punitive actions by the occupants: in 1944–1953, the USSR security units killed nearly 20,000 partisans, another 19,000 were arrested (the total number of people killed, arrested, or legalised standing at 120,000); according to the Soviet security data, 9 cannons, 30 anti-tank rifles, 31 mortars, 3,002 machineguns, 40,000 submachine guns, rifles, and handguns, 557 typewriters and copying devices were seized. With their courage, self-sacrifice, and resilience, the freedom fighters somehow mitigated the despair and shame over the government of Lithuania failing to order the military to defend the independence with arms in the summer of 1940; their armed and spiritual resistance, casualties, and sacrifice showed that Lithuania had been annexed to the USSR against the nation's will, forging said will, and shamelessly lying to the world.

Just like any other war, this one, too, unfortunately took a large toll of civilian lives.

Despite fighting for the restoration of its statehood and against a dictatorship of a single party and terror, Lithuania did not benefit from any tangible assistance from the democratic West in this war. Western intelligence displayed a slightly bigger interest in the partisan warfare; however, any contacts with the West established through the 'iron curtain' were limited and fragmented. And that was all, because the partisans survived solely on the support from the ordinary Lithuanian peasants who supplied them with food, clothes, arms, ammunition, medications; hundreds or thousands of signallers were their mail service, their communication, their press carriers, eyes and ears in the long and brutal war after a war.

Ongoing efforts to commemorate the partisans have begun. This commemoration has been done at the initiative of public authorities, public organisations, even private individuals. The following are landmark examples of perpetuating Žemaitis's memory:

- In 1997, Žemaitis was awarded the Order of the Cross of Vytis (the highest military award in the Republic of Lithuania), rank 1.
- In 1998, he was bestowed the rank of Retired Brigadier General.
- In 1998, the Military Academy of Lithuania was named after General Jonas Žemaitis.
- In 1999, a monument to Žemaitis was unveiled near the Defence Ministry of the Republic of Lithuania, and in 2009, in the garden of the War Museum in Kaunas. More commemorative monuments have been erected elsewhere.
- In 2007 and in 2009, the secondary school of Šimkaičiai and the gymnasium of Raseiniai were named after Žemaitis.

▶ In 2009, the Seimas (Parliament) of the Republic of Lithuania declared that Žemaitis had de facto sat as President of the Republic of Lithuania.

Historian Nijolė Gaškaitė-Žemaitienė wrote the first thorough book about Žemaitis-Vytautas under the title of *Žuvusiųjų Prezidentas* (The President of the Fallen). This might be the most accurate description of his post, a spot-on description of the self-sacrifice and courage involved in the 1944–1953 fight of the Lithuanian partisans, the tragedy of Jonas Žemaitis's fighters, their wilful ultimate sacrifice – their life – in the name of Lithuania and its independence.

The work to commemorate the Lithuanian partisans and freedom fighters continues, with new monuments being built, their desecrated remains sought and ceremoniously reburied, scientific studies conducted, memorable sites guarded.

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MILITARY ACADEMY OF LITHUANIA

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LITHUANIAN PARTISAN DISTRICTS IN 1949–1950

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