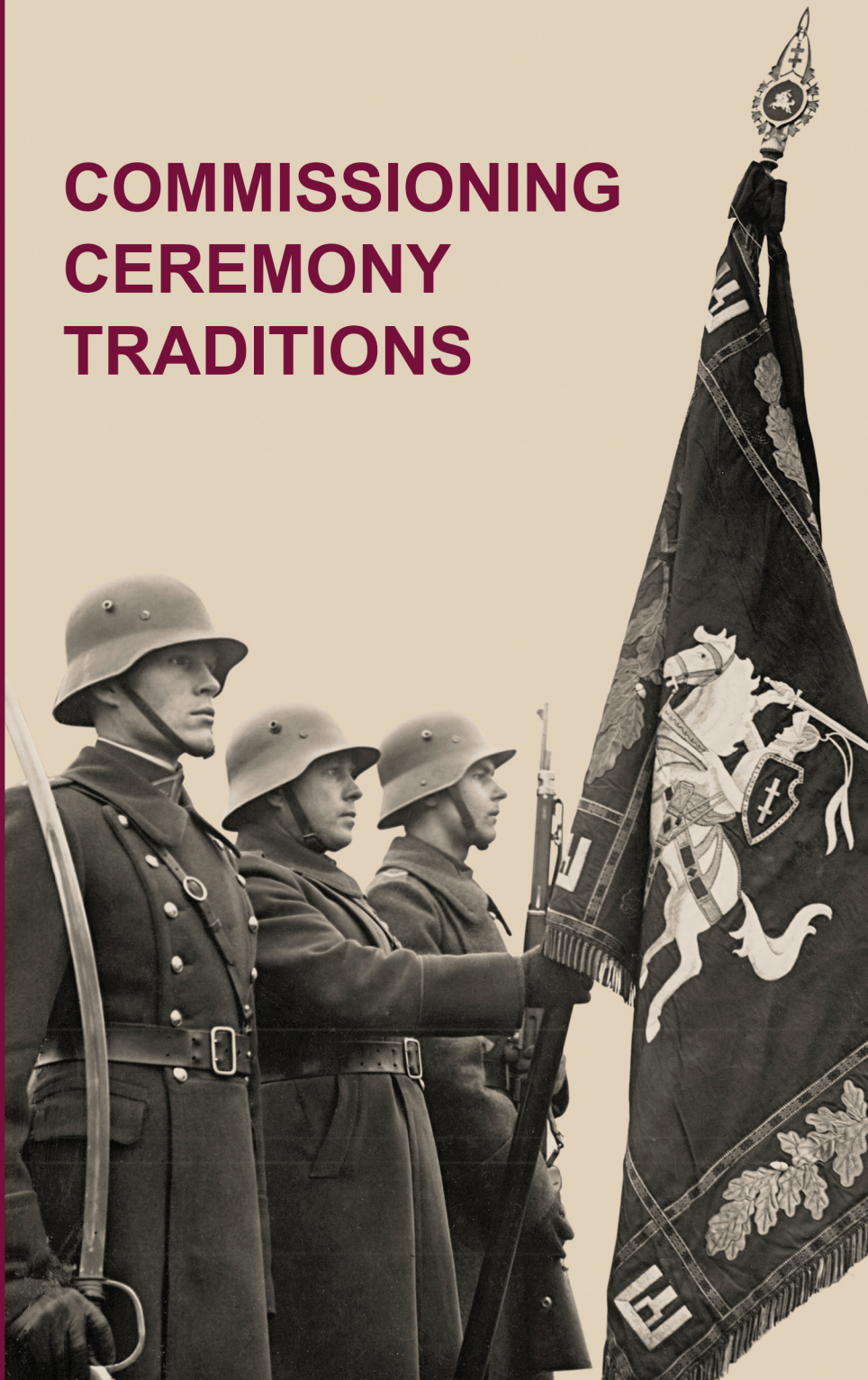
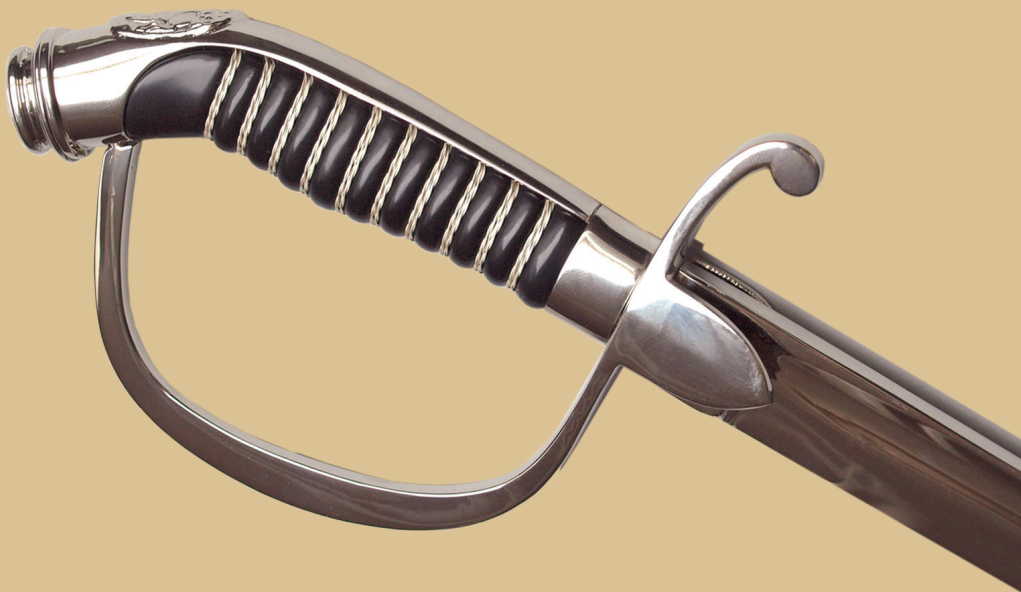




COMMISSIONING CEREMONY TRADITIONS





THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY



GENERAL JONAS ŽEMAITIS
MILITARY ACADEMY OF LITHUANIA

THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY

VILNIUS
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**YOU SHALL NOT DRAW THE SWORD FOR NO REASON,
NOR SHALL YOU SHEATHE IT WITHOUT HONOR!**
THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY

Translated and proofread by Skrivanek vertimų biuras UAB,
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Military schools and academies around the world differ not only in their students' uniforms but also in their long-standing traditions being unique to an institution of higher education for the training of commissioned officers.

Enshrined in the Lithuanian Military School between 1919 and 1939, traditions exerted an explicit educational influence on future officers of the Lithuanian Armed Forces and were hence promoted by the chiefs of the Armed Forces and the cadets themselves. It took quite a while for the tradition of both bestowing an officer rank on the Military School cadets and taking their commissioning oath to evolve into **a unique commissioning ceremony specific to Lithuania alone.**



President of the Republic of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda

**THE COMMISSIONING
CEREMONY OF
THE FIRST CLASSES
IN 1919–1922**



The Lithuanian Military School was established on 15 January 1919 in Kaunas, along with the formation of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. On 25 January, officer Jonas Galvydis-Bykauskas was named its commandant.

Classes 1 to 4 of the Military School were trained according to an abridged wartime officer-training programme, with the training duration determined by the trainee's position at the front. This is why the wartime commissioning ceremony was very basic and matter-of-fact. The best illustration of this is the commissioning ceremony of the 1st Class of the Military School, which was scheduled on 6 July 1919 and included the following:

- The Holy Mass held at the School by a clergyman from the Samogitian Diocese (or, from 1929, the Archdiocese of Kaunas)
- Reading of the decree on bestowing the rank of *karūžas* (junior officer)
- Congratulatory remarks
- Ceremonial breakfast

The commissioning ceremony of the School's 3rd wartime Class was also similarly modest. After the service at Kaunas Garrison Church, cadets lined up outside the church to hear the Act of the President of the Republic of Lithuania read aloud, which bestowed the rank of officer on them. Right afterwards, young officers marched past the president and the chiefs of the Armed Forces. Then upon returning to the School premises, they changed their clothes and were taken to the cafeteria where there was no ceremonial dinner or anything resembling a formal party.



Military School graduation parade
Museum of the Military Academy of Lithuania

Though the commissioning ceremony of the 4th wartime Class of the Military School was quite similar to the previous ones, it was held in the Square of Petras Vileišis in Kaunas, and the line-up included other divisions of the Armed Forces. There was a reception in the evening, with chiefs of regiments, divisions, and General Staff in attendance.

IN SUMMARY, COMMISSIONING
CEREMONIES OF ALL FOUR
WARTIME CLASSES WERE VERY
SIMPLE AND MODEST.

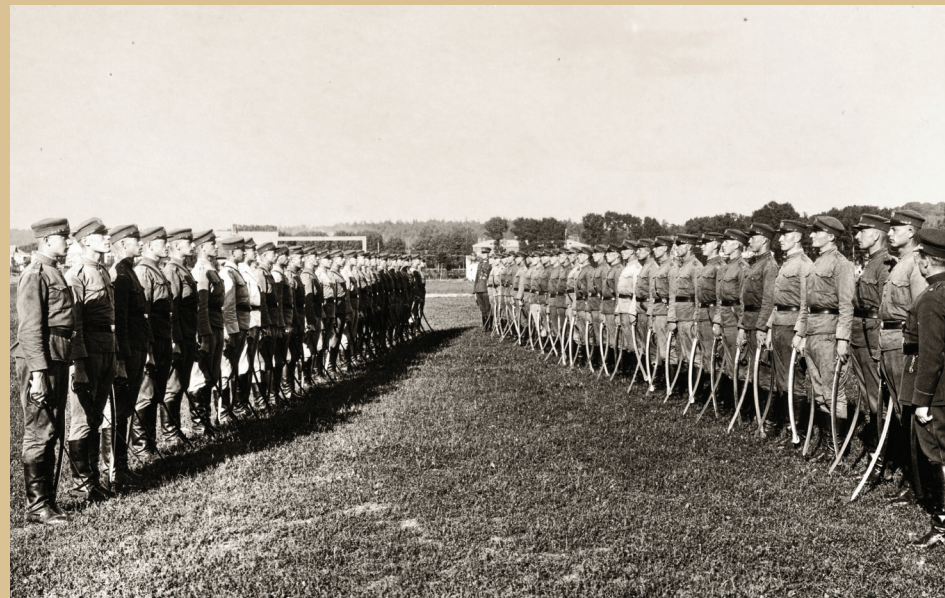
THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY IN 1923–1940



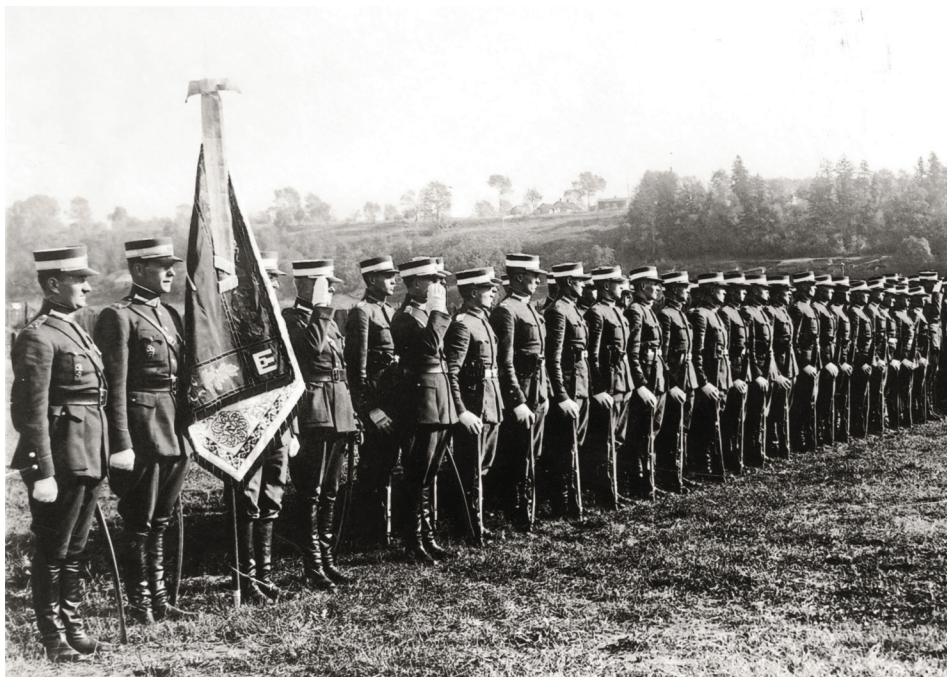
A significant change in the Military School graduation ceremony traces back to the commissioning ceremony of the School's 5th Class on 22 October 1923.

THE 5TH CLASS COMMISSIONING
EVENT BECAME A BLUEPRINT FOR THE
TRADITIONAL CEREMONY FOR YEARS
TO COME.

On the day of the commissioning ceremony, there was a church service in Aukštoji Panemunė, attended by the President of Lithuania, Minister of National Defence, Chief of Defence, and other honourable guests. After the service, cadets lined up outside the church. And the presidential decree on conferring the rank of lieutenant was read out loud. Afterwards, young officers were congratulated by the president himself who wished them all the very best for the future. Then followed the national anthem. The graduates responded to all speakers' words of congratulations and wishes by hollering "Hooray!" and marched past the guests of the ceremony. With the ceremony by the church completed, young lieutenants returned to the School barracks and changed into officer uniforms.



"Actions with the Sword," the last lesson for the line-up
Museum of the Military Academy of Lithuania



The line-up of cadets (1930s)
Museum of the Military Academy of Lithuania

Later on, the president and other guests arrived at the School for **THE SWORD PRESENTATION CEREMONY**. The main hall of the School was decorated with wreaths of yellow autumn leaves; fir twigs were scattered on the floor. There was a table covered with a red baize tablecloth, holding the swords. The names and dates of the most famous battles won by Lithuanians were engraved on their blades. On one side, there was a list of victories in ages past: 1236 Saulė, 1260 Durbė, 1410 Grunwald, 1506 Kletsk, 1514 Orsha, 1564 Ula, 1605 Kirchholm, 1649 Loyew, 1654 Shklow; on the other, victories achieved in Lithuania's struggles for independence: 1919 Panevėžys–Dauguva, 1919 Radviliškis, 1920 Giedraičiai. The hilts were adorned with Vytis's double cross.



The sword presentation ceremony (1930s)
Office of the Chief Archivist of Lithuania

For the first time in the Military School history, **President Aleksandras Stulginskis, standing at the head of the table, presented a sword to each young lieutenant, saying: “You shall not draw the sword for no reason, nor shall you sheathe it without honour!”** After the sword presentation ceremony, the president, the guests, the Military School instructors, and the graduates were photographed outside the barracks and went to the cafeteria for lunch. With hunger assuaged, attendees burst into Lithuanian patriotic folk songs. In the evening, the guests were invited to attend the graduation party at the Officers’ Club.

It is worth noting that as of 1923, officers graduating the Military School would receive their swords from the President of Lithuania or the Minister of National Defence.

IMPORTANT CHANGES IN THE
COMMISSIONING CEREMONY OCCURRED IN
1927, WITH THE COMMISSIONING OF THE
9TH CLASS OF OFFICERS.

The commissioning ceremony order of business in general was similar to the previous ones, except that during the formal lunch the top-performing graduate of the Military School, Lt. Adomas Stankevičius – on behalf of the new class of lieutenants – responded to the guests’ congratulations and wishes.

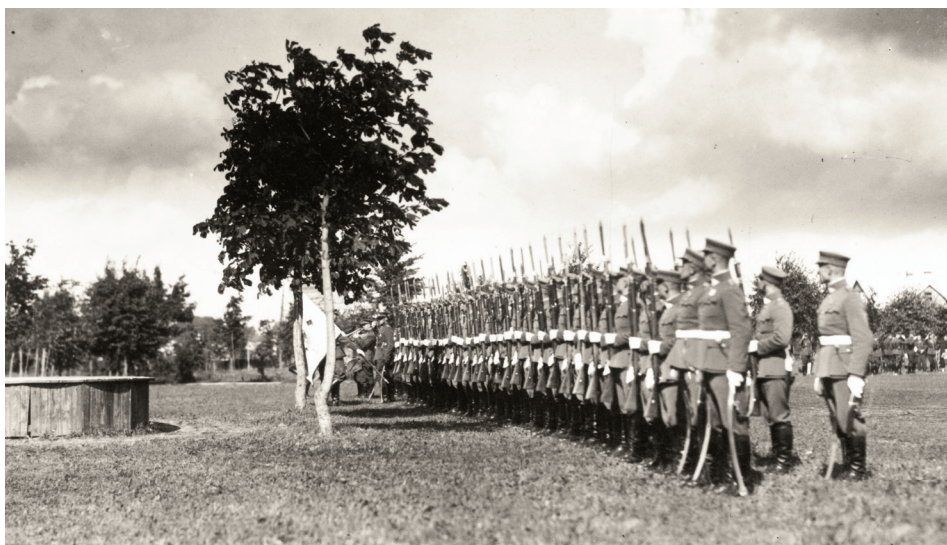
FROM THAT YEAR ON, A SPEECH OF THE
BEST-PERFORMING GRADUATE OF THE
MILITARY SCHOOL BECAME
A TRADITION.



11th Class of Military School cadets (1929)
Museum of the Military Academy of Lithuania

In 1930, another important element was embedded in the commissioning ceremony. It has to do with the flag which was presented to the Military School during the commissioning ceremony of the 11th Class on 6 October 1929; it bears the image of the President of Lithuania Antanas Smetona, the patron of the Military School.

SINCE 1930, THE GRADUATING CLASS WOULD
SOLEMNLY PASS ON THE FLAG OF THE
PATRON TO THE SENIOR CLASS ON THE DAY
OF COMMISSIONING.



Honour Guard standing by the flag for the last time.
Officers from the 17th Class
Museum of the Military Academy of Lithuania



Commissioning Ceremony of the 17th Class of the Military School cadets.
Reading of the decree, 1935
Museum of the Military Academy of Lithuania

The commissioning ceremony reached its final form between 1927 and 1930, remaining unchanged until the occupation of Lithuania in 1940. Its traditions were preserved until the commissioning of the 20th Class of officers in 1939.

The commissioning ceremony of the 21st Class of officers took place in the autumn of 1940 under the People's Government of Lithuania, which is often referred to as "the puppet government." This government forced a fundamental change on the order of business of the ceremony, replacing the national anthem with "The Internationale" and introducing many other changes related to the onset of sovietisation.

REVIVING THE TRADITIONS OF THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY AS OF 1990 – NOWADAYS



After the restoration of Lithuania's independence in 1990, the Military School was restored and on 16 June 1992 was reorganized into the Military Academy of Lithuania. **The 1st Class of 111 officers were commissioned on 2 September 1994.** In preparation for the commissioning ceremony, it was decided to revive the Military School commissioning traditions of the interwar period. A few things, however, were changed. It was decided to end for good the practice of giving each cadet a sword. Also, what did not remain as part of the commissioning ceremony was the interwar ritual of kissing the cross, the Book of the Gospels, and the Military Academy flag with the orchestra playing church hymns.

Today, General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania not only cherishes the 1919–1939 commissioning traditions of the Military School, but also creates new ones.

After the restoration of Lithuania's independence, the commissioning ceremony for the Military School cadets was held at the Independence Square in Vilnius in front of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania (The Seimas).

When the orchestra performed a solemn march, the graduates of the Military Academy received their diplomas, Academy graduation insignia, and watches with their names engraved.

Then, the President of Lithuania took a sword – the symbol of power and honour – into his hands and touched with it the shoulder of the best-performing graduate, Sigitas Ratkevičius, and of every young officer in turn.

Young officers then marched from the Independence Square to the Cathedral Square, where they received the blessing of the military chaplain and congratulations from their parents and relatives.



President of the Republic of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus at
the commissioning ceremony in the Military Academy of Lithuania
Museum of the Military Academy of Lithuania

In 1995 - 2006 commissioning ceremonies would take place in the Military Academy with the President of Lithuania and other honourable guests in attendance, later moving to Simonas Daukantas Square, situated in front of the Presidential Palace. Here, on 5 July 2007, President of the Republic of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus conferred the rank of lieutenant on the 14th Class of the Military Academy, which comprised 6 female and 51 male cadets.

SINCE THEN IT BECAME A TRADITION TO INVITE THE NEWLY SWORN OFFICERS INTO THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE AFTER THE CEREMONY TO RAISE THEIR GLASSES TOGETHER WITH THE PRESIDENT TO THE SUCCESSFUL SERVICE TO THE COUNTRY IN THE YEARS TO COME.



A new tradition of the commissioning ceremony was created in 2001.

THE MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE PRESENTED THE BEST-PERFORMING GRADUATE WITH A SABRE, WHICH IN 2007 WAS UPGRADED TO A SWORD.

In 2003, cadets from the 10th class were the first to receive **special rings of the Military Academy Class**. This has become yet another lovely tradition of the Academy commissioning ceremony.

The idea to present the rings to the Military Academy graduates stemmed from having familiarized with the traditions of military schools in the United States. Designers at a jewellery workshop designed the first Lithuanian rings of this kind. From 2011 onward, all rings were made out of silver alloy. In 2014, the Class Ring design and description was formalised.



In 2012, after receiving their bachelor's diplomas and platoon commander certificates, the 19th Class of the Military Academy planted an oak tree in its yard.

SINCE THEN, EVERY GRADUATING CLASS
OF THE ACADEMY WOULD PLANT AN OAK
TREE OF ITS OWN.



Graduates are planting an oak tree to symbolize
the years of study at the Academy
Museum of the Military Academy of Lithuania

The commissioning ceremony at the Military Academy is a wonderful celebration not only for the graduating officers themselves but also for our country's society at large. It welcomes President of Lithuania, heads of the Parliament and the Government, Minister of National Defence, chief of defence, archbishop of Vilnius, staff of the Ministry of National Defence, chiefs of the Armed Forces, commanders of military units, foreign military attachés accredited in Lithuania, rectors of higher education institutions, representatives from non-governmental organisations, and graduates' parents, relatives, and friends.

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