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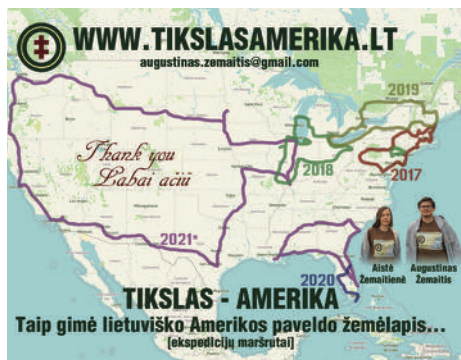
April 2022

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Back Cover: Lithuanian and Ukrainian flags together symbolize our strong support for Ukraine in its fight against Russia.

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from the editor

Dear Reader,

The beautiful month of April is here. This year, we celebrate Easter on April 16th. We rejoice, looking forward to rebirth and renewal with hope. And yet, this year, it is hard to be joyful. Our hearts are heavy with sadness and grief as we watch the innocent civilians – women, children, and men – being killed and tortured in Ukraine.

I know that many ask how is this possible in the 21st century? How is this possible with the entire world watching these atrocities and not being able to stop them? Why some are so insensitive? Why are there people saying that this is not about us; this is just about Russia and Ukraine?

Well, it is not just about them. Ukraine is a shield for Europe right now. It is sad to notice that not everyone in Europe understands it. Ukraine is spilling her blood not only for her own sovereignty but also for the rest of Europe, especially East Europe.

It is not accidental that Lithuanians think about the war in Ukraine a lot and try to do everything they can to stop this war and help Ukrainians. We, the Lithuanians, still remember very well what Russian rule means. We know from the stories our parents and grandparents told us and from the books we have read about the killings, the deportations, and the refugees. We do know first-hand what the Russian “soul” is and how “soulless” it can be.

Therefore, we stand with Ukraine, and we help in whatever way, big or small, we can. I invite everyone who wants to help to do so. There are plenty of organizations that take in the support for Ukraine in its many forms. You can contact your local Ukrainian organizations and support their initiatives. You can contact the Lithuanian American Community and support its initiatives. If you feel comfortable donating abroad, you can donate to www.blue-yellow.lt.

We all live in a time of war now. It does not matter that the bombs are not exploding in our back yards. They are exploding in our neighbors’ back yards, and we hurt too. We all have a responsibility to do whatever we can to stop the Russian aggression. It can be just as small a thing as not buying any Russian goods or as big a thing as going to fight for freedom.

With hopes for a brighter future,

Karilė Vaitkutė
Editor

Memoirs of an Ordinary Lithuanian, Jonas Venckus

Translated from handwritten notes by Roland Giedraitis



Seirijai today

Part 5

Preface: During the German occupation, life went on relatively normally. People were mostly left alone. But the war was not going well for the Germans. Jonas had to make plans to evacuate his family Westward, which he did.

Seirijai

Area-wise, Seirijai was larger than Simnas county, which it bordered. There were about 11,000 inhabitants. Three catholic churches with six priests. The Rev. K. Reitelaitis was especially talented. Besides being a priest, he was also an architect, chief builder, and physician. The pastor in Seirijai was Rev. Burokas. The viršaitis, or chief of this rural district, was Antanas Maskoliūnas. He was a volunteer soldier in the fight for independence and my cellmate in the Marijampolė prison. The head dairyman was Balys Baranauskas, who collected, refined, and distributed milk products. There were also more than ten schools, a post office, a physician, a veterinarian, a pharmacist, a midwife, a notary, general stores, and restaurants. There were no Jews.



A Lithuanian soldier in General Povilas Plechavičius army was willing to fight for Lithuania but not for Germany

During the German occupation, we especially had to cooperate with the viršaitis, or chief of the district. His office determined the requisitions. The police were called

to acquire products from reluctant citizens. The chief of the requisition commission was a German repatriate by the name of Ezingis, who was a decent and understanding man.

And so, in Seirijai during the German occupation, the civil administration was, as the Pastor Burokas named us, “the three tank drivers” or the three who were in charge: me, viršaitis, or district chief, and Ezingis. The three of us managed quite smoothly during the entire occupation. Not a single farmer suffered for not giving his share since we managed to resolve all difficulties locally. We did not want to hurt or exhaust the people. The local German headquarters were in Alytus. We tried very hard to have friendly relations, and when any of them would visit Seirijai, we welcomed them with a feast. The Germans were appreciative. During the entire time, we had no contact with the Gestapo.

In Alytus, the police chief was Juškauskas. He was a son of a farmer and understood agricultural matters very well. I think that the police chief’s secretary, with the knowledge of the chief, was the underground press distributor. Thus every month, when we traveled to get our monthly payments, we would also pick up the underground literature, which I, in turn, would relegate to trusted people for distribution.

On the matter of conscription to the army, an order would go out that on a certain day, a commission would arrive, and all men of a certain age would have to register. So all the invalids and misfits would show up because they knew they would not be drafted for army service. But the police were not ordered to hunt down men and lead them to the commission. In the evening, we would organize a feast for the commission, which officially would scold us that we did not properly inform the potential candidates.

In the Seirijai region, we had three big lakes: Dusia, Metelys, Obelija, and numerous small lakes. Whitefish were especially abundant in Lake Dusia, where we would catch and smoke them. We were always friendly with the pastor and the monsignor, who were hospitable and enjoyed visiting others. Same with the dairyman Baranauskas, the viršaitis or chief of the district, and the farmers who frequently would invite us to lavish dinners.

The farmers had enough food and even managed to sell bacon, butter, and cheeses on the black market. The locals

were well provided. Spirits or moonshine were also available. We did not bother with such matters since the whole country felt the weight of the occupation.

When Plechavičius announced that he was organizing a self-defense force (1), many young men from Seirijai traveled to Marijampolė to join. The Seirijai area was quite peaceful from communist bandits and desantininkai (2). But nearby, over the Nemunas River, in the Merkinė district, communist guerrillas raged. Thus the police authorities organized a strike force to crush the guerrillas. The force commander was the assistant police chief. We spent about a week maneuvering in the area. We determined that within a certain village, there indeed were bandits. Our leader divided us into two groups. I was the leader of one group, with orders to occupy an area near a long lake. Meanwhile, the other group would rouse the farmers and make noise so that the bandits would run through the lake into the forest. It was spring, but the ice was still strong. At dawn, we heard the barking of dogs, shouts, and some shooting but nothing moved. After a while, we got a signal to gather together, so we traveled from our lake post through a farmer’s yard to our meeting spot. When we were within about a hundred meters of the yard, a farmer burst out from his house while putting on his fur coat and hurried to meet us. When he came to



The German-Soviet front in the fall of 1944



German-dominated Europe in 1942



Germany at the height of its power in Europe

me, he asked not to enter the room since his wife was in a delicate pregnancy condition and not to frighten her. So while we talked to him, we passed his house through his yard on our way to our meeting spot. Later we found out that in this farmer's house, special forces (desantininkai) were sleeping. Of course, they were well-armed, and we would have been easy targets for them. Apparently, they did not want any trouble and let us pass. It happened in the early spring of 1944. The German front was cracking in many areas, so Germans were retreating towards Lithuania.

this and sent a bicyclist to check. He returned saying there was nobody there. So we again packed our wagons and continued on a common road.

At night we stopped to rest. Then, we continued on the Vilkaviškis-Šakiai road. One farmer standing by his barn shouted: "Where are you traveling, Russians!" but we did not understand what he was saying. As soon as we were back on the road, a rider on a horse approached our wagon, took some hay, then rode on. The rider was young, no hat but with a rifle slung on his back; no saddle but with a Russian army uniform. I sat in the wagon,

After that event, I was summoned to Kaunas by the police department's chief V. Reivytiis. I suspected that they were getting ready to promote me, but after a discussion with my wife Bronelė, we decided we would like to stay where we are. On the appointed day, I presented myself to V. Reivytiis, whom I knew from my police academy days. At once, he asked me if I would like to be promoted. But I answered that I have a family with small children and would not want to be transferred anywhere, especially not to the Vilnius region. Then he asked where I would like to be assigned if NOT to the Vilnius region? I answered that I would like to stay where I was since I suspected that the Germans would not be able to resist much longer. But I was afraid to say that. Reivytiis told me I could stay in Seirijai.

The Russian front was getting closer. At night, Russian planes would bomb various cities. And so in the first days of July, the Alytus area and other police regions were ordered to burn documents and all archives and retreat towards Marijampolė.

We leave Lithuania

My family and the Baranauskas family left Lithuania on July 3, 1944. We were accompanied by other families, totaling six wagons and two foresters on bicycles. We arrived in Marijampolė and stopped at a repatriate's farmhouse. We had contacts with the Marijampolė police. One day, we were informed that the Marijampolė police had left. We could not believe

holding my machine pistol on my knees. So without saying a word to one another, we separated.

After we rode about 300 meters, an armored truck with Russian soldiers appeared. A while later, we heard some shots, then silence. The foresters disappeared, and we never saw them again. We suspected that they were shot. We hurriedly rode into the next forest. There we found German soldiers who were digging trenches. We hurried on to Kudirkos Naumiestis since we were told that we could enter East Prussia there.

Around noon we arrived in Kudirkos Naumiestis. In the square, we could see shot horses and empty wagons. The road was full of German soldiers. Civilians could not cross the bridge. Our authorities told us to retreat to Slavikai to avoid Russian planes. After a couple of kilometers, we stopped by a well-to-do farmer's woodland so that the horses and we could eat. Just as we started eating, a Russian scout plane buzzed by real low and after spotting us, he let loose a salvo at us with his machine gun. We sheltered under the wagon with our food. That plane did not return, so we hurried on to Slavikai.

We spent a few days in Slavikai. One evening, we were informed, that early next morning, we would be allowed to enter East Prussia. We conferred with the Baranauskas during the night about whether the whole family should go or that I should scout alone. Bronelė and the Baranauskas steadfastly refused to leave Lithuania.

In the morning, I said goodbye to my family and the Baranauskas. I harnessed my one-horse wagon and rode to the Slavikai Bridge. Near the bridge, there was a crush of German troops again, and I could not cross. Then the authorities ordered us to cross at the Šešupė Brasta, which was not too far from this bridge. So one wagon after another, we crossed the Šešupė River (3). In late summer, the river was not too deep, so when wading, the wagon was not submerged, but on the East Prussia side, the bank was very steep, and it was a difficult climb for the horse.

After the crossing, I found two roads. One went along the river and was used by refugees, while the other went left to a forest and was used by the army. Police and other refugees traveled all day toward Tilžė (4).

In the evening, the whole caravan of 50-100 wagons approached the Neman-Ragainė manor. We spent the night there. The police authorities called a meeting of leading people to ascertain information from various



Civilians and the German army in East Prussia, 1944

locales. I reported to the police inspector Kazys Vilkas (the one who admitted me to the police academy), who at once asked me where my family was. After I explained that they remained in Slavikai, he admonished me in a fatherly way, saying that he was getting serious news that families that remained were persecuted and even murdered. He anticipated that we would stay in this manor for a week or longer and advised me to go back and retrieve my family.

I immediately borrowed a bicycle from Juškevičius while I bestowed to him my horse and the wagon with a few items. I returned on the same road to Slavikai to collect my family.

Without saying much, I harnessed the horses and seated the children in the wagon. I said to Bronė: "If you want to



The Šešupė River, the boundary between Lithuania and East Prussia



German propaganda poster in Lithuania c 1943 urging Lithuanians to work for Germans

stay to become a Russian victim, you may stay. But I am taking the children.” I knew a mother would never part from her children. Of course, the Baranauskas also left with us.

When we came to the Slavikai Bridge, a young army lieutenant said: “Hitler is sending his best armored Grossdeutschland division. They will never let the Russians through. Why are you going to Germany with small children to famish? You will always have enough time to leave. You should take residence in these repatriates (5) houses and take care of those farms.” We agreed and voted to stay in Lithuania.

Not far from the bridge, we found an abandoned repatriate’s farm and settled there. We lived there for about six weeks like true farmers. Unfortunately, there were no animals. We bought a lamb from a neighbor and ate it. The army troops were massing, while Russian planes would shoot at the farms.

The German army authorities advised us to cross the Nemunas River into Žemaitija since it was quiet there. We packed our wagon with rye flour and other goodies and went to Žemaitija. On our way through the forest, on a

rough road, a wagon wheel broke. Balys Baranauskas and I brought the wheel to a blacksmith so he could repair it. At that moment, a Russian scout plane flew over, shooting at us and killing a horse tethered by the smithy. We laid down in the smithy to avoid bullets. The blacksmith fixed our wheel, and we happily continued our journey through the Jurbarkas Bridge, where we continued to Pajūris, where Baranauskas knew a dairyman.

We settled in a barn, but we could prepare our food in the kitchen. We listened to the dairyman’s radio where the Germans boasted that the front would be repulsed and all of Lithuania would be liberated since a Lithuanian army was being engaged. Apparently, there was some hope. As they say, a drowning man will grasp at a straw to save himself. But on October 5th we received sudden news that the Pajūris Bridge was being prepared to be blown up. I drove over to inquire what was happening. The bridge armorers told me that in the afternoon, at an uncertain hour, the bridge would be blown. I quickly returned and ordered my family to pack the wagon. I prepared the horses and in one hour, we were ready to cross the bridge to the Western side.

We took a route straight to Tilžė. In the evening, we were in Kartenai where we briefly rested and then continued towards Tilžė. In the morning, at about 9, we were at the Tilžė Bridge, ready to cross the Nemunas River. We found a mass of army troops and refugees. Here, there was no priority for the army. We squeezed in the best way we could. The bridge was full of travelers heading south. We successfully crossed the bridge and continued through Tilžė further south. After traveling another 20 or 30 kilometers, the horses and the children were exhausted. We decided to seek shelter with a local farmer.

Next: The Venckus family flees further West through East Prussia. The Germans confiscate their horses; the families are broken up since the men are sent to special camps.

1. *Former Lithuanian General Povilas Plechavičius received permission from German authorities to form a home guard. Some 19,500 Lithuanian men volunteered. The Germans wanted to use this force to fight the Soviets while the Lithuanians wanted it to defend their own land. Eventually, they were disbanded by the Germans for noncooperation.*
2. *Russian soldiers parachuted behind enemy lines*
3. *Šešupės Brasta, a fording area in the river where one can wade across*
4. *Tilžė is now called Sovetsk*
5. *Lithuanians who returned from Germany*

LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN HERITAGE MAP IS COMPLETED



The 5-year long mapping mission came to an end. The Destination Lithuanian America map of Lithuanian-American heritage now covers the entire USA and is accessible to everyone for free at <http://map.truelithuania.com>.

The final major expansion of the map was completed in January 2022. Some 100 new Lithuanian heritage sites were added, increasing the total number to 750. The map covers Lithuanian-American churches, cemeteries, club buildings, monuments, museums, famous burials, and more.

Every single one of these additional sites was visited in person by the author of the map Augustinas Žemaitis, who took images and recorded the stories. Most of the information is available on the map's sister website <http://global.truelithuania.com>, as well as the True Lithuania Youtube channel and the True Lithuania Facebook page.

Here are some highlights of what is included in the Destination Lithuanian America map.

LITHUANIAN HERITAGE IN THE PENNSYLVANIA COAL REGION

In the Pennsylvania Coal Region alone, as many as 105 Lithuanian heritage sites were added to the map.

This was the first area where Lithuanians settled in huge numbers, starting in 1869 and numbering over 100 000 at the turn of the century. In this area, there are more than 40 Lithuanian churches, with a density of a Lithuanian church every 10 miles in some places, with one in almost every town.

Many of the Lithuanian parishes had their cemeteries, and there are non-religious Lithuanian cemeteries as well. Shenandoah, the "capital" of Lithuanian heritage in the area, has six Lithuanian cemeteries. To this day, Shenandoah has some 12% of its population considering themselves Lithuanians, and the Schuylkill county--some 5%, making it the most Lithuanian county of the USA. All of the region's Lithuanian churches (including the closed and/or demolished ones) and cemeteries are marked on

the Destination Lithuanian America map, while their stories and images are available at global.truelithuania.com.

Other sites, such as Lithuanian club buildings (six of them are still in operation) and Lithuanian school buildings have also been painstakingly researched and mapped. Shenandoah, once known as Vilnius of America, is important in the history of Lithuania as well. Here the world's first Lithuanian-language novel was published in 1904, at the time when Lithuanian press was banned in Lithuania itself. The location is included in the Destination Lithuanian America map.

While the Pennsylvania Coal Region was the most Lithuanian area of the east coast, Lithuanian churches, cemeteries, and parish schools have emerged all over the New England and Mid-Atlantic area and beyond (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Merrimack Valley, Massachusetts and New Hampshire; New York City area, New York and New Jersey; Boston area, Massachusetts; towns in Connecticut, southern Illinois, etc.). These places have also been thoroughly mapped. For descendants of Lithuanian-Americans whose forefathers once lived in these so-called "Lithuanian colonies," the map offers a good opportunity to easily discover the places where they practiced their religion, participated in Lithuanian activities, and were buried.

BUILDINGS OF THE MODERN LITHUANIAN ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

The map includes the world's best buildings and monuments of the Modern Lithuanian architectural style that has been invented by Lithuanian-American architects in the 1950s-1960s.

At the time, Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union. Ethnic architecture in Lithuania was replaced by a drab Soviet style, and most Lithuanian architects who were working in the pre-World War Two independent Lithuania were either killed, exiled, or fled the country. Lithuanians who successfully fled to the United States aimed to create "pieces of Lithuania" in the form of Lithuanian churches, monuments, and club buildings.

For them, merely Lithuanian activities were not enough. They sought that those activities would take place inside the truly ethnic architecture. Lithuanian-American architects answered the call by reinterpreting traditional Lithuanian folk crafts on a monumental scale, using modern materials (e.g. building concrete church towers in the form of Lithuanian wooden chapel-posts), as well as using Lithuanian symbols. Such ethnic modern architecture was unheard of even in the USA where the "international style" prevailed at the time. And thus, the "Modern Lithuanian" style attracted American attention and prizes for its architects.

Indeed, this style is an important part of both, the Lithuanian architectural history and a testament to the acceptance of Lithuanian immigrants by the United States, allowing them to continue cherishing their culture. Every building of the Modern Lithuanian style is included in the Destination Lithuanian America, ranging from Chicago's Nativity BVM church and the Lithuanian Youth Center to the Lithuanian churches in East St. Louis, Illinois, and Queens, New York to a massive memorial dedicated to those who perished for Lithuania in Kennebunk, Maine.

FAMOUS LITHUANIAN BURIALS

The Destination Lithuanian America map includes 44 graves of famous Lithuanian historical figures who are buried in the USA and Canada. Most of them fled the Soviet Genocide in 1944. As Soviets generally targeted intellectuals, it was the "cream of the society" who emigrated. Many of them were important politicians and artists who continued to create in America. The names of some of them are known to nearly every Lithuanian, yet their graves are somewhat forgotten due to them being so far away from Lithuania. Now, every one of them had their locations marked on the Destination Lithuanian America map, in addition to the luminaries of earlier Lithuanian waves of immigration. Among those whose burial sites are marked are Povilas Plechavičius, a general who thwarted the Nazi plans to create a Lithuanian SS legion, and Antanas Škėma, a writer whose existentialist semi-autobiographical novel *White Shroud* about an underemployed Lithuanian-American refugee in NYC is considered the most important Lithuanian literary work of the 20th century.

Among the other mapped burial sites are "father of Lithuanian basketball" Pranas Lubinas (Frank Lubin), poet Henrikas Radauskas, world boxing champion Jack Sharkey (Juozapas Žukauskas), tennis player Vitas Gerulaitis, Hollywood star Charles Bronson (Karolis Bučinskis), and world-famous Archbishop Paul Marcinkus.

Also included is the grave of a non-Lithuanian American Samuel J. Harris, who is known to be the only American soldier who died for Lithuania. He was shot by communists while lecturing for the young Lithuanian armed forces in Kaunas in 1920. Harris is buried in Arlington, Virginia, where Lithuanians built a memorial for him with a Vytis bas-relief.

LITHUANIAN MONUMENTS IN THE USA

The Destination Lithuanian America map includes 179 memorials and commemorative plaques, ranging from monuments to those who died for Lithuania's freedom to statues of particularly famous Lithuanians and Lithua-

nian-Americans to plaques describing the history of local Lithuanian communities. Their locations span the territory from Yorktown, Texas, the oldest known Lithuanian community dating to the 1850s, to Springfield, Illinois, and Shenandoah, Pennsylvania.

For much of the 20th century, Lithuanian monuments could not have been erected in Lithuania as it was occupied. Lithuanian-Americans compensated by erecting them in the US, especially the ones dedicated to Lithuanians who fell for their country. For example, the world's first monument to Romas Kalanta, a young man who self-immolated expressing his opposition to the Soviet regime, is located in Chicago, Illinois.

America became a treasure trove of Lithuanian ethnic artwork, such as UNESCO-World-Heritage-inscribed large Lithuanian wooden crosses that incorporate pagan sun symbolism. These large crosses or similar ethnic monuments are also mapped in the Destination Lithuanian America map, including Hills of Crosses in Lemont, Illinois, Camp Dainava, Michigan, and Mississauga, Ontario, which were inspired by the original Hill of Crosses near Šiauliai.

LITHUANIAN HERITAGE SITES IN CHICAGOLAND

Chicagoland is the largest treasure trove of Lithuanian heritage sites in America, with as many as 111 of them added to the map.

Chicago is known as the “capital of Lithuanian diaspora”. Before World War One, there were more Lithuanians in Chicago than in any city of the then still rural Lithuania itself. Until the 1980s, Lithuanian mass was celebrated in more churches in Chicago than in any city of Lithuania itself. Lithuanian churches in Chicago – and all over the United States – were, and many of them still are, hubs of the secular Lithuanian culture as well, providing space for Lithuanian organizations, dance groups, etc.

Chicago’s Lithuanian churches (one



Smith Creek Cemetery sign in Texas

of them demolished by now) were added to the Destination Lithuanian America map. Along with the churches, massive parish schools, Lithuanian clubs, two Lithuanian cemeteries with Lithuanian monuments, famous burial sites, and ethnic gravestones were also mapped.

The map authors spent several weeks in Chicago in order to visit, photograph, and research every site.



At the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture in Chicago, with Stanley Balzekas, III



Dick Butkus statue in Champaign, Illinois



During Lithuanian Days in Los Angeles, California

The Destination Lithuanian America includes 54 localities named after Lithuania or Lithuanians, including entire districts of Lithuanian streets in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and Nashua, New Hampshire, and lakes Dainava and Kasulaitis in Quebec and Pennsylvania respectively.

The Destination Lithuanian America creators sought to uncover the stories behind the naming of these sites. That information can also be found on global.truelithuania.com.

LITHUANIAN CONVENTS, MONASTERIES, AND CAMPS

Lithuanian convents and monasteries have also been mapped. They provided a voluntary workforce for Lithuanian parishes, parish schools, and more. In return, Lithuanian donors transformed them into treasure troves of Lithuanian art in America, turning some of them into Lithuanian parks (e.g. in Kennebunk, Maine).

Other Lithuanian “parks” have been built after World War Two in the form of Lithuanian camps for children so they could spend summers among other Lithuanian kids, speaking the language and learning the culture. As the Destination Lithuanian America map shows, these have been placed strategically all over America, mirroring the Lithuanian settlement patterns. They range from Rambynas near Los Angeles, California to Dainava, Pilėnai, and Rakas in Michigan (between Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit), to Neringa in New England and Romuva and Kretinga in Ontario, Canada.

In order to provide a Lithuanian atmosphere, the camps have a variety of Lithuanian sculptures, crosses, and other artwork. They all are individually included in the Destination Lithuanian America map.

LITHUANIAN MUSEUMS IN AMERICA

The Destination Lithuanian America map includes eleven Lithuanian museums in the USA, each of them a great introduction to the Lithuanian ethnic traditions, crafts, and history.

The map also includes the unique historic sites built to embody Lithuania itself, such as the Lithuanian Cultural Garden in Cleveland, built before World War and full of sculptures of Lithuanian heroes, the Lithuanian Auditorium at Pittsburgh University, gifted circa 1940 by the then independent Lithuania, and the Lithuanian Our Lady of Šiluva Chapel and the National Shrine of Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC.

In these places, the artwork is meant to represent Lithuania and its history. Their artistic quality and the fact that they are surrounded by similar sites artistically represent-

ing America's other minorities make them popular among non-Lithuanian American tourists.

PLACES RELATED TO LITHUANIAN MINORITIES

The Destination Lithuanian America has a list of criteria that renders a site inclusion. These criteria consider a visible relation to Lithuania but not necessarily ethnic Lithuanians. As such, important places visibly related to the former Lithuanian minorities are also included in the map.

Among them is a monument to King Jogaila in New York Central Park built by Polish Americans, two settlements named Wilno (after Vilnius) established by Polish Americans, a Jewish Telshe Yeshiva relocated from Telšiai, Lithuania to Cleveland, Ohio, two synagogues named Vilna (after Vilnius), arguably the oldest mosque in the US built by Lithuanian Tatars in New York City, and the Litvak areas in the Waldheim Jewish Cemetery in Chicago.

While most of the 160 mapped Lithuanian and Lithuanian-related churches and chapels are Roman Catholic, Lutheran Lithuanians, and National Catholic Lithuanians have their church buildings as well. After all, before World War Two and the Soviet Genocide, some 10% of Lithuanians were Lutherans.

The Lithuanian National Catholic church had been established in the United States as a reaction to the internationalizing influence of non-Lithuanian bishops of the Roman Catholic Church. Its main parish still exists in Scranton, Pennsylvania. It is yet another unique Lithuanian-American story, a counterpart to which does not exist in Lithuania itself.

REMOTE LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN DESTINATIONS

While most of the North American Lithuanian heritage is concentrated in the New England/Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, and Ontario/Quebec areas, covered respectively by 2017, 2018, and 2019 expeditions of the Destination Lithuanian America, there are some 50 remote Lithuanian heritage sites in North America.

These have been covered by the final expedition of 2021, when the creators of the map drove 9000 miles, from Los Angeles to Chicago, through the Southwest, and back through the Northwest, passing through sixteen states.

Among the remote Lithuanian sites are those related to the unique Lithuanian community of Choctaw Nation, Oklahoma, West Coast's sole Lithuanian cemetery near Roslyn, Washington, Our Lady of Šiluva statue built by a Lithuanian missionary priest in a desert in New Mexico, and a street named after Motiejus Valančius near Sedona, Arizona.



Valancius Way street sign in Sedona, Arizona



Valancius Way street sign in Sedona, Arizona



Buzidragis Middle School in Hartshorne, Oklahoma, was named after Joe Buzidragis, who served as the school's principal for 25 years.

There are entire clusters of Lithuanian heritage located quite far from the rest, including Los Angeles, California, Omaha, Nebraska, Kansas City, Kansas, Montreal, Quebec, and Florida. Each of them has numerous Lithuanian heritage sites; 28 have been mapped in the Los Angeles area alone.

IMPROVEMENTS AND DESTRUCTIONS OF LITHUANIAN HERITAGE SITES

In the Destination Lithuanian America map, the Lithuanian heritage sites are grouped according to category (church, monument, cemetery, etc.). They are also graded by importance, ranging from the top-level ones that include sites that could be of interest not only for those of Lithuanian heritage to the lowest-level of sites that were historically Lithuanian but where today nothing visibly Lithuanian remains. It is easy to choose which sites to see, and so, tourists interested only in the highlights may choose to see only those, while somebody who lives in the area and wants to learn about all the Lithuanian-related sites in that particular location may choose to see everything.

Unfortunately, some of the mapped sites had to be “downgraded”. Among such is the Lithuanian church in Du Bois, Pennsylvania that has been closed and sold after it had been included in the map in 2017 and a plaque for Alexander Kuršius, the founder of the first Latin language school in New York City, which has been removed.

However, the author of the map, Augustinas Žemaitis,

was most delighted to find out that some of the Lithuanian heritage sites were actually improved since they were first mapped. “It is great that our expeditions played a part here as well. In West Frankfort, for example, local Lithuanians said that our attention inspired them to erect a Lithuanian flag in the West Frankfort Lithuanian cemetery, as well as a new sign. Even better things happened to the Lithuanian cemetery in Ledford, Illinois. During the 2018 expedition, we found it as America’s most derelict Lithuanian cemetery, completely overgrown by forest. After we shared information about the cemetery, Vilius Žalpyis of Oregon kickstarted a project to clean it up in 2021. As a result, this year, we have photographed an entirely differently-looking cemetery,” Žemaitis said. Also, compared to the 2018 trip to Illinois, the Lithuanian church in East St. Louis had its tower rebuilt. Numerous new Lithuanian monuments have been built in Illinois, their dedications ranging from the Lithuanian football star Dick Butkus to Lithuanian anti-Soviet partisan leader Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas.

“It is most important to know and safeguard the Lithuanian American heritage sites as they are feats of Lithuanian as well as American art and history. I hope the map will spread the word and help with that, especially since some of these sites are not well known neither in Lithuania nor in the Lithuanian diaspora”, Augustinas said.

FURTHER EXPANSION OF THE MAP

While the Destination Lithuanian America map now undoubtedly covers nearly every Lithuanian-American site, the creator of the map Augustinas Žemaitis believes there are still some more elusive sites that have been nearly forgotten. “There have been sites that took years for me to discover and research before I managed to get any tangible data or explanations of their history. There are probably some that we have not found yet, known only to a few elderly people of some once-Lithuanian area,” Žemaitis said.

Please review the map and see if you know of any Lithuanian heritage sites that have not been mapped yet. If you do, please contact Augustinas Žemaitis at augustinas.zemaitis@gmail.com to help make the map even more complete. The map and the encyclopedia are online (rather than a book), which makes them easily expandable and editable.

P.S. While the map includes only the Lithuanian heritage sites in North America, the world Lithuanian heritage is covered in <http://global.truelithuania.com>, including Latin America and Australia. The project’s authors are the same.

Steel Wolf

We Sing About Krupnikas & Kugelis!



Krupnikas (honey liquor), kugelis (potato casserole), and koldūnai (dumplings) are not what Lithuanian rock bands often sing about. However, in the United States, there is a band that croons "Oh, Grandma, where's that kugelis?" They are Steel Wolf, a rock band that has existed in New York for forty years and was founded by Lithuanian-Americans.

Steel Wolf mostly sings in English, but their albums are full of Lithuanian themes and words. Even the band's name was inspired by the Lithuanian legend of the iron wolf. According to Mark Adomaitis, one of the founders of the group and the main vocalist (who agreed to give an interview to this article), songs about krupnikas and kugelis introduce Americans to Lithuania and give the band an individuality that helps them stand out a little in the humongous world of music.

We talked to Adomaitis via Zoom. During the interview, he revealed that this is the first time in the forty years

of the group's existence that he has given a live interview to a journalist from Lithuania. We spoke in English, but, as in his music, the interviewee often inserted Lithuanian words during the conversation.

Mark Adomaitis was born in 1967 in New York. His parents met in America, but they are both Lithuanian. His grandparents came to the United States after World War II, fleeing Soviet occupation like many Lithuanians of that generation.

"My father was born in Šiauliai. He emigrated to America when he was about ten years old because his father was a judge, and they fled the Russians, first to Germany and then here. My mother was born here in the States, but she is also Lithuanian. Her mother grew up in the Lithuanian countryside."

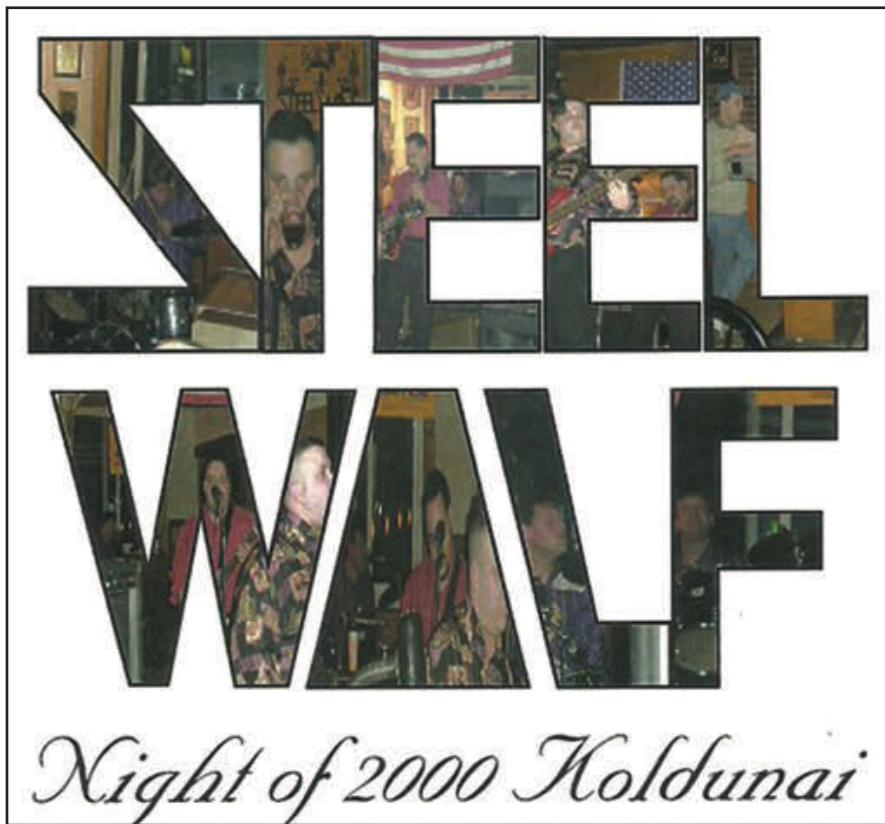
Growing up, Mark was educated in the Lithuanian spirit. He was surrounded by the Lithuanian community, and from childhood, he participated in Lithuanian scout camps and dance festivals. Lithuanian holidays were celebrated in his house. Lithu-

anian dishes were eaten.

In 1982, the members of Steel Wolf were teenagers. Initially, Steel Wolf simply played covers of classic rock songs at school events or friends' birthdays. But later, songs of their own creation appeared.

"Many of my closest friends are Lithuanians. Therefore, when we formed a group, it seemed natural for us to showcase our Lithuanian roots. We wanted as many Americans as possible to be introduced to Lithuania because a lot of Americans do not know anything about our beautiful heritage."

Although there have been a couple of breaks in the band's history, Steel Wolf has stayed the course, playing shows and composing new songs. The members of Steel Wolf have changed, but Adomaitis has remained the leader of the group and the lyricist all those years. Guitarist Ed Kezys was also a member of the band throughout this time. In total, the band has recorded ten stu-



dio albums and several live albums. The band's latest album is this year's acoustic album *Funplugged*. Bands like KISS, The Who, Black Sabbath, Van Halen, and Metallica are named as the bands that he likes and probably influenced him most.

"These groups have helped me become the artist I am."

According to Adomaitis, each time a new album is recorded, the band includes at least one song with a Lithuanian theme. For instance, some titles include: "Sunday Morning - Where's the Krupnikas?", "Night of 1000 Koldūnai", "Skambutis!" (The Bell), "Naktipiečiai"(Night Snack), and "Midnight Train to Siauliai" - in honor of Mark's father's birthplace.

"Thanks to me, my American friends know quite a lot about Lithuania. I sing a lot about my Lithuanian roots, and so they, in turn, know what krupnikas, kugelis, and koldūnai are. They would not know these things if not for Steel Wolf."

Also, according to the Steel Wolf leader, the lyrics are born out of everyday life.

"For example, take our song about krupnikas. Ed Kezys, had been participating in a weekend camp of the Lithuanian community, called "Giraitė". I wasn't there, but he talked about how they celebrated and drank a lot. And, as Ed told me, one of our friends woke up on Sunday morning, and his first words were, "Where's the krupnikas?" When I heard this story, I thought - there is a song in there somewhere! But there is another version of this same song called "Kur Tas Kugelis?" which has become our most popular song. We were readying ourselves to perform at a Lithuanian scout camp and realized singing the praises of krupnikas to young children was not really a good idea. Therefore, we rewrote the lyrics of the song, changing the krupnikas to kugelis and the whole camp liked it very much. In the song, we sing "Don't forget the onions / Don't for-

get the sour cream / Don't forget my plate / Don't forget to call me / Oh, Grandma, where's that kugelis? / Oh, Grandma, where's that kugelis now." Videos of us performing this song in Lithuanian camps can be found on Youtube. I don't know if Lithuanians from Lithuania would like Steel Wolf songs the way Lithuanian-Americans in the States do."

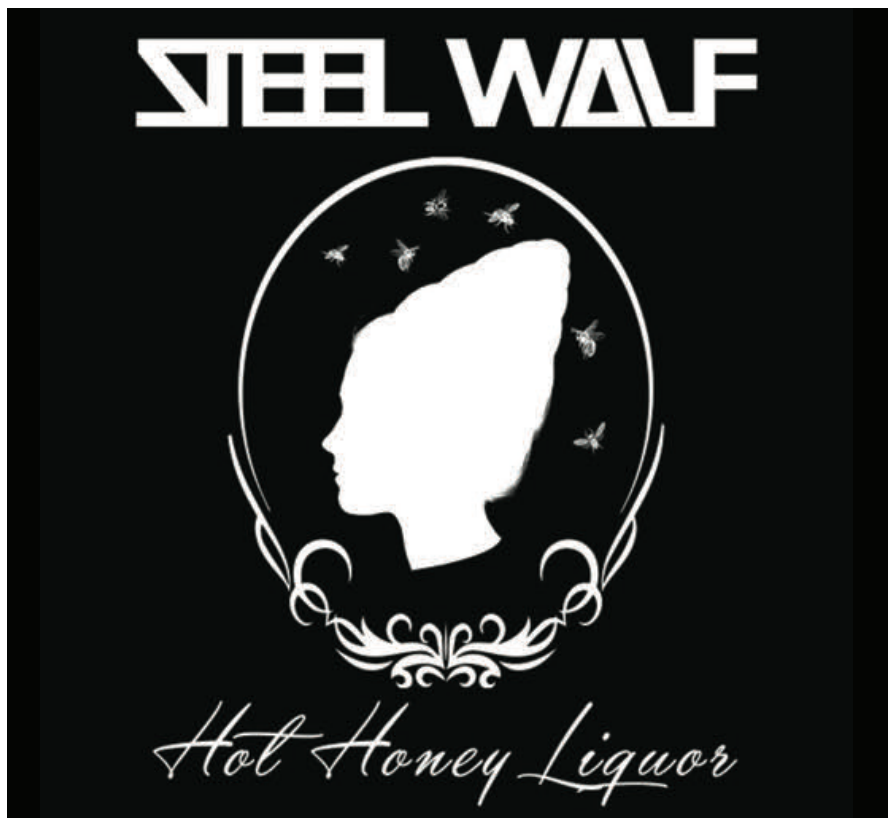
He believes that Lithuanians in Lithuania may believe that Steel Wolf's songs about krupnikas or kugelis are meant to be satirical. However, Adomaitis emphasizes that this is not really the case - it's just that Lithuanians in America may see things differently than Lithuanians in Lithuania.

"I create songs for the Lithuanian-American audience since that is what I am. We look at Lithuania from an American point of view. We are, first of all, Americans because we live here, but we do care greatly about our heritage. Our families have instilled a love of Lithuania in us by sending us to Lithuanian camps and the like. It is important for us to raise the Lithuanian flag, both literally and figuratively, to show the rest of the world where it was we came from."

When asked what songs, in his opinion, could be the most interesting for listeners from Lithuania, Adomaitis ponders.

"It would be interesting to know what Lithuanians think about our songs like "Naktipiečiai", "Sunday Morning (Where's the Krupnikas?)", "Skambutis!" or "Kaziuko Mugė"(Little Casimir's Fair)".

Adomaitis loves kugelis and eats it whenever available. His wife is Colombian, so she is not used to cooking Lithuanian dishes. Kezys' brothers (former Steel Wolf members) have a restaurant in Queens, New York where kugelis and koldūnai are available. In addition, Lithuanian dishes are also produced by Adomaitis' parents, so he can get Lithuanian dishes fairly regularly. He also





has the opportunity to enjoy Lithuanian food in Lithuanian camps, which take place every year.

"When I was little, my parents took me to a Lithuanian camp in Vermont, called Neringa. And now my kids go there."

According to him, the Lithuanian community in the northeastern United States, where he lives, remains active, although most of its members were born in America and a few don't even speak fluent Lithuanian.

"There is a big community here. We are active and keep in touch through Facebook and community meetings."

"Biški" (A little.) - the leader of Steel Wolf answers the question of whether he speaks Lithuanian himself.

"I would say that I understand Lithuanian better than I speak it."

By the way, by profession, he is an English teacher. Playing in Steel Wolf is a hobby. However, according to Adomaitis, it is often through music that he establishes a connection with students. The leader of Steel Wolf visited Lithuania once during the 1990s, after the country regained its independence. However, his son and daughter visited the birthplace of their ancestors a few years ago, and now he plans to return himself.

"My wife often tells me that our youngest son must see Lithuania. We plan to go next year. I am really looking

forward to being able to visit Lithuania again."

However, Adomaitis admits that not all persons of Lithuanian origin in the States are interested in their origin and ancestral country.

"There are many people of Lithuanian origin who are not interested in the culture. Even though being of Lithuanian descent, they know nothing about Lithuania. But I personally am very happy to be a part of the Lithuanian community. And that I can talk about it through music."

Although Steel Wolf sometimes plays on Lithuanian holidays, many of the band's concerts are not for Lithuanian audiences necessarily.

"When the band plays for Americans, we always present ourselves as a Lithuanian-American band. Then the listeners know that the members of this crazy group are of Lithuanian origin. Even if they think that we came from Lithuania ourselves, that's okay- the most important thing is that they know that being Lithuanian is important to us. You could say it's our promotional gimmick. If our

fellow Americans leave our concerts knowing that they were listening to a Lithuanian band, we are content."

On November 7th, Steel Wolf performed in Brooklyn during the New York City Marathon. The group is invited to this event every year, during which they fly the Lithuanian flag.

"A lot of people are running in the marathon. As some of them pass by, see the flag, smile and raise their thumbs, they seem to recognize the flag. It's very cool."

When asked if he would ever like to hold a Steel Wolf concert in Lithuania, Adomaitis answers without a doubt.

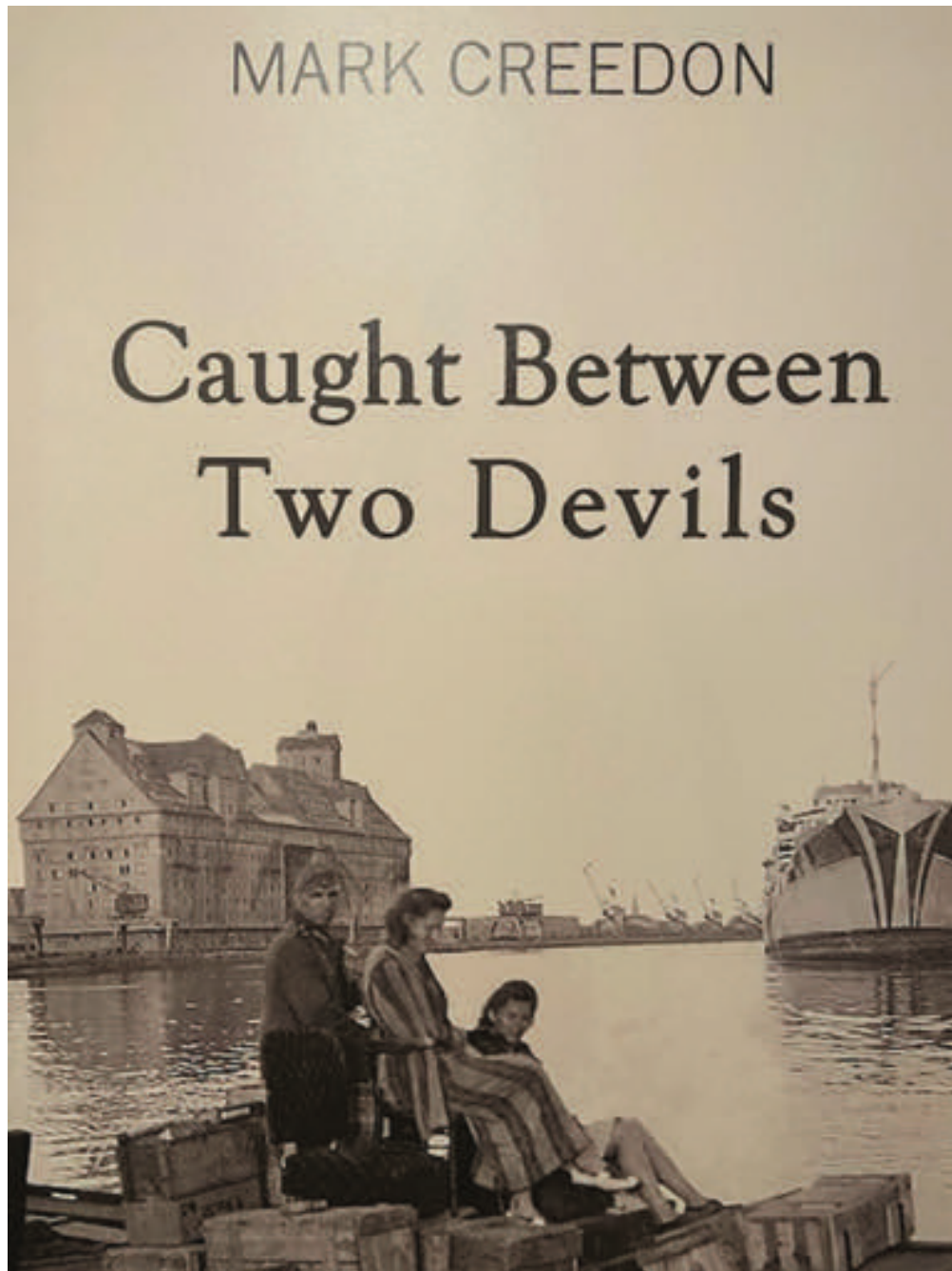
"I would very much like the opportunity to arise. We could play as a group or as a duo, acoustically, which had to do more than once during a pandemic. If any concert organizer reads this, it would be wonderful."

The article was originally written in Lithuanian by Ugnius Antanavičius

Learn more about Steel Wolf at steelwolfband.com
Listen to Steel Wolf's music (pictured) on Spotify

"Caught Between Two Devils"

By Mark Creedon



In the photo, from right to left: Maria Paskevicius, Jadwyga Paskevicius, and their Wehrmacht guard on the barge that took them from Kaunas to Elbing. The shot was taken by Antanas Paskevicius, while they took on supplies at Kaliningrad. Why the German guard allowed Antanas to take the picture is beyond belief.

This is an inspirational novel based upon the real-life experiences of Antanas Paskevicius, his Polish wife Jadwyga, and his sister Maria. Antanas met Jadwyga when her family visited his family in Kaunas, Lithuania in 1938. He fell in love with her at first sight and proposed within months of their first meeting. She was only eighteen, and though she was attracted to him, she held off saying yes until a year later. Their wedding plans were thwarted by the joint invasion of Poland by the German and the Soviet armies. When Hitler later attacked his ally, Stalin, wedding services were further banned. Antanas was determined to marry Jadwyga, and they did so in January 1942 in a secret ceremony. He almost did not make it to his own wedding when a blizzard threw his car into a ditch beside the highway to Vilnius. With help from strangers, he made it to the church before the SS patrol did.

In April of 1944, life became even more challenging when Jadwyga, Antanas, and his sister Maria were ejected from Kaunas and sent to a work camp in Elbing, Germany. There they toiled for ten months. They made friends with fellow workers, some German civilians, and even some Wehrmacht soldiers

book review

who also hated the Nazis. Maria fell in love with just such a man, Private Peter Baur. They also faced dangerous enemies such as the camp commander, Major Braunschiedel, and Jadwyga's boss, Corporal Schmidt. There was nowhere to run to until the winter of 1945 because the Nazis controlled all the land surrounding their camp for thousands of kilometers.

Despite the risk of betrayal, torture, and death, they stole a Wehrmacht truck and diesel fuel in February 1945 and, along with seven other prisoners, two German women, and their children, fled from their camp and headed for Bavaria. Their journey was fraught with hunger, cold, and fear of SS patrols but with courage, faith, and teamwork, they made it. In late April 1945, they were liberated by the US Army. Still, their trials were not over, and they remained in US Army Red Cross camps for another four years until they could emigrate to Canada.

The struggles of Antanas, Jadwyga, and Maria are not unique; there were six million foreign prisoners compelled to work for the Third Reich. They faced the two greatest tyrants of the twentieth century and prevailed because of love, faith, loyalty, and courage.

This book and its forty positive reviews can be found on [Amazon.ca books](https://www.amazon.ca/books).

Chapter 2 Exodus Part 1

The Red Army was pressing forward hard on the Eastern front. German defenses were still formidable, but German forces were losing ground and their strength was diminishing. The Red Army outnumbered the Wehrmacht by a ratio of 5 to 1 in terms of soldiers and 6 to 1 in terms of tanks.

Old Town, Elbing, February 3 and 4, 1945

After his conversation with Peter, Antanas returned late to the flat in the Old Town of Elbing that he shared with his wife and his sister. He recalled the risk that he, Jadwyga, and Maria had taken when they moved from the barracks at the work camp into a flat rented out by a woman named Frau Brewer. That had been three long years ago. It was now time to say goodbye to this phase of their lives.

When Jadwyga heard her husband's footsteps on the stairs, she raced to the door. "I thought you'd been arrested by the Wehrmacht—or worse, the Gestapo!" she exclaimed, as the fear drained from her face.

Maria rushed towards her brother. "Did you speak to

Peter? Can he do something to help get us out in time?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes," Antanas responded as he stepped inside the common room they shared. "He's willing to risk his life for us. I'll meet him at 9 p.m. tomorrow night in the yard at the garage. I'll pick up the truck. Then I'll drive to the cleaning depot and meet the two of you in the back courtyard at 9:30 p.m. sharp."

Maria stared down at the floor as she asked her brother in a whisper, "Is Peter coming with us?"

"No," said Antanas. "He knows he would endanger everyone by joining us."

Maria burst into tears and fled to her room. Jadwyga and Antanas stood together in silence, feeling completely helpless.

Antanas broke the silence. "We can invite seven of your closest friends to join us—but no more," he told his wife. "I'll let you and Maria make the final choices about which friends should be several times already, and you know what I think. We're placing our very lives in their hands. All of them must be absolutely trustworthy."

Jadwyga nodded to signal her understanding. "What about luggage?" she asked.

"Each of us can bring only one suitcase. That's all we can fit into the truck."

"I'm going to go check on Maria. She needs comforting," Jadwyga said as she headed towards Maria's bedroom.

After a while, Maria and Jadwyga exited the bedroom slowly and joined Antanas at the table in the common room. None of them felt hungry, but they each forced down half a bowl of watery borscht.

As they sipped their soup, they debated whether or not to invite their landlady, Frau Brewer, to join them in their escape attempt. After some discussion, they concluded that it would be too dangerous.

"She's been a good landlady, but our relationship with her is strictly business, not personal," Maria said. "We can't be certain that she wouldn't betray us to the authorities."

"War is still being waged and Frau Brewer is German. We cannot take her with us," Antanas said firmly.

With this crucial decision made, Jadwyga stood up and began to pace back and forth. "Let's figure out what to bring with us," she said.

This proved to be a slow and painful task. Jadwyga packed practical things first: a pair of wool slacks, three pairs of socks, a pair of long underwear, two shirts, and her underthings. She would wear her wool coat, her old sweater, a scarf, a hat, and gloves. The only special items she would bring along were a small photo album of her

family in Vilnius, a few photos of Antanas, Maria, and herself, some amber jewellery, and her embroidered nightgown. As she packed her few belongings, she thought longingly of her mother and sisters whom she had had to leave behind in Vilnius.

Maria packed all her practical belongings first as well, followed by her photographs of Antanas and their family in Kaunas and a few pieces of amber jewellery. She wept silently as she gently ripped up the only picture taken of Peter and her together. It was dangerous enough to hide this picture in her room, but to have it found on her person if and when a Wehrmacht patrol stopped them in their getaway truck would be fatal for both of them.

Antanas packed his work clothes, his long underwear, some socks, and a sweater. He knew that Jadwyga and Maria would bring along their family photos, so he packed only one photo of his beloved dog. Nero was a large, intelligent, handsome German shepherd. He was Antanas's best friend. Antanas had had no choice but to leave him behind in Kaunas with his parents. Antanas wondered if Nero was still alive. He hoped with all his heart that his parents were still alive.

Antanas planned to pack some tools, but they were stored at the garage. That task would have to wait until tomorrow.

Elbing Work Camp and Old Town, Elbing, February 4, 1945

Antanas usually arrived at the garage at 7:45 a.m. each day. His mechanics left work for the day at 5:30 p.m. He liked every one of the men who worked for him, and he even liked his German boss, Captain Carl Ninehaus. However, he strongly suspected that one of his men, Vytautas Belskas, had made a treacherous deal with Major Braunschiedel, the commander of the work camp. Because of likely betrayal on the part of Vytautas, Antanas could not risk inviting any of his men to join their escape attempt.

Vytautas was short, slim, and handsome. He had a thin nose, pale blue eyes, and curly brown hair. He was an extrovert who could strike up a conversation with anyone. He laughed a lot and often kidded with the other mechanics. He also liked to drink, and he had shown up at work drunk several times. No one knew how or where Vytautas got his schnapps and his wine, but in all likelihood someone in the Wehrmacht was securing it for him. Antanas was convinced that this person was Major Braunschiedel.

Braunschiedel was a zealous Nazi who was feared by everyone. Antanas trusted the rest of his men, but he

knew that Vytautas would be able to read their faces if they harboured a secret. If Vytautas were to report to Major Braunschiedel that he sensed something unusual going on behind the scenes at the garage, the Gestapo would be called in to investigate. Antanas wiped away tears as he silently confirmed within himself his decision to exclude his entire crew of mechanics from the escape plan.

At about 6:15 p.m., Antanas arrived home for dinner. Jadwyga had made him a little soup and coffee. He could drink the coffee, but his stomach would not tolerate food. At 7:40 p.m., as Jadwyga handed him his coat, hat, and gloves, she told him reassuringly, "Don't worry. Maria and I will bring your suitcase to the camp. It would be hard for you to explain why you're carrying a suitcase to the garage. I have a scheme to justify the suitcases for all of us. Maria and I will ensure that the guards don't think our suitcases are part of an escape. We've thought of a good excuse. We'll see you at 9:30 p.m. by the cleaning depot."

Jadwyga hugged Antanas with all her strength, and then gave him three small pieces of meat wrapped in paper. "This is for the guard dogs in case they don't recognize you," she said. She kissed her husband tenderly and returned to the kitchen. Maria held open the door for Antanas and he stepped out into the cold, moonless night.

The temperature had fallen another six degrees. It was now minus eighteen degrees Celsius. The cold, crisp air amplified the sound of his footsteps as Antanas walked in the direction of the work camp.

Antanas took in his surroundings and was struck by the impact that the Allied bombing had had on Old Town. In the early phase of the bombing, the British and the Americans targeted only Elbing's factories and warehouses. Beginning in 1944 and continuing into 1945, however, they bombed everything. Antanas reflected on how random the damage seemed. One house would be demolished while the house next door to it remained unscathed.

When Antanas arrived at the gate to the camp, his face broke into a warm smile when he saw that the guard on duty was Hans Muller. Antanas knew this man well. Hans often joined Jadwyga, Maria, and other foreign workers at lunchtime to swap stories and to sing together.

"Hans, are you cold enough yet?" Antanas asked in a joking tone.

"Yeah! It's colder than Major Braunschiedel's heart," Hans replied. They both laughed.

"What brings you back to the camp on such a cold night?" Hans inquired.

Antanas blew on his hands and stomped his feet as he

book review

said, "Captain Ninehaus wants me to have a bus ready to roll by 7 a.m. tomorrow and we couldn't finish the repairs on it this afternoon."

"Why are you alone? Why didn't you ask one of your men to help you?" asked Hans.

"No, it's okay; what's left to do is a one-man job," replied Antanas nonchalantly.

Hans tipped his hat to Antanas as he said, "You're too soft on those mechanics of yours. But have fun working tonight in that cold barn you call a garage."

Antanas waved at the guard as he strode past. "I'll do my best," he said.

As he drew near the garage, two Doberman Pinschers approached him slowly with their ears pinned back. Both dogs were larger than the average Doberman, but they had the breed's classic black and brown coat large black ears, and flashing white fangs. The smaller of the two was named Panzer and the larger was named Tiger. They growled menacingly at first, but when they realized it was Antanas who was entering the garage, they went quiet. He was a favourite with both dogs because he had fed them scraps ever since they had first begun guarding the camp.

"Here, boys, take this meat and be happy," he said as he tossed them the scraps that Jadwyga had packed for them. After eating, the dogs rolled in the snow and then ran off towards the north fence. Antanas used his key to open the door to the garage. It was a large sliding door that one man could manage to open with some effort. As slowly and quietly as possible, he succeeded in shoving the door open.

The escape vehicle that Antanas had chosen was a military transport truck. Even though the crew at his garage worked mostly on buses belonging to the Elbing Transit System, Antanas and his men were sometimes ordered to fix army cars, trucks, and tanks. The truck that Antanas had selected for their risky plan was a beauty—a 1936 Mercedes-Benz heavy-duty transport vehicle that could carry twelve people and a reasonable amount of luggage. Because of the extra fuel can, tools, and ropes he needed to bring along, however, Antanas knew that the truck could only transport ten escapees.

Antanas had stealthily siphoned eight litres of diesel into the truck's fuel tank the previous evening, after his men had finished work for the day. Tonight, he filled the reserve fuel can to the brim and stored it in the back of the truck. That extra can would give them another twenty-five litres of fuel.

With ten passengers and their luggage, plus his tools and the weight of the extra fuel cans, Antanas calculated that the truck would travel between 280 kilometres and 360 kilometres on a full tank of fuel.

How far they progressed would depend on various factors: the maximum speed they could attain given the weight being hauled, the road conditions, the weather, the terrain, and any idling time they needed. The reserve diesel would get them another 88 to 113 kilometres. Antanas realized that this amount of fuel would not get them all the way to Bavaria. He would have no choice but to siphon diesel from unguarded vehicles at night as he and his companions fled. He knew that if he was apprehended stealing fuel, he would be shot point-blank.

Antanas heard a sudden rap on the window of the garage's back door. His heart froze for a moment before he stepped quickly towards the source of the sound. Peter stood at the door. "Thank God, it's you," Antanas said as he let him in.

"Who did you think it was—the Führer making a surprise inspection?" said Peter in an amused tone.

"Help me put this tarp on the truck," Antanas said. There was clearly no time to banter.

The truck had a large cab that could accommodate three people and its body consisted of metal poles and beams that would enclose the rest of the travelers. Once the tarp was fastened over the poles and the beams, the truck would become a kind of covered carriage that would protect the passengers from wind, snow, and rain, but not the cold. Anticipating freezing temperatures, Peter had stolen five large woolen blankets from the barracks and placed them in the back of the truck.

Antanas threw Peter a section of tarp and they worked swiftly together to secure it in place with ropes. When they were finished, Peter leaned in closely towards Antanas and whispered into his ear, "Leave by the south gate tonight. I left it unlocked."

Antanas nodded and then loaded his personal toolbox onto the truck. It contained the equipment he would be most likely to need on the journey. Complete sets of screwdrivers and wrenches, check. Metal strips for setting spark plug gaps, check. Wire brushes for cleaning spark plugs, check. Small engine parts, check. Antanas tossed a hacksaw, a jar of grease, some rags, six spark plugs and three litres of oil to the back of the truck. He threw two long pieces of rope into the back of the truck as well, and then used a shorter piece of rope to tie one of two shovels to the driver's side of the vehicle. Peter did the same on the passenger's side. Then Antanas remembered that he would have to bring along a two-metres rubber hose. He would need the hose to siphon diesel fuel.

After he had loaded all the equipment into the truck, Antanas paused and checked his watch. A worried frown creased his brow. Damn, it's 9:37 p.m. already! I can't be late. We have to make it out of the camp before the patrols have a chance to stop us. He climbed into the

cab of the truck and turned the ignition key. The motor sputtered and then died. Bastard truck! Frantically, he tried again. This time the truck's engine turned over and started to make the clacking and popping sounds so typical of diesel engines. Antanas let the engine run for five minutes to warm up. Then he depressed the clutch and put the vehicle into first gear. Peter slid open the garage door and Antanas let out the clutch, pressed the gas pedal, and crept forward slowly. He stopped just outside the garage, rolled down his window, and was about to thank Peter when a lump in his throat prevented him from speaking.

Peter said simply, "God be with you."

Antanas saluted his friend.

Neither man would ever speak to the other again.

8:55 p.m.

By the time Maria and Jadwyga reached the little courtyard by the cleaning depot, it had begun to snow. The depot was a three-story wooden structure with a sloped roof that enabled the snow to slide off it. Big snow banks had accumulated below the roof on either side of the building. Clustered in front of one of the snow banks were the women that Jadwyga had invited to join them in their flight to freedom. Tanya Shushkevich held a small bag of clothes. Marion Fedyck spoke quietly with Tanya, and Veronica Norkas sat on her suitcase as she listened to their conversation.

9:10 p.m.

Maria watched her housekeeping colleagues trudge into the courtyard. First came Birite Balsys and Jurate Matulionis. Maria knew Jurate from high school in Kaunas and Birute was Jurate's cousin. Maria nodded a greeting to the two women. These two I would trust with my soul.

Then she spotted Agafya Gorokhov and Sarah Friedman marching into the square. Inviting these two women to join them had sparked considerable debate with Antanas during the past few days.

When Maria and Jadwyga first recommended her friend Sarah, Antanas had thrown up his hands and exclaimed, "But Sarah's a Jew!"

"So?" Jadwyga and Maria replied in unison.

"If Major Braunschiedel discovers we've tried to assist a Jew to escape, he won't just kill us. He'll torture her, and then us, to death as an example to everyone else!"

Jadwyga had raised her arms towards the heavens. "From what Wladek said, it won't be long before the Red

Army is here and Major Braunschiedel will have more to worry about than a frightened Jewish girl and a bunch of foreign workers."

"Look what happened to Wladek. Is that what you want for us?"

"No, but dear husband, you're a good man. Remember the Kaunas massacres. The Germans lied to the Lithuanians and claimed that Jews had led the Soviet oppression of their country. The mob believed them and killed thousands of innocent Jews. Afterwards, I promised God that I would do something to right that terrible wrong. This is our chance, Antanas!" Jadwyga clasped her hands in a gesture of prayer. "This girl has lost her family. And, based on what Wladek told us, the Jews of Eastern Europe are being destroyed. Right now, in this camp, we are the eyes, the hands, and the feet of God. We must help Sarah."

"I agree, brother; we have to include her," said Maria.

"All right," said Antanas. "But that leaves only one more spot."

Jadwyga remembered distinctly that at this point in the argument Maria had crossed her arms and faced her brother squarely. "Then it has to be Agafya Gorokhov."

"Maria, she's Russian. We would have the same problems that we would have with Pavel."

"No, there are big differences. She's not a POW, she's not a former Red Army soldier, and she's not a man. She wouldn't be viewed as a deserter by the Red Army."

"Antanas, I support Maria," said Jadwyga. "Agafya is a gentle and intelligent soul who will do us no harm."

Antanas threw up his arms. "Okay, you two, but Agafya is the last person we can take with us."

9:40 p.m.

Jadwyga believed that of all the women with whom they had worked, these seven were the ones they could trust with their lives. We gave the lucky ones only twelve hours' notice. Secrecy and surprise are our only weapons.

Jadwyga now saw two new women arrive. One of them held a little boy by the hand and carried an infant girl. Jadwyga grabbed Maria by the shoulders and shook her. "Oh, my God! Those are two of the local German women, and one has brought her infant daughter Katrina and her little boy Sebastian."

Maria shook her head worriedly.

Jadwyga knew what these women wanted. They desperately needed to get out of Elbing, just as they all did. Jadwyga was also acutely aware that there was room for only ten people in the truck. She didn't know what to do and her heart started to pound.

book review

Suddenly, Jadwyga recognized the women. She whispered to Maria, "The children belong to the older woman. Her name is Carola. Her husband was killed fighting the Soviets in Poland. I think her friend is called Johanna."

Maria's face grew tense. "There can only be ten of us. Our caravan must consist of the three of us plus seven of our closest friends. That is what we decided last night."

As Jadwyga and Maria conversed, Carola approached them. "I'm pleading with both of you. I know what the Soviet soldiers do to German women. What will happen to my babies if I am raped and killed? And I cannot leave my friend Johanna."

Jadwyga did not know who had told Carola about their escape plan, but now that these two women were here, she needed to take action. She glanced at Maria and then took Carola by the hand. "I'll speak to my husband Antanas. He's a good man."

When it appeared that there would now be fourteen escapees, four of whom were German, Jadwyga and Maria were anxious to leave right away. It was 9:44 p.m. and there was no sign of Antanas. He was already fourteen minutes late. The pain of the cold was nothing compared to the icy fear gripping their hearts.

Then, at 9:47 p.m. they heard the low rumble of the truck and they watched in relief as it drove into the courtyard. When Antanas climbed out of the cab and saw the number of women and children who had gathered, he became angry and alarmed.

"I said there should be ten of us, not fourteen! Two of these women are German. Why didn't you just invite the camp commander as well?"

Jadwyga drew close to Antanas. "This was not our idea. I don't know how they found out. They just showed up. They're here now. Are we to send them home? Even if you don't care about them or their children, think about what they might do if we reject them. Do you want them screaming at the guards to stop the truck?"

"How will we fit all of them in there, plus our luggage?" asked Antanas in exasperation. He paused and frowned. Then an idea struck him and he called out to Maria. "Little sister, climb to the top of the truck and spread your body evenly over the tarp and the metal beams. You're going to help us secure the luggage to the roof."

"Have you gone mad, big brother?"

"No; it's the only way we'll be able to cram fourteen people into this truck."

Maria did as she was instructed and scampered to the top of the truck. Don't let me rip this tarp. Dear Jesus, let me do this right, she prayed. Antanas, Jadwyga, and the other women carefully passed the suitcases to Maria using a long rope slipped through the luggage handles. Maria, in turn, spread the suitcases over the ribs of the

carriage roof and handed the other end of the rope to Antanas. He fed the rope through the brackets on both sides of the truck. He also fed it through the bracket at the back of the cargo compartment. Then Antanas threw the remainder of the rope to Maria. She crawled over the roof again and pulled the rope through the luggage handles once more. Then she extended it to the front of the carriage. She dropped what was left of the rope to Antanas. He pulled hard on it to give him more length. Finally, he tied it to the bracket at the front of the carriage.

The women and children boarded the back of the vehicle swiftly and silently, while Antanas, Jadwyga, and Maria entered the cab. Antanas started up the engine and drove towards the south gate of the camp. As they approached the exit, Antanas spotted a soldier, grimaced, squeezed the steering wheel hard, and thought: Who the hell is that? Is our escape going to end here? Then he realized that the soldier was Peter and his shoulders and arms relaxed.

Peter opened the gate and motioned them to drive through quickly. Once they were out of the camp, Peter closed and locked the gate, saluting as they drove past. Antanas saluted in return. Peter blew a kiss to Maria, who began to sob. Jadwyga put an arm around her. Antanas checked his watch: it was 10:15 p.m.

Antanas's guts tightened another notch as they passed through the heavy manufacturing area of Elbing. The factories in this area had huge walls made of reinforced concrete. Many of these walls, although tough, were broken from the frequent Allied bombings, and more than half the warehouses had been levelled by bombs as well. Smoke still hovered close to the ground from the last raid.

After another thirty minutes of driving, Antanas made a three-point turn and headed back towards Elbing. Having gone about 400 metres, he made a hard right and headed south down a little-used country road. As the truck lurched, a couple of the women yelled. Sebastian, Carola's three-year-old squealed in delight, and his baby sister screamed.

"What was all that about?" Maria asked.

"I just realized that the road we were on is well travelled by local farmers and army trucks. That road has enough traffic to warrant frequent army patrols, but this road going south leads to marshes and swamps. It's a passable road, and it won't have as many Wehrmacht patrols."

"Okay, big brother, that makes sense, but please make the turns a little less dramatic next time."

The farther they drove from the camp, the more relaxed everyone felt. However, at the south end of Lake Družno, the route deteriorated from a two-lane gravel road into a one-lane dirt road. After driving a few kilometres along this road, Antanas began to worry that this might be a dead end. After another kilometer he observed that a major thoroughfare joined the road to the right. He turned and proceeded west along this bigger boulevard.

Travelling along a major roadway made Jadwyga extremely nervous.

Maria handed Jadwyga her rosary. "Pray and you'll be all right."

Jadwyga fingered the rosary constantly, praying quietly: "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, please, please help us get to Bavaria."

They had been driving for two hours when Jadwyga suddenly spotted a Wehrmacht patrol up ahead. Five soldiers awaited them. The tallest of the soldiers was standing on the edge of the road moving a lantern in a circle with his right hand and pointing to the side of the road with his left.

Antanas eased up on the accelerator and pulled the truck onto the shoulder. The sound of the soldiers' footsteps crunching in the snow made Maria sit up straight. The truck had driven about 30 metres past the patrol, but none of the soldiers had fired upon them. Antanas hoped fervently that the transport documents that Peter had furnished him would pass inspection. Maria reached down and touched a metal pipe concealed beneath her seat. She was prepared to use it.

Jadwyga continued to pray quietly. "Mother Mary, spare me, Maria, and the other women from rape, and Antanas from death."

As a sergeant approached the truck, Jadwyga's stomach cramped, sweat broke out on her forehead, and her arms began to shake. Then she fainted. Maria propped Jadwyga up on her shoulder to make it look as though she was sleeping, and then smiled at the sergeant who was rapping on the glass.

Antanas rolled down his window.

"Caught Between Two Devils"

This is an inspirational novel based upon the real-life experiences of Antanas Paskевичius, his Polish wife Jadwyga, and his sister Maria. Antanas met Jadwyga when her family visited his family in Kaunas, Lithuania in 1938. He fell in love with her at first sight and proposed within months of their first meeting. She was only eighteen, and though she was attracted to him, she held off saying

yes until a year later. Their wedding plans were thwarted by the joint invasion of Poland by the German and the Soviet armies. When Hitler later attacked his ally, Stalin, wedding services were further banned. Antanas was determined to marry Jadwyga, and they did so in January 1942 in a secret ceremony. He almost did not make it to his own wedding when a blizzard threw his car into a ditch beside the highway to Vilnius. With help from strangers, he made it to the church before the SS patrol did.

In April of 1944, life became even more challenging when Jadwyga, Antanas, and his sister Maria were ejected from Kaunas and sent to a work camp in Elbing, Germany. There they toiled for ten months. They made friends with fellow workers, some German civilians, and even some Wehrmacht soldiers who also hated the Nazis. Maria fell in love with just such a man, Private Peter Baur. They also faced dangerous enemies such as the camp commander, Major Braunschiedel, and Jadwyga's boss, Corporal Schmidt. There was nowhere to run to until the winter of 1945 because the Nazis controlled all the land surrounding their camp for thousands of kilometers.

Despite the risk of betrayal, torture, and death, they stole a Wehrmacht truck and diesel fuel in February 1945 and, along with seven other prisoners, two German women, and their children, fled from their camp and headed for Bavaria. Their journey was fraught with hunger, cold, and fear of SS patrols but with courage, faith, and teamwork, they made it. In late April 1945, they were liberated by the US Army. Still, their trials were not over, and they remained in US Army Red Cross camps for another four years until they could emigrate to Canada.

The struggles of Antanas, Jadwyga, and Maria are not unique; there were six million foreign prisoners compelled to work for the Third Reich. They faced the two greatest tyrants of the twentieth century and prevailed because of love, faith, loyalty, and courage.

This book can be found on Amazon.ca books.

About Mark Creedon

Mark Creedon was born and raised in Toronto, Ontario. He received his Master of Social Work degree from the University of Toronto in 1975 and worked at several social work settings for thirty-eight years. These agencies ranged from child welfare to a family services organization where he spent the last twenty years of his career as the executive director. Mark met his wife Chris in 1972 and they were married in 1974. When Mark retired he wrote "Caught Between Two Devils" which is based upon the real-life experiences of Chris' parents and paternal aunt as forced labor in WWII.

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Security

...In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Seimas unanimously approved a Declaration of Emergency which is meant to strengthen borders, increase security and check vehicles for weapons at the border. Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė further supported the decree by adding that cybernetic infrastructure's security needed greater protection. President Gitanas Nausėda called Russia's actions against Ukraine criminal and he could not remain "indifferent to this unprovoked military aggression" and called for a "united and strong response".

...U.S. troops and combat equipment from the Army's 3rd Cavalry Regiment crossed the border near Kalvarija at 3 AM for the planned Saber Strike 2022 exercise. Kalvarija lies within the 65 km Suwalki Gap joining Poland and Lithuania and separating Russia's Kaliningrad enclave on the Baltic from Belarus, a Russian ally and participant in the invasion. Conversely, the Suwalki Gap is the only land connection between the three Baltic nations and Europe. The U.S. combat equipment included infantry fighting vehicles, armored SUVs, and trucks. The troops will train in Lithuania and then plan to go to Latvia. Saber Strike 2022 is part of a larger-scale exercise Defender-Europe 2022, which involves the U.S. 12th Combat Aviation Brigade and the Royal British Air Force troops with Chinook CH-47 transport helicopters and AH-64 Apache attack helicopters as well as a U.S. air defense platoon.

...President Joseph Biden ordered an additional 800 U.S. troops from an infantry battalion based in Italy to deploy to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, along with 32 AH-64 Apache helicopters from Greece and Germany to be repositioned to Poland plus six F-35A fighter jets from England to be redeployed to Estonia and Lithuania.

...For the first time, NATO has activated its 40,000-strong response force which would be under command of NATO Supreme Allied Commander-Europe U.S. Air Force General Tod Wolters. Commander Wolters said, "This is a historic moment and the very first time the Alliance has employed these high readiness forces in a deterrence and defense role. They represent a flexible, combat-credible force that can be employed in multiple ways, and we are utilizing fully their inherent agility."

...The U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III, a retired Army General, met in Vilnius with the Estonian Minister of Defense Kalle Laanet, Latvian Minister of Defense Artis Pabriks, and Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis to discuss Russia's military buildup in and

around Ukraine, including Belarus. Landsbergis said that he was concerned that if the Kremlin was willing to take Ukraine, Moscow would next target the Baltic nations and Poland. "The battle for Ukraine is a battle for Europe. If he's not stopped there, he will go further," Landsbergis said, calling for military strategy in the region to shift from trying to dissuade Russia from attack to preparing to defend against one. Austin vowed, "I want everyone in Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia to know – and I want President (Vladimir) Putin in the Kremlin to know – that the United States stands with our allies."

...Lithuania has banned direct Russian air flights to Kaliningrad which necessitates flying over the Baltic to St. Petersburg. An 80-minute flight will now take 120 minutes, a 50% increase which will likely be matched by a similar increase in ticket prices. In a tit-for-tat response, Russia has banned Lithuanian planes from its airspace.

...A German convoy of 130 soldiers and 60 vehicles arrived in Lithuania via Poland in support of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup for Lithuania. Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said he was assured by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz that the German soldiers are authorized to fight to defend Lithuania: "The German army is on our territory to defend us, and if there's a threat to Lithuania, they are ready to do their duty."

...A Ukrainian-made Antonov An-124 military aircraft delivered four Swedish Combat Vehicle 90 infantry fighting vehicles and other vehicles in support of 44 Norwegian soldiers who landed in Kaunas airport as part of a NATO buildup in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The four-engine An-125 heavy-lift aircraft can transport 150 tons with a top speed of 537 mph. The CV90 has a crew of 3 and can transport 7 fully equipped infantry. NATO's presence in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia is projected to grow from 3,400 at the start of the year to more than 6,000 in the near future. Seventy of these additional troops headed to Lithuania are expected to come from the Netherlands.

...The Lithuanian Cabinet authorized sending medics to help Ukraine and would pay wages, bonuses, daily allowances, and provide sleeping accommodations. The Health Ministry stopped registration after 300 volunteered to go to Ukraine but not all specialists were needed. In groups of 12, the needed specialists include paramedics, nurses, anesthesiologists, and intensive care specialists.

...The U.S. has given permission for Lithuania to trans-

fer some of the U.S. supplied short-ranged ground-to-air Stinger missiles to Ukraine, and Lithuanian troops are going to Ukraine for a few weeks to train the Ukrainian troops. Lithuanian's Chief of Defense Valdemaras Rupšys said, "We have fully supported, are supporting, and will continue to support Ukraine. Weapons and technology are nothing without the knowledge and ability to use them, so... we will share our knowledge and experience."

...Membership in NATO comes with the goal of allocating at least 2% of GDP for defense. Not all members meet that goal. Lithuania has met that goal and for 2022 was budgeting 2.05% (\$1.31 Billion; 1.2 billion euros). With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the government and political parties have agreed to increase the budget to 2.5%.

...U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited the U.S. Embassy in Vilnius and promised that the U.S. would invoke Article 5 of the NATO treaty and come to the aide of Lithuania if Russia attacks Lithuania or any of the Baltic nations for their support of Ukraine.

...In addition to NATO troops scheduled for spring exercises in Lithuania, Germany will deploy an air defense system, the U.S. will send a troop battalion with tanks, and the Netherlands will send more troops. The exercises and additional deployments will increase NATO personnel from 3,000 to 4,000. Lithuania has allocated an additional \$44.1 million (40.4 million euros) to cover the accommodations.

...According to the Scramble website, the U.S. Army operating out of Lithuania's Šiauliai airbase deploys two Beech RC-12X Guardrail spy planes where they conduct Aerial Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (AISR) missions along the borders with Kaliningrad and Belarus.

...Lithuania is now independent of Russian gas. The Energy Ministry indicated that the Klaipėda LNG terminal has the capacity to meet the Lithuanian demand for domestic needs but it does not have the capacity to supply the needs of all three Baltic countries. Some of the LNG comes from the United States. The Baltic nations have weaned themselves from Russian gas by drawing from reserves stored underground in Latvia by the Conexus Baltic Grid. Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda chided the rest of Europe for not following Lithuania's lead. Estonia, Latvia, and Finland plan on building an LNG terminal in Paldiski, near Tallinn, Estonia's capital but it will take years to bring to reality.

...A truck carrying vehicle spare parts from a Lithuanian company to Belarus was detained by Vilnius customs officials at the Medininkai border checkpoint. The parts belong to a special category of dual-purpose strategic goods and can only be transported upon receipt of a license from the Ministry of the Economy and Innovation. The goods and truck were detained and the Belarusian driver was told to not leave Lithuania. A pre-trial investigation into the smuggling of strategic goods was initiated.

...Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė was one of several hundred who were sworn in front of the Seimas as a member of the Riflemen's Union, a volunteer paramilitary force that supports the military and police as needed in certain functions. There are now about 12,000 Riflemen with about 4,000 women.

Ukraine

...With about 4 million refugees leaving Ukraine, almost 1% (38,600) has arrived in Lithuania. This total includes 16,400 minors with 4,400 children under the age of six and 12,000 between six and eighteen.

...Forty-four Ukrainian orphans are being taken in by residents of the Lithuanian resort of Trakai, which overlooks a medieval castle on an island in a now-frozen lake. Trakai town is working to provide food, schooling, and extra school activities for the Ukrainian orphans. "They are our children now," Mayor Andrius Satevičius said, "We are working with the school communities, on how to accept them, what topics to avoid with them, so they feel comfortable and safe."

...Refugee centers have been opened in Alytus and Marijampolė in southern Lithuania with plans for additional ones in Klaipėda, Šiauliai, and Panevėžys. More than 11,000 accommodations have been prepared. The Non-Governmental Organization, Stiprūs Kartu (Strong Together), has registered 7,000 homes ready to accept 23,000 Ukrainians.



current events

...The Ministry of Culture will offer monthly grants of 600 euros for 3 months for cultural, professional art workers, translators, restorers, and guides who have fled Ukraine and now live in Lithuania.

...Ukrainian refugees who have registered with the Migration Department will be provided with basic healthcare services and prescription medicines prescribed in Lithuania for non-hospital treatment. The Vilnius hotel used by members of the Seimas has accommodations for 71 guests. Currently, there are 9 vacant apartments that are being offered to Ukrainian refugees.

...Over 300 Ukrainian refugees have registered for Lithuanian language courses taught by student volunteers from Vilnius University and experienced teachers from Vilnius' adult schools. The courses will also offer an opportunity for Ukrainians to get acquainted with the local culture and establish new social contacts. School-leavers from Ukraine who have been granted asylum will be able to take graduation exams in Lithuania. They will not have to take the Lithuanian language and literature exam. Ukrainian refugees will be exempt from having a command of the Lithuanian language at work for two years. Some positions such as teaching have this requirement.

...As passengers on the Moscow-Kaliningrad line stop in Vilnius for 10 minutes, they will see 24 pictures from the Russian invasion of Ukraine and hear announcements to bring their attention to the war. This may be one of the few opportunities for the average Russian to be exposed to information that does not emanate from an official Russian source.



COVID-19

...With a decrease in COVID-19 cases, only Lithuanians who have tested positive will be required to self-quarantine. The rule replaces self-isolation if someone in the household was diagnosed with the disease or came in contact with someone who has the disease.

...Lithuania has recognized AstraZeneca's Indian-manufactured COVID-19 vaccine, Covishield, and Novavax's jab Nuvaxovid. Covishield shots are not administered in Lithuania, but they are recognized. Lithuania will purchase 633,000 doses of the Nuvaxovid vaccine, which are expected in the first quarter of 2022. So far, 797,500 people have tested positive for COVID-19, and the death toll has reached over 8,000.

...Lithuania's official statistics service, Statistics Lithuania, believes that Lithuania has had 11,000 excess deaths due to COVID-19. Excess mortality, a mortality rate in excess of the historic average was evident in December 2020, January 2021, October 2021, and November 2021 related to COVID-19's Alpha and Delta variants.

...The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and demanding an immediate end to hostilities. Although 141 countries affirmed the resolution, 35 countries abstained, including Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. In response, Lithuania has reversed its decision to donate 444,600 doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine to Bangladesh.

...Since the start of the pandemic, almost 985,000 people have contracted COVID-19 and almost 8,700 have died solely because of this virus. Almost 70% of Lithuanians have received one COVID-19 vaccine shot.

Business

...Nearly 100 Taiwanese businesses attended presentations on Lithuanian opportunities held by the Taiwan External Trade Development Council in Taipei. Taiwan set up the "Taiwan Central and Eastern European Investment Fund" which focuses on investments in semiconductors, biotech, laser, and electric vehicle industries. Lithuania has strong economic points in high-quality human resources, advantageous geography, convenient transportation, seven free economic zones, multilingual workers, and a high level of globalization and digitization. In 2021 bilateral trade between Taiwan and Lithuania grew 20% to \$174 million.

...The European Commission's figures indicate that trade between Lithuania and China plunged 91% in December from December of last year.

...Despite pressure from China, the local head of the German auto parts maker, Continental Group, said that they had not reduced its plans for their investment of over \$210 million in a production facility that will employ 1500.

...Pennsylvania-based pharmaceutical distributor, AmerisourceBergen, plans to expand its existing Lithuanian global business services (GBS) center from the existing 190 employees to 700 over the next 5-years. It entered Lithuania in 2017 with 10 specialists in shipment management and began a GBS office in 2019 with a team of 200 including Finance, IT, HR, and other specialists with a multilingual capability and strong work ethic. Currently, they are coordinating the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in the U.S., Nordics, and Germany with additional capabilities in Quality Assurance, Robotic Process Automation, Sales Support, and Business Analysis. Worldwide AmerisourceBergen employs 42,000 and has \$200 billion in annual sales.

...The Financial Times and the research company, Statista, ranked the Lithuanian company Kilo Health in second place in the FT 1000 highest compound annual growth rate in Europe with 450% over the past 3 years. With 15 digital health and wellness products, it has over 550 colleagues and offices in 5 European cities. Of the 1000 companies, 235 were in Italy, 194 in Germany, 153 in the U.K, and 11 in Lithuania.

...As part of the economic sanctions against Russia, four Russian-owned companies will not be able to use the Single Euro Payment Area (SEPA) managed by the Lithuanian Central Bank. SEPA is used by 150 payment companies in 18 European countries and handled 358 billion euros last year which was twice the amount handled in 2020. Russia is not part of SEPA but these four Lithuanian-based companies were able to use the system.

...An investigation has been initiated on the collapse of a 151-meter tower with a 5.5 MW GE Cypress turbine at the 50 MW Anykščiai onshore wind farm. There were no injuries. The farm is located 80 km north of Vilnius and was installed in the second half of 2021 and was scheduled to be operational this quarter. Anykščiai is part of a 186 MW wind portfolio that was sold by European Energy to funds managed by Lords LB Asset Management and Taaleri Energia at the end of 2021.

...The Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), a global container shipping company, will include Klaipeda in a new route connecting Europe and New York. It will take 15 days for containerized cargo to go from Klaipeda to NY with the total route including Klaipeda-Gdynia(Poland)-Gothenburg-Bremerhaven-NY-Philadelphia-Norfolk-Klaipeda. MSC has Klaipeda on a new route to Latin America including the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Peru, and Colombia plus another route to India and Pakistan.

General

...The cabinet has approved a further reduction of the value-added tax on household heating oil from the standard 21% and the reduced level of 9 % to 0% from January to the end of April. This reduction will cost the government budget about 23 million euros.

...The U.S. Library of Congress will store the digital content of the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania in its archives, including the website's public third-party contents, including Facebook, YouTube, etc.

...Pope Francis has sent 50,000 euros to Caritas Vilnius, which is assisting migrants stuck near Lithuania's eastern border with Belarus. The funds will provide migrants with medicines, food, and warm clothing. Many migrants come from the Middle East and African countries and have been stuck for months in the reception centers. In 2021, the Seimas passed a law that allowed the detention of asylum seekers for up to 6 months. This detention was later extended for up to a year. The law allowed asylum seekers to be deported while awaiting hearings on appeals. Earlier this year, Pope Francis made a donation to assist migrants stuck at the border between Poland and Belarus. Before the Ukrainian crisis, the Pope planned to visit Malta in April to highlight the plight of migrants seeking to enter Europe.

...The Lithuanian Interior Ministry estimates it costs 11,000 euros per year to maintain one migrant. The Polish satellite public broadcast channel aimed at Belarus, Belsat, reports that 272 migrants (mostly from Iraq) have accepted a ticket home and 1,000 euros to leave Lithuania. Most of the migrants have had their asylum requests rejected. The cash payments are being funded by the European Union.

...The Lithuanian Army warned travelers of the large military maneuvers that occur at night and early morning, especially at border crossings. The Army indicated that they will break up large convoys into groups of 30

current events

or fewer vehicles accompanied by military police. They cautioned travelers to not pass these groups.

...The Vilnius Mayor, Remigijus Šimašius, announced that the cul-de-sac leading to the Russian embassy will be renamed in Ukrainian the equivalent of – “Ukraine’s Heroes 2”. He said that mail will only be delivered to the embassy if addressed to the new street.

...Lithuania’s annual inflation reached 14.2% which is double the average annual inflation of 6.8%. Consumer goods rose by 15.8% which includes heating, fuels and oils, solid fuels, milk and dairy products, gas, vegetables, bread, and cereal products. Services were up 10.3% and include restaurants, car repairs, electrical, and water services.

...Police in Vilnius and Riga arrested 108 scammers involved with three organized crime call centers who promised lucrative investment opportunities but deliv-

ered nothing. Speaking in English, Russian, Polish, and Hindi, they raked in 3 million euros per month. With the support of Europol and Eurojust, police have frozen 25 bank accounts, shares of 4 companies, 3 luxury vehicles, 4 properties, and virtual currency worth more than \$100,000.

...The administrative director for Kaunas, Vilius Siliauskas, was suspected of accepting bribes from Autokausta for construction and related work contracts. On inspecting his home, police found 140,000 euros.

...Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has caused a large demand for professional military equipment, semi-automatic weapons, handguns, and pepper spray. According to the Lithuanian Association of Gun Owners, there are about 95,000 gun owners in Lithuania. Members of the Lithuanian Rifleman’s Union are permitted to own military semi-automatic grade weapons.

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