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Investigating Bunkers: Lithuanian Partisans, Archaeology and Excavation in Pagrenda Forest

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Introduction

Termination of the Second World War marked the end of the greatest military conflict in world history, but hostilities in Lithuania and some European countries did not cease. In summer 1944, when the war front was moving through Lithuania westward, the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania for a second time. At that moment Lithuanians began active partisan resistance that lasted until 1953. The Lithuanian Partisan War is documented in the abundant contemporary data that are found in Soviet security files, partisan documents, photographs, diaries, memoirs of participants and wit-

nesses of the historical events.¹ Not least important, the Lithuanian Partisan War left significant traces in the landscape, and a decade-long armed struggle for freedom and independence is witnessed by numerous bunker pits, trenches, and artefacts found in such places as well as campsites and battle sites.

During the Lithuanian Partisan War, thousands of fortified and unfortified wooden bunkers, and simple hideouts were installed in the woods, homesteads of partisan supporters, and even wells and cemeteries. Some bunkers were used by partisans as headquarters of the resistance while others functioned as simple communication points, temporary or permanent refuge places. For many Lithuanian partisans, bunkers became their places of death.

Quite often Lithuanian term *bunkeris* (English: bunker) is mistaken with term *žeminė* (English: dugout), but their construction and purpose were slightly different.² Underground bunkers with one or, less often, two or three rooms spread widely during the preparation for the winter of 1945 and 1946. Well-concealed bunkers, used until the end of the partisan war, were installed in the woods, dwellings, and outbuildings; however, the potentialities of defending such bunkers were poor. Bunkers of 2 by 3 m in size and about 1.5 m high were among the most common, while bunkers of the partisan leadership were larger.³

On the contrary, partisan dugouts, partially raised above the ground and adapted for larger groups of partisans, were typical for the beginning of the Lithuanian Partisan War. In the later years of the war, dugouts were mainly installed in marshes and wet forests. They usually had doors, windows, and often wells, food and weapon storage pits were set up nearby. Surround-

¹ The largest collection of memories of Lithuanian freedom fighters was published in a 12-volume series from 1996 to 2016 by Romas Kaunietis. For more information: A. Petrauskienė, *Laisvės kovotojų prisiminimai: 1944–1953 m. partizaninio karo dalyvių vardynas*, „Acta Museologica Lithuanica“ 2015, t. 2, p. 201–229.

² A. Petrauskienė, V. Vaitkevičius, *Atrandant partizaninio karo pavidlą*, „Nepriklausomybės sąsiuviniai“ 2017, nr 3 (21), p. 64–66; G. Vėlius, D. Žygelis, *Pokario Lietuvos partizanų bunkeriai Mėnaičių ir Balandiško k. (Grinkiškio sen., Radviliškio r.)*, „Lietuvos archeologija“ 2013, t. 39, p. 187–210.

³ A. Petrauskienė, G. Petrauskas, V. Vaitkevičius, *Partizanų bunkeris Daugėliškių miške: kompleksinių tyrimų studija ir šaltiniai*, Raseiniai 2017, p. 73; A. Petrauskienė, V. Vaitkevičius, op. cit., p. 66; G. Vėlius, D. Žygelis, op. cit., p. 207.

ed by ramparts, trenches, machine gun firing nets, one or more dugouts formed separate fortified camps.⁴

For a long time, researchers of the Lithuanian Partisan War focused mainly on the types of bunkers as fortification devices: their installation, masking, provisioning etc.⁵ The daily life and difficult living conditions in bunkers were portrayed only in partisan diaries and memoirs.⁶ Since the start of the archaeological investigations of partisan bunkers, fortified and unfortified campsites, and battle sites, the first publications have appeared focusing on the significance of archaeology and complex interdisciplinary research in investigating the Lithuanian Partisan War.⁷ Over the last de-

⁴ M. Kosas, *Partizaninio pasipriešinimo fortifikacija (1944–1953)*, [in:] *XX amžiaus fortifikacija Lietuvoje*, red. I. Veliutė, Kaunas 2008, p. 161–163.

⁵ J. Bagušauskas, *Lietuvos partizanų slėptuvės*, „Darbai“ 1996, nr 1, p. 134–142; A. Baltrušaitis, *Ypatingomis aplinkybėmis ypatinga išmintis ir išradingumas*, „Statyba ir architektūra“ 2001, nr 9, p. 13–43; N. Gaškaitė, *Pasipriešinimo istorija. 1944–1953 metai* (2nd ed.), Vilnius 2006, p. 74–79; N. Gaškaitė, D. Kuodytė, A. Kašeta, B. Ulevičius, *Lietuvos partizanai 1944–1953 m.*, Kaunas 1996, p. 85–88; K. K. Girmius, *Partizanų kovos Lietuvoje*, Vilnius 1990, p. 309–311; M. Kosas, op. cit., p. 161–177; *Lietuvos naikinimas ir tautos kova (1940–1998)*, red. I. Ignatavičius, Vilnius 1999, p. 356–375; R. Mosiejienė, *Partizaninis karas Lietuvoje 1944–1953 m.*, [in:] *Lietuvos gynybiniai įtvirtinimai*, red. A. Kuncevičius, Vilnius 2001, p. 52–54; M. Pocius, *Antisovietinio pogrindžio formavimasis (1944 m.) ir raida*, „Statyba ir architektūra“ 2001, nr 9, p. 9; K. V. Tauras, *Guerilla Warfare on the Amber Coast*, New York 1962, pp. 39–42; G. Vėlius, D. Žygelis, op. cit., p. 182–210; *Už laisvę ir tėvynę*, red. D. Kuodytė, E. Peikštenis, D. Žygelis, Vilnius 2004, p. 187.

⁶ Cf. L. Baliukevičius, *The Diary of a Partisan. A Year in the Life of the Postwar Lithuanian Resistance Fighter Dzūkai*, Vilnius 2008, pp. 31, 58–59, 109–110; J. Lelešius-Grafas, *Partizanų kapeliono dienoraštis*, red. K. Kasparas, Kaunas 2006, p. 171; A. Ramanauskas-Vanagas, *Many Sons have Fallen in the Partisan Ranks*, ed. J. Everatt, Vilnius 2018, pp. 531–532, 571, 602, 609.

⁷ A. Čepulytė, G. Petrauskas, *Lietuvos laisvės kovos sąjūdžio štabo bunkerio archeologiniai tyrimai Daugėliškių miške*, „Genocidas ir rezistencija“ 2011, nr 2 (30), p. 165–172; G. Petrauskas, *Lietuvos partizaninio karo archeologijos dešimtmetis: tyrimų kryptys ir ateities perspektyvos*, „Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis“, t. XXXIX (in press); G. Petrauskas, A. Petrauskienė, *Archaeology of Lithuanian Partisan War: Case of the Partisan Bunker in Daugėliškių Forest*, [in:] *Archaeologies of Totalitarianism, Authoritarianism, and Repression: Dark Modernities*, eds. J. Symonds, P. Vařeka, New York (in press); G. Petrauskas, A. Petrauskienė, *Blinstrubiškių miško partizanai: istorija, archeologija ir paveldosauga*, [in:] *Is Panevėžio praeities: miško broliai. XX konferencijos pranešimai*, red. A. Astramskas, D. Juzėnas, Panevėžys 2018, p. 54–72; A. Petrauskienė, G. Petrauskas, *Naujausiųjų laikų konfliktų archeologija: Lietuvos partizaninio karo tyrimų atvejis*, „Lietuvos archeologija“ 2014, t. 40, p. 221–253; A. Petrauskienė, G. Petrauskas, V. Vaitkevičius, op. cit.; G. Vėlius, D. Žygelis, op. cit., p. 177–234.

cade, partisan bunkers have become an object of a new branch of Lithuanian Partisan War archaeology.

This article presents the investigations of Lithuanian partisan bunkers, discusses their results, and reveals the significance and potentialities of archaeological research. Special attention is paid to the investigation of the platoon bunker of Ignotas Nasutavičius (codename Bondaras) of the Didžioji Kova brigade in Pagrenda Forest (Elektrėnai Municipality). The archaeological excavation was carried out by the Kaišiadorys Museum expedition in summer 2013 (led by Livija Ivanovaitė).⁸ Here, the comprehensive data obtained from the archaeological investigation, written sources, and memoirs of the witnesses allowed to reconstruct the daily life of partisans and their last fight with the Soviet soldiers.

Archaeological Investigations of Partisan Bunkers in Lithuania

Since the beginning of the Lithuanian Rebirth in the late 1980s, partisan bunkers have received due attention. Former partisans, couriers, supporters, and their followers initiated excavations of bunkers with the aim of searching for weapons, documents, and personal items left inside. Bunkers were usually regarded as places where partisans lost their lives, therefore, in order to commemorate the deaths of freedom fighters, people began to restore the destroyed bunkers, place crosses and monuments over them, and organize public gatherings. Until 2019, around 50 partisan bunkers have been restored in Lithuania. However, about 80% of them have been reconstructed in authentic places without conducting any archaeological research. Only 2 partisan bunkers have been investigated by archaeologists before restoration.⁹ Such wanton digging of bunkers led to destruction of authentic partisan war sites and loss of valuable scientific data.

Archaeological research of Lithuanian partisan bunkers began in 2010. Since then, 9 bunkers have been investigated for scientific, cognitive, and

⁸ L. Ivanovaitė, G. Petrauskas, *Ignoto Nasutavičiaus Bondaro būrio bunkerio Pagrendos miške tyrimai*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2013 metais“, Vilnius 2014, p. 471–476.

⁹ A. Čepulytė, *Probleminiai ginkluotos rezistencijos įamžinimo aspektai*, „Lietuvos istorijos studijos“ 2011, t. 28, s. 123–124; A. Petrauskienė, *Lietuvos partizanų bunkerių ir žeminių atstatymas 1991–2011 m.*, „Gimtasai kraštas“ 2016, t. 10, p. 44–45.

rescue purposes. Furthermore, over the last decade, thorough archeological surveys with a metal detector have been carried out in the vicinity of 4 partisan bunkers. Isolated archaeological findings have been recorded in another 30 locations. Although archaeological research of partisan bunkers, like other sites of the Lithuanian Partisan War, has been conducted only by a few archaeologists, the geography of investigated bunkers covers the whole territory of Lithuania (Fig. 1).

The aims and circumstances of the first partisan bunker investigations vary from the personal initiatives to government decisions. For example in 2010, history teacher and students of the Ariogala Gymnasium, working on a voluntary basis, decided to restore the partisan bunker in Daugėliškiai Forest (Raseiniai District). At the time, the bunker had no legal protection, therefore, in order to prevent it from being destroyed, archaeological research was carried out on a private initiative.¹⁰ The same year, the bunker at the partisan supporter Miknius homestead in Minaičiai village (Radviliškis District) and the bunker at the partisan courier Sajus homestead in Balandiškis village (Radviliškis District) were excavated as significant historical places.¹¹ On 16 February 1949, the Declaration of the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters (*Lietuvos laisvės kovos sąjūdis*, hereinafter LLKS), was signed at the Minaičiai village bunker. Stating that the LLKS Council was the only legitimate government of occupied Lithuania, the Declaration was the main political document for the succession and struggle in restoring the independent democratic state of Lithuania.¹² Thus, the last two bunker investigations were the result of a government decision to erect a memo-

¹⁰ A. Čepulytė, G. Petrauskas, op. cit.; G. Petrauskas, A. Petrauskienė, *Archaeology of Lithuanian*; A. Petrauskienė, G. Petrauskas, op. cit., p. 236–238; A. Petrauskienė, G. Petrauskas, V. Vaitkevičius, op. cit.

¹¹ G. Vėlius, *Lietuvos partizanų bunkerio Balandiškio kaime tyrinėjimai*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2010 metais“, Vilnius 2011, p. 523–527; idem, *Partizanų vadavietės bunkerio Mėnaičių kaime tyrinėjimai*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2010 metais“, Vilnius 2011, p. 527–531; G. Vėlius, D. Žygelis, op. cit., p. 219–225.

¹² B. Gailius, *Partisan Warfare, European Democracy and Lithuania*, [in:] *Demokratija Lietuvoje. Pilietiškumas ir totalitarizmas XX amžiaus istorijos lūžiuose. Democracy in Lithuania. Civil Spirit Versus Totalitarianism at the Defining Moments of the Twentieth Century*, red. M. Jurkutė, N. Šepetys, Vilnius 2011, p. 323–333; N. Gaškaitė-Žemaitienė, *The Partisan War in Lithuania from 1944 to 1953*, [in:] *The Anti-Soviet Resistance in the Baltic States* (5th ed.), ed. A. Anušauskas, Vilnius 2006, p. 23–45; D. Kuodytė, *The Lithuanian Resistance Movement (1944–1953)*, [in:] *Lithuania in 1940–1991: The History of Occupied Lithuania*, ed. A. Anušauskas, Vilnius 2015, p. 270–308.

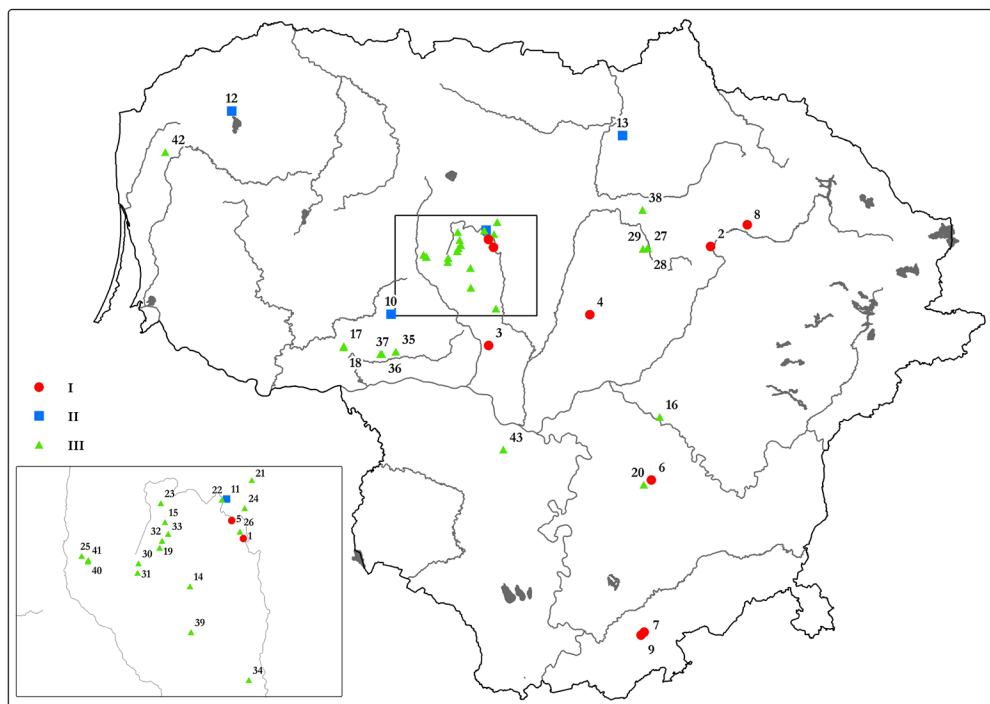


Fig. 1. Investigations of partisan bunkers in Lithuania: I – archaeological excavations; II – thorough surveys with a metal detector; III – recorded isolated finds: 1 – Balan-diškis, 2 – Butkiškis, 3 – Daugėliškiai Forest, 4 – Dovydai Forest, 5 – Minaičiai, 6 – Pagrenda Forest, 7 – Palkabalis Forest, 8 – Šimonys Forest, 9 – Zervynos (Palkabalis) Forest, 10 – Blinstrubiškiai Forest, 11 – Legečiai Forest, 12 – Pamedžiai (Montvidinė) Forest, 13 – Žadeikiai Forest, 14 – Bargailiai Forest, 15 – Butkiai Forest, 16 – Čiobiškis Forest, 17 – Globiai Forest I, 18 – Globiai Forest II, 19 – Grigalaičiai (Miškiniai), 20 – Jagėlonys Forest, 21 – Mažuoliai Forest, 22 – Mumšilis, 23 – Mūrai, 24 – Paberžiai Forest, 25 – Padubysis Forest, 26 – Pašušvys Forest, 27 – Raguva Forest II, 28 – Raguva Forest III, 29 – Raguva Forest IV, 30 – Sandrausiškė Forest, 31 – Sandrava Forest (Sandrausiškė), 32 – Šauktas Forest I, 33 – Šauktas Forest II, 34 – Šilainiai Forest (Pušynė), 35 – Šimkaičiai Forest I, 36 – Šimkaičiai Forest II, 37 – Šimkaičiai Forest III, 38 – Taruškos Forest, 39 – Tautušiai Forest, 40 – Tytuvėnai Forest I, 41 – Tytuvėnai Forest II, 42 – Voveraičiai (Aukštkalviai) Forest, 43 – Žiemkelis Forest. Drawing by Gediminas Petrauskas

rial, restore the barn and bunker underneath, and create a museum at the Miknius homestead.¹³

During the investigations of the partisan bunkers in Daugėliškių Forest, Minaičiai village and Balandiškių village, wooden structures were detected, the size, height, and construction type of the bunkers were determined, and various artefacts were found. The first archaeological excavations were met by Lithuanian historians and archaeologists with scepticism, as they raised considerable controversy over their relation to science of archaeology. However, the excavations revealed the potential of archaeology in the investigation of the Lithuanian Partisan War sites. Existing written records and oral narratives augmented with archaeological data, made it possible to revise, correct, and reinterpret it. For instance, the analysis of ammunition and fragments of hand grenades detected in the Daugėliškių Forest bunker and its environment provided an opportunity to reconstruct the attack on the bunker and the course of the battle, the approximate number of soldiers fired, their position, weapons, and components of the partisans' last shots made during the attack. Based on the discovered skull fragments, the exact place of death of two partisans, who committed suicide by gunshots to the temple, has been identified.¹⁴

Unlike the above mentioned investigations, the goals of archaeological research in the Zervynos (Palkabalis) Forest (Varėna District) were to search for and exhume the remains of partisans buried in the bunker. According to the Soviet security file, four partisans were killed during the MGB (Ministry for State Security) military operation on 20 May 1952. In 2012, burnt wooden structures were detected, also weapon fragments, ammunition, and household articles were discovered during an archaeological investigation of the bunker.¹⁵ Although no partisan bodies were found in the bunker, the burnt remains of the partisans, killed and later scattered by the beasts, were buried in a pit 15 meters away from the bunker.

¹³ R. Čekutis, *Memorialas Lietuvos partizanams*, „Genocidas ir rezistencija“ 2011, t. 1(29), p. 182–184; V. Juozevičiūtė, *Visuomenei pristatyta nauja ekspozicija Minaičiuose*, „Genocidas ir rezistencija“ 2012, t. 1(31), p. 227–228.

¹⁴ E. Kuckailis, *Neramus 1950 metų liepos 22 dienos rytas Daugėliškių miške*, „Karys“ 2010, nr 10, p. 51–53; 2011, nr 3, p. 43–44; A. Petrauskienė, G. Petrauskas, V. Vaitkevičius, op. cit., p. 84, 88–90.

¹⁵ V. Juozevičiūtė, *Archeologiniai tyrimai Varėnos rajone*, „Genocidas ir rezistencija“ 2012, nr 2(32), p. 199–201; A. Žilinskaitė, G. Vėlius, *Genio grupės štabo bunkeris Zervynų-Palkabalis miške*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2012 metais“, Vilnius 2013, p. 652–659.

In preparation for the restoration of the destroyed partisan bunker, archaeological research was carried out in Butkiškis village (Anykščiai District), while the goal of the investigations of the Šimonys Forest (Anykščiai District) and Palkabalis Forest (Varėna District) bunkers was to register the preserved wooden structures. The investigations provided valuable data on the construction type of the bunkers and their installation. The bunker in Butkiškis village was dug as a shaft, it had two rooms separated by a tunnel at a depth of 3 meters, with an uncompleted escape tunnel going outwards.¹⁶ The Šimonys Forest bunker consisted of one room with two tunnels on each side, one of which ended with a latrine, and a niche named as a chancery in the Soviet security file was discovered at the other.¹⁷ While during the archaeological investigation of the Palkabalis Forest bunker not only wooden structures surrounded by ramparts were found, but details of the battle between the partisans and the MGB soldiers were also reconstructed.¹⁸

The archaeological investigation of a partisan camp in the Žadeikiai Forest (Pasvalys District), for which no written records or oral narratives were available, made it possible to determine the chronology of the camp (period from 1944 to 1946) and define the zones of partisan work and leisure. Discovered ammunition showed that the bunkers were fired by the Soviet soldiers.¹⁹ The archaeological investigation of the surroundings of the Blinstrubiškiai Forest (Raseiniai District) bunker revealed that, contrary to what had been thought before, the battle did not take place at the bunker and their location but further away from it. Judging by the results of the coring method, the bunker was approximately 1.15 m deep and pine wood was used for its construction. The analysis of the discovered ashes and burnt wood fragments confirmed the historical data that the fire occurred during the attack on the bunker.²⁰

¹⁶ G. Vėlius, *Karaliaus Mindaugo (Kalnų) partizanų srities štabo bunkeris*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2014 metais“, Vilnius 2015, p. 592–600.

¹⁷ Idem, *Algimanto apygardos štabo bunkerio Šimonių girioje tyrimai*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2015 metais“, Vilnius 2016, p. 518–527.

¹⁸ Idem, *Dainavos apygardos Kazimieraičio rinktinės Vytauto tėvūnijos štabo bunkeris*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2016 metais“, Vilnius 2017, p. 507–514.

¹⁹ G. Petrauskas, V. Vaitkevičius, *Lietuvos partizaninio karo vietos Pasvalio ir Radviliškio rajonuose*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2019 metais“ (in press).

²⁰ G. Petrauskas, A. Petrauskienė, *Blinstrubiškių miško*; iidem, *Partizanų žeminės Blinstrubiškių miške aplinkos žvalgymai*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2017 metais“, Vilnius 2018, p. 632–641.

In addition, it is important to pay attention to thorough survey of the surroundings of partisan bunkers by a metal detector. During the investigation in the Legečiai Forest (Radviliškis District) and the Pamedžiai (Montvidinė) Forest (Plungė District), significant data on the battles were collected, the weapons used were identified, the disposition of the Soviet soldiers and directions of attack were determined, and the areas of partisan activities in the environment of the bunkers were defined.²¹

Since 2014, comprehensive field surveys have begun at the Lithuanian Partisan War sites. Although they covered almost the entire territory of Lithuania, the main focus was on searching for the traces of the Lithuanian partisan leadership (the surveyed bunkers mostly concentrated in Central Lithuania).²² Applying archaeological field surveying methods, the partisan bunkers and the surrounding trenches were measured and described, their coordinates were estimated, situation plans were made, and the surveyed sites were related to previously known and newly collected historical data. The metal detector was used in most of the surveyed sites, and the finds discovered during the small-scale research allowed to approve or deny the ties between the bunkers and the Lithuanian Partisan War, determine their approximate chronology, the reasons for abandonment, and finally answer the question whether the bunkers were attacked by the Soviet soldiers.

²¹ G. Petrauskas, *Lietuvos partizaninio karo vietų žvalgymai Žemaitijos nacionaliniame parke*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2019 metais“ (in press); G. Petrauskas, V. Vaitkevičius, *II Pasaulinio ir Lietuvos partizaninio karų vietų žvalgymai Jurbarko, Kauno ir Radviliškio rajonuose*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2018 metais“, Vilnius 2019, p. 595–598; iidem, *Legečių miško partizanų žeminės aplinka*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2019 metais“ (in press).

²² G. Petrauskas, *Radviliškio rajono savivaldybės teritorijos (Geručių k., Godų k., Grinkiškio mst., Gulbinų k., Noručių k., Paberžių k., Šilelių k., Pašušvio mšk., Užpelkių mšk., Radviliškio r., Baisogalos ir Grinkiškio sen.) archeologinių žvalgymų 2014 m. ataskaita*, Vilnius–Pašulniškės 2015, p. 9–11, 13–14, 16, 18–19. Manuscript Department at the Lithuanian Institute of History, Fund No. 1, File No. 7261; G. Petrauskas, V. Vaitkevičius, *II Pasaulinio*, p. 591–592, 594–595, 599; idem, *Lietuvos partizaninio*; G. Petrauskas, V. Vaitkevičius, A. Petrauskienė, E. Kuckailis, *II Pasaulinio ir Lietuvos partizaninio karo vietų žvalgymai*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2015 metais“, Vilnius 2016, p. 499–506; iidem, *Lietuvos partizaninio karo vietų žvalgymai*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2017 metais“, Vilnius 2018, p. 644–649, 652; iidem, *Lietuvos partizaninio karo vietų žvalgymai Radviliškio rajone*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2016 metais“, Vilnius 2017, p. 442–444; V. Vaitkevičius, *Žvalgymai Birštono, Prienų ir Raseinių rajonuose*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2018 metais“, Vilnius 2019, p. 564–565; V. Vaitkevičius, G. Petrauskas, A. Petrauskienė, *Archeologinių ir istorinių vietų žvalgymai 2016 m.*, „Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2018 metais“, Vilnius 2019, p. 544–550, 558–559.

In 2012, due to private initiatives to intensify the legal protection of the Lithuanian partisan bunkers, a working group, formed by Decree of the Prime Minister of Lithuania Andrius Kubilius, proposed to expand the required archaeological research by adding all the sites of the Lithuanian Partisan War (the mandatory investigation for the exhumation of the partisan remains was confirmed in 1992).²³ This provision is also intended to augment the Regulation on Archaeological Heritage Management; unfortunately, the proposal has not yet been legally approved.

Case Study: The Partisan Bunker in Pagrenda Forest

The story of the Pagrenda Forest bunker dates back to the early years of the Lithuanian Partisan War. In autumn 1944, partisans of the Ignotas Nasutavičius (codename Bondaras) platoon of the Didžioji Kova brigade installed three bunkers near their home in Pagrenda Forest. On 20 January 1945, one of the bunkers was betrayed and attacked. The article presents existing historical data compiled with the results of the archaeological excavation.

Historiography²⁴ and archival sources²⁵ abound with controversy about the Pagrenda Forest bunker and the death of partisans. A note prepared on the basis of Soviet security files in 2004 by the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania stated that seven partisans were killed in the bunker, these were: Bolius Česonis (born in 1927 in Stančikai), brothers Kajetonas Česonis (born in 1923 in Peliūnai) and Vladas Česonis (born in 1925 in Peliūnai), Vladas Juozupka (born in 1926?), brothers Albertas Seli-

²³ A. Petrauskienė, *Partizaninio karo vietos: įamžinimas ir įpaveldinimas nepriklausomoje Lietuvoje* (Doctoral dissertation), Vilnius University 2017, p. 83.

²⁴ S. Abromavičius, *Didžioji Kova*, Kaunas 1999, p. 123, 365, 382; idem, *Žalio Velnio takais*, Kaunas 1995, p. 49, 180, 193–194; S. Abromavičius, K. Kasparas, R. Trimonienė, *Didžiosios Kovos apygardos partizanai*, Kaunas 2007, p. 147, 498, 555, 582, 657; *Ar meni tų ažerų? Elektrėnų krašto tautosaka*, red. O. R. Šakienė, V. Vaitkevičius, A. Leskauskaitė, L. Sungailienė, Vilnius 2009, s. 198–199; *Laisvės kovotojų prisiminimai*, t. VII (2), red. R. Kaunietis, Vilnius 2010, p. 283; *Lietuvos gyventojų genocidas*, t. II: 1944–1947. A–J, red. B. Burauskaitė, Vilnius 1998, p. 339; *Lietuvos gyventojų genocidas*, t. II: 1944–1947. K–S, red. B. Burauskaitė, Vilnius 2002, p. 996; *Šiaurės rytų Lietuvos partizanų sritis. Atlasas. Biržų krašto partizanai, Didžiosios Kovos, Vėžio apygardos*, t. 1, red. E. Jankauskienė, Vilnius 2014, p. 61, 235.

²⁵ Lithuanian Special Archives (Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas, hereinafter LYA), Fund No. K-11, Inventory No. 1, File No. 3780, p. 38 (back side), 152; LYA, Fund No. V-5, Inventory No. 1, File No. 3803, p. 1, 2, 6, 7, 10, 14, 15.

uta (born in 1919 in Pagrenda), Jeronimas Seliuta (born in 1913 in Pagrenda), and Simonas Seliuta (born in 1917 in Pagrenda).²⁶ Same names also appeared on the monument next to the bunker pit.

Prior to archaeological expedition in the Pagrenda Forest in 2013, historical data on the bunker and killed partisans were revised. Also, direct as well as indirect witnesses of the event were sought for. Several sources confirmed that four partisans, killed on 20 January 1945, were brothers Albertas Seliuta, Jeronimas Seliuta, Simonas Seliuta, and an unidentified partisan. According to the Death Metric of the Kietaviškės Parish,²⁷ Vladas Juozupka (real name Ščerbavičius) was killed on 15 February of the same year, brothers Kajetonas Česonis and Vladas Česonis on 16 February, while Bolius Česonis, possibly named after Bernardas in the book, died on 9 March 1945.

The circumstances of the Pagrenda Forest bunker betrayal are not well known. According to Genovaitė Seliutaitė-Novikienė, the day before the attack on the bunker partisan Albertas Seliuta visited his relatives²⁸ (the Seliuta homestead was located in Stančikai village, a kilometre away from the bunker). Following the footprints of the returning partisan, Soviet soldiers were brought to the bunker. The other sources indicate, that the bunker was possibly betrayed by Bronius Kanapickas, former supporter of the Second World War Soviet partisans.²⁹ The Chekist military operation in the Pagrenda Forest was conducted by the 97th Border Brigade of the NKVD Army and Semeliškės *istrebiteli* (collaborant militia, from the Russian: destroyers). Two local inhabitants, Motiejus Urbonas from Pagrenda and Jonas Gutauskas from Gilūšis, were used in the operation by force.

According to historical data, the bunker was attacked by hand grenades and fired from machine guns. However, the curved bunker entrance created difficulties for soldiers to reach partisans, thus the opening was filled with straw and the entrance was set on fire. After straw had finished burning, Urbonas, ordered by the soldiers to enter the bunker, reported on the death of partisans.³⁰ Judging by the same data, all the brothers Seliuta were

²⁶ *Dėl archyvinių istorinių žinių*, Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania letter No. 22R-151 to Vytautas Griščenko, Head of the Department of Culture and Sports, Elektrėnai Municipality Administration, 1 October 2004.

²⁷ Documents are stored at the Kietaviškės Holy Trinity Parish Archive.

²⁸ The letter is stored at the Kietaviškės Elementary School Museum.

²⁹ S. Abromavičius, K. Kasparas, R. Trimonienė, op. cit., p. 147, 498.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 498.

shot down by the unidentified partisan who also later shot himself. The burnt partisan remains were pulled out of the bunker with the help of Gutauskas. Then, the deceased were transported to Kietaviškės by Gutauskas' carriage and laid in obscene poses for display at the gates of the Holy Trinity Church. Four days later, unnoticed by the Kietaviškės *istrebiteli*, relatives of the brothers Seliuta stole the bodies and secretly buried them in the Peliūnai village cemetery,³¹ while the fate of the unidentified partisan remains unknown. A few months later, an oak cross was placed but soon demolished near the destroyed bunker.

After the proposals of the working group formed by decree of the Prime Minister of Lithuania for the restoration of partisan bunkers, their management and maintenance have been made, the Trakai State Forest Enterprise and the Elektrėnai Municipality Administration, in co-operation with the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, had a discussion about the partisan bunker in Pagrenda Forest. As a result of this discussion, a decision was made to commemorate the bunker, clean up its environment, and also initiate archaeological research for scientific purposes.

Archaeological Excavation

The partisan bunker was located in Elektrėnai Municipality, Pastrėvys Eldership, in the north-western part of the Pagrenda Forest (quarter No. 61, plot No. 9), in a coniferous forest with deciduous tree undergrowth. The bunker was constructed on top of a massive 10 to 12 meter high, about 100 by 150 m in size clayey hill (H_{abs} 143.5 m). The hill was surrounded by marshy lowland to the west and south, and the Gudaraistis swamp was to the north of the hill. The place for the bunker was chosen almost on the edge of the forest. It was separated from the forest by a distance of only 200 to 250 meters, and according to the Soviet military topographic map of 1949 (scale M1: 25,000), there were eight households in Šuoliai and Vinđiuliai villages 250 to 550 meters north and west of the bunker (Fig. 2). The second bunker of the brothers Seliuta was located on the eastern edge of the Pagrenda Forest, 800 meters south-east of the investigated bunker.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 497.

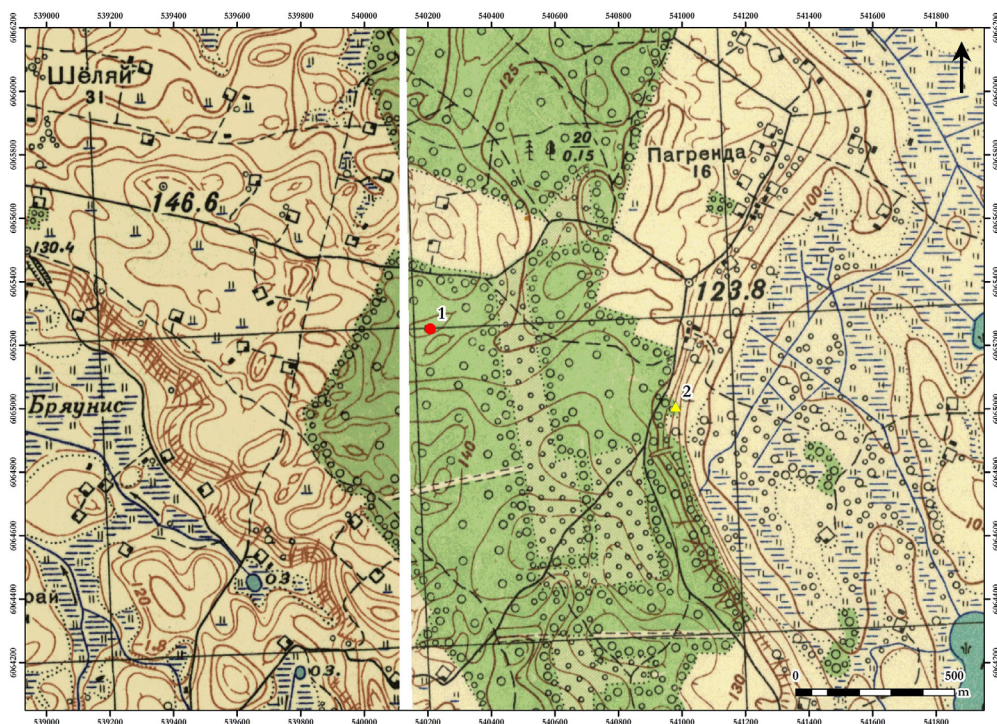


Fig. 2. A fragment of the 1949 Soviet military topographic map (scale M1: 25,000) showing the Pagrenda Forest and its surroundings: 1 – Pagrenda Forest bunker, 2 – second bunker of the partisan brothers Seliuta. Drawing by Gediminas Petrauskas

Before the archaeological investigation, an irregular pit of about 2.5 by 3 m in diameter and up to 1.1 m deep was found at the bunker site. On the north-western part of it, the outline of a 4 m long and 0.8 to 1 m wide curved entrance ditch was seen. Judging by a tree stump at the entrance, it was masked by a little fir tree. According to contemporaries, the bunker had a removable cover with a tree on it, and more trees grew on top of the bunker construction.³² In 1992, a metal cross was placed by partisan relatives at the southern end of the bunker pit,³³ another broken oak cross was found lying on the ground. Two decades later, in 2013, the partisans killed

³² Told by Jonas Grybauskas, born in Šuoliai village in 1930, residing in Pagrenda. Recorded by Danutė Gudeliienė in Pagrenda on 15 March 1991.

³³ S. Abromavičius, K. Kasparas, R. Trimonienė, op. cit., p. 498; *Šiaurės rytų*, p. 235.

in the Pagrenda Forest bunker were commemorated by state authorities as a concrete monument was built at the bunker.³⁴

The excavation of the Pagrenda Forest bunker was carried out from 20 June to 4 August 2013 by the archaeological expedition of the Kaišiadorys Museum. The goal of the investigation was to collect archaeological data about the bunker, the battle, and the killed partisans. A total of 28.8 m² were excavated and an area stretching 30 m from the bunker was surveyed with a metal detector while searching for traces of the battle.

During the investigation, the soil of the bunker was excavated with a trowel, then constantly checked with a metal detector, and where it was possible sieved using a 4 × 4 mm sieve. A cross-section of the bunker pit was recorded using two control lines intersecting perpendicularly. It should also be mentioned that the archaeological expedition sought both for scientific and educational purposes as pupils of the School of Young Historian of the Algirdas Brazauskas Gymnasium in Kaišiadorys were involved in the excavation. Moreover, based on the excavation results, the archaeological expedition of the Pagrenda Forest bunker has become the first to reconstruct the former image and outline of the bunker pit and its entrance.

The excavation revealed that the Pagrenda Forest bunker was dug out in a dark brown clay loam, gradually transforming into a brownish clay. The discovered curved entrance and wooden structures as well as the cross-sections of the bunker pit and its entrance enabled to reconstruct the construction type of the bunker. Judging from the detected structures, the bunker was 2.4 by 3.6 m in size, about 1.5 m high, and its entrance was about 60 cm wide (Fig. 3, 4). A 40 cm layer of soil was placed above the bunker, but there was no emergency exit from the bunker. As investigations of the Lithuanian partisan war have revealed, partisans usually had from 0.9 to 1.1 m² of space in the bunkers.³⁵ Thus, the Pagrenda Forest bunker could have been adapted for a living or temporary stay of no more than 8 or 9 partisans.

The partisans used little wood while setting up the bunker. The walls were made of undisturbed clay loam and clay, and no wooden structures were used to reinforce the walls. However, the walls slanted to the bottom of the bunker for stability. Fir ceiling joists of 14 to 15 cm in diameter (the

³⁴ *Šiaurės rytų*, p. 235.

³⁵ A. Petrauskienė, G. Petrauskas, V. Vaitkevičius, op. cit., p. 73; A. Petrauskienė, V. Vaitkevičius, op. cit., p. 66.

longest and best preserved being 3.3 m long) were discovered in the western, eastern, and southern walls of the bunker. Far shorter joists were found in the eastern and southern walls, but no significant remains of the wooden ceiling boards or a ventilation duct were recorded. A fragment of a 30 cm long and 20 cm wide board was uncovered on the northwest corner of the bunker, while the northeast corner of the entrance was marked by a stone of 15 to 19 cm in diameter. On the other hand, the wooden structures were heavily destroyed during the attack on the bunker (the soldiers were ordered to dig the bunker³⁶), and only small fragments of branch cores from the wooden boards remained due to the hard soil.



Fig. 3. View of the Pagrenda Forest bunker during the archaeological investigation, as seen from the south. Fragments of wooden structures are seen in the picture. Photo by Livija Ivanovaitė

A 4 to 5 cm thick base of dark grey clay was unearthed at the level of the floor at a depth of 2.2 m measured from the top of the pit. The bottom of the entrance, distinguished by the undisturbed soil, was recorded slightly

³⁶ Told by Jonas Grybauskas, born in Šuoliai village in 1930, residing in Pagrenda. Recorded by Danutė Gudalienė in Pagrenda on 15 March 1991.

higher comparing with the room of the bunker at a depth of 2.02–2.09 m. Many finds were detected on the floor, traces of burnt straw were also spotted here, and a distinct layer of it was detected at the entrance. All this confirmed that straw was struck into the entrance to cause a fire during the attack on the bunker.



Fig. 4. Section of the entrance to the bunker (distinguished by black soil), as seen from inside the bunker. Photo by Livija Ivanovaitė

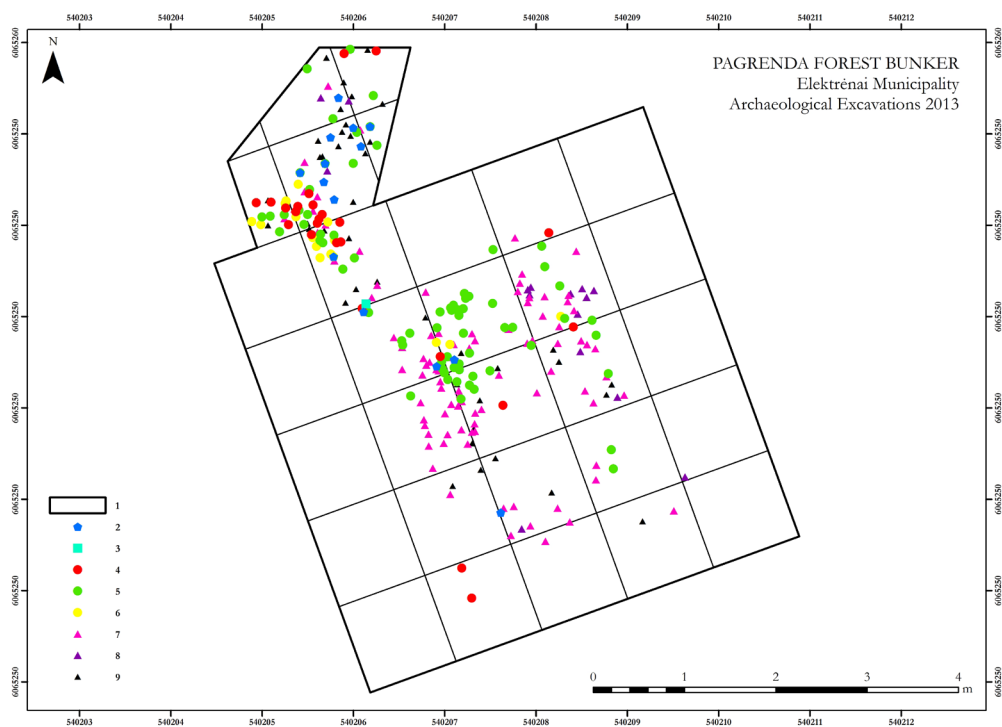


Fig. 5. Situation plan of the Pagrenda Forest bunker: 1 – excavated area, 2 – fragments of hand grenades, 3 – “Kampfpistole” flare gun, 4 – unfired cartridges, 5 – cartridge cases, 6 – bullets, 7 – glass shards, 8 – nails, 9 – finds of other type. Drawing by Gediminas Petrauskas

A total of 414 finds were discovered during the investigation of the Pagrenda Forest bunker (Fig. 5). The majority of the finds were ammunition: 41 unfired cartridge, 104 cartridge cases, and 24 bullets. As was typical for the beginning of the Lithuanian Partisan War, the partisans in the Pagrenda Forest were well armed with both German and Soviet weapons. Judging by the discovered ammunition, the partisans used the German MG-42 machine gun, the G-41 or G-43 semi-automatic rifle, the MP-38/40 submachine gun, besides, a loaded “Kampfpistole” flare gun was found on the floor of the bunker (Fig. 6). Although after the attack the bunker was searched by the NKVD soldiers or the *istrebiteli*, the flare gun was left unnoticed on its floor. The Soviet ammunition includes a semi-automatic rifle SVT-38/40 and a PPSH submachine gun. In addition, fragments and

details of at least three unidentified German hand grenades and one Soviet RG-33 hand grenade were found in the bunker, and an unexploded Soviet F-1 hand grenade was discovered a little further from the bunker.



Fig. 6. The “Kampfpistole” flare gun unearthed on the floor of the bunker. Photo by Livija Ivanovaitė

Unlike ammunition, other finds in the Pagrenda Forest bunker were scarce. A Wehrmacht uniform button, a small rosary fragment, a shoe insole, 29 factory nails, 2 bolts, broken glass shards, fragments of wire, pieces of tin, and a few animal bones were found during the excavation. According to the zooarchaeological analysis performed by Dr. Giedrė Piličiauskienė, the discovered animal bones belonged to a pig aged 8 to 10 months, a calf (?) of less than one year old, and most likely one more older bovine animal.³⁷ These animal bones provided indirect data on the diet of partisans

³⁷ L. Ivanovaitė, *Didžiosios Kovos rinktinės Ignoto Nasutavičiaus-Bondaro būrio partizanų bunkerio vietos (Elektrėnų sav., Pastrėvio sen., Pagrendos miškas) detaliųjų archeologinių tyrimų 2013 m. ataskaita*, Kaunas 2015, p. 88–89. Manuscript Department at the Lithuanian Institute of History, Fund No. 1, File No. 7206.

in the Pagrenda Forest bunker. Considering the fact that pigs were mostly slaughtered in late fall and winter, while calves a little bit earlier, it was assumed that the meat of the animals entered the table of partisans at a similar time.

Analysis and Interpretation

The archaeological excavation has provided significant data on the platoon bunker of Ignotas Nasutavičius in Pagrenda Forest and the course of the battle. Scarce wooden structures discovered during the investigation enabled to determine the size, construction, and installation type of the bunker. The Pagrenda Forest bunker was of 2.4 by 3.6 m in size and 1.5 m high corresponded to the prevailing general size of partisan bunkers and slightly exceeded it.

Primitive wooden structures are what distinguish the Pagrenda Forest bunker from the other investigated partisan bunkers. There were no wooden wall posts and boards in the bunker, a base of undisturbed clay was left at the level of the floor, and no traces of a ventilation duct or an emergency exit were found during the archaeological investigation. However, the curved entrance, covered with a fir tree, and tales of trees growing (planted?) on top of the bunker³⁸ reveal that the partisans were trying to mask the bunker from the outside. In the fall of 1944, at the time when the Pagrenda Forest bunker was constructed, Lithuanian partisans were still mostly in large squads, and underground bunkers of intricate construction suitable for long partisanship had not yet been installed. The fact that the partisans who used the Pagrenda Forest bunker often visited their relatives living nearby also speaks of a low alertness at that time.

In late 1944 and early 1945, people in Lithuania strongly believed in the upcoming war between the West and the Soviet Union (the Second World War was not over yet). Thus, the partisan bunker in Pagrenda Forest was created not as a permanent place for the partisans to live, but as a temporary hideout for the overwinter. Only a few months have passed since the installation of the bunker and its destruction during the Soviet attack on 20 January 1945. However, it remains unclear whether or not the bun-

³⁸ Told by Jonas Grybauskas, born in Šuoliai village in 1930, residing in Pagrenda. Recorded by Danutė Gudalienė in Pagrenda on 15 March 1991.

ker has been used all this time. The short life span of the bunker explains why apart from the Wehrmacht uniform button, the small rosary fragment, and the shoe insole no household and personal partisan items, or clothing details were found during the archaeological excavation. It must be said that during the early years of the Partisan War, Lithuanian partisans were mostly wearing civilian clothing, while Interwar period Lithuanian military uniforms as well as uniforms taken from the Wehrmacht soldiers were far less common.

Ammunition as well as fragments and details of hand grenades discovered in the bunker and its environment reveal that a fierce battle took place in the Pagrenda Forest. As Genovaitė Seliutaitė-Novikienė has written, *the missiles were rising above that hill, and it was so bright as during the fire.*³⁹ 40 unfired cartridges, 98 cartridge cases and 17 bullets were unearthed in the bunker and at its entrance, and another one fragment of an unfired cartridge, 6 cartridge cases and 7 bullets were found by a metal detector in the environment of the bunker. Having examined the ammunition and fragments of the hand grenades found during the archaeological investigation, Ernestas Kuckailis, Staff Sergeant of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, recreated the most likely course of the attack on the bunker.

The battle in Pagrenda Forest arose when the NKVD soldiers and the Semeliškės *istreibiteli* found the exact location of the bunker. Fragments and details of three unidentified German hand grenades and a Soviet RG-33 hand grenade, smashed into small fragments mainly on the bottom of a curved bunker entrance, revealed that at least four grenades have exploded inside the bunker. The German hand grenades were blown up by the partisans while breaking through the bunker or after losing their last chance to resist, and the Soviet hand grenade was thrown into the bunker by the NKVD soldiers after the first explosions had occurred. Another Soviet F-1 hand grenade did not work, thus it was thrown away by the soldiers further from the bunker. A distinct layer of burnt straw detected at the entrance confirmed the recollections of contemporaries that the fire occurred during the attack on the bunker.

According to historical data, an unidentified partisan shot down the brothers Seliuta and later shot himself in the bunker (as it was stated, a pis-

³⁹ Genovaitė Seliutaitė-Novikienė letter to Danutė Gudielienė of 3 February 1992. The letter is stored at the Kietaviškės Elementary School Museum.

tol was found in the hands of the partisan Albertas Seliuta⁴⁰). Since German ammunition and explosives were never used by the Soviets, the cartridge cases of the MG-42 machine gun, the G-41 or G-43 semi-automatic rifle, and the MP-38/40 submachine gun discovered in the bunker and its environment, suggests that one or two partisans succeeded in escaping the bunker. The loaded “Kampfpistole” flare gun found lying near the entrance to the bunker remained unused in the combat.

The ammunition discovered in the bunker and near its entrance evidence the intense firing on both sides during the battle. Judging by the cartridge cases, at least 24 shots were fired at the entrance to the bunker, and another 17 unfired cartridges did not work or were simply left unused. The bullets found at the entrance testify to at least 13 shots of NKVD soldiers fired in the direction of the bunker. On the other hand, cartridge cases discovered inside the bunker witness of at least 46 shots made by the resisting partisans (another 7 cartridges remained unfired). However, the question whether the three bullets hit the bunker from the weapons of the NKVD soldiers or should they associate with the last self-directed shots of the partisans has not been answered. Also, due to the contradiction in historical data, the total number of partisans involved and killed in the battle by the ambush of the NKVD soldiers on the southern and western outskirts of the forest remains unclear.

Conclusions

Since archaeological excavations of partisan bunkers and their environment began in 2010, the importance of archaeology in the investigation of the Lithuanian Partisan War has been revealed. Archaeological investigations corrected and supplemented existing evidence of written and oral history, provided new data on partisan bunkers, their construction and installation, living conditions of partisans and their deaths, battles and destruction of the bunkers. In addition, archaeological research presented a new, more comprehensive narrative of the Lithuanian Partisan War.

The platoon bunker of Ignatas Nasutavičius of the Didžioji Kova brigade in Pagrenda Forest was excavated by an archaeological expedition of

⁴⁰ Told by Jonas Grybauskas, born in Šuoliai village in 1930, residing in Pagrenda. Recorded by Danutė Gudalienė in Pagrenda on 15 March 1991.

the Kaišiadorys Museum in 2013. During the investigation of the bunker, the curved entrance and wooden structures were detected, their dimensions were determined, new data on the partisans killed in the bunker were collected, and the course of the attack on the bunker was reconstructed. As the Pagrenda Forest bunker dates back to the early years of the Lithuanian Partisan War, it was used by partisans from neighbouring villages. The primitive structures of the bunker suggest that it was set up as a temporary shelter for the overwinter.

The brothers Albertas Seliuta, Jeronimas Seliuta, and Simonas Seliuta as well as the fourth unidentified partisan were killed during a battle at the Pagrenda Forest bunker on 20 January 1945 (no data on the losses of the NKVD Army and the Semeliškės *istreibiteli* exist). At least four hand grenades were blown up and about 100 shots were fired in total during the fight. A distinct layer of burnt straw discovered at the entrance confirmed the fact that the fire occurred during the attack on the bunker. At least 46 cartridge cases found inside the bunker speak about the fierce resistance of the partisans, while fragments of three exploded German hand grenades and shots fired outside the bunker testify to an attempt to break through the bunker.

The Pagrenda Forest bunker is one of nine partisan bunkers investigated by archaeologists in Lithuania. The archaeological investigations of partisan bunkers, the methods employed, the comparison of archaeological data with written and oral history, its analysis and interpretation contribute to the development of archaeology of the Lithuanian Partisan War.

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Streszczenie

Eksploracja bunkrów: litewska partyzantka, archeologia i wykopaliska w lesie Pagrenda

Artykuł przedstawia aktualny stan badań na temat litewskich bunkrów partyzanckich, omawia ich wyniki oraz ujawnia znaczenie i potencjał poszukiwań archeologicznych w omawianym kontekście. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono bunkrowi plutonu Ignotasa Nasutavičiusa (pseudonim Bondaras), brygady Didžioji Kova w Lesie Pagrenda (gmina Elektrėnai), zbadanego przez ekspedycję archeologiczną Muzeum w Koszedarach w 2013 r. Odkryto zniekształcone wejście oraz drewniane konstrukcje, których rozmiar oszacowano, i w następstwie kolejnych eksploatacji odnaleziono ponad 414 cennych artefaktów. Na podstawie wyników wykopalisk, przeprowadzonej analizy oraz szerokiej interpretacji udało się odtworzyć sceny walk stoczonych pomiędzy litewskimi partyzantami a żołnierzami radzieckimi 20 stycznia 1945 r. Badania archeologiczne bunkra, zastosowane metody, porównanie danych archeologicznych ze pisаныmi i ustnymi źródłami historycznym, ich analiza i interpretacja przyczyniły się do rozwoju wiedzy oraz postępu w archeologii dotyczącej litewskiej wojny partyzanckiej.

Summary

Investigating Bunkers: Lithuanian Partisans, Archaeology and Excavation in Pagrenda Forest

The article presents the investigations of Lithuanian partisan bunkers, discusses their results, and reveals the significance and potentialities of archaeological research. Special attention is paid to the archaeological excavation of the platoon bunker of Ignotas Nasutavičius (codename Bondaras) of the Didžioji Kova brigade in Pagrenda Forest (Elektrėnai Municipality) carried out by the Kaišiadorys Museum archaeological expedition in 2013. The curved entrance and wooden structures were detected, their dimensions were determined, and a total of 414 finds were discovered during the investigation of the bunker. Based on the results of the excavation, its analysis, and interpretation, battle scenes between Lithuanian partisans and Soviet soldiers that took place at the bunker on 20 January 1945 were reconstructed. The archaeological investigation of the bunker, the methods employed, the comparison of archaeological data with written and oral history, its

analysis and interpretation contribute to the development of archaeology of the Lithuanian Partisan War.

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