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**Guerrilla Warfare as regional
expression of identity.
The example of Northern
Lithuania**

Historical, political, economic, mental changes – Russian and Soviet occupations, wars, globalization, emigration etc. – determined that the Lithuanians since XIX century prefer “identity of resistance”. The resistance by regular residents is very important to expression of identity.

Guerrilla warfare has many interpretations. In common understanding it is something between civil war and regular war. In academic community the understanding of guerilla warfare had had many different interpretations as well. Especially conception had many different views during the second half of the twentieth century. The division of the world during the time of Cold war in to Western democracies and Soviet totalitarianism was the key factor that guerrillas began associate with communist fighters. Based on the realities this approach was associated with with the military clashes in China, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Central Africa and so on. Of course it is clear, that such view is nothing than misunderstanding what guerilla warfare is. There is no reason to argue with such opinion. Therefore we may notice that guerilla tactic was used in Lithuania and Ukraine at the end of World War II, or Afghanistan in 80’s had nothing in common with fights for communism. It seems clear that the guerilla fights has nothing with the classic ideology. And the exceptions only proves the rule.

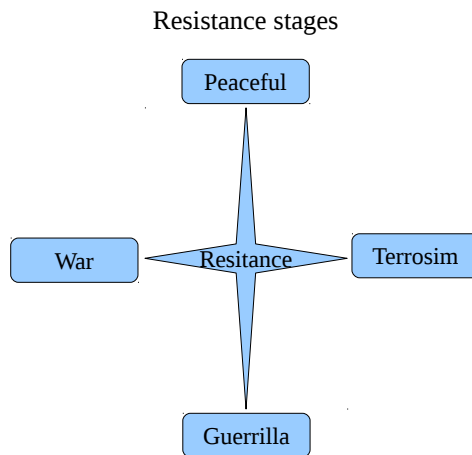
It is obvious that military conflicts that took place in the past and which could be attributed to the guerilla war, already known for centuries. As an examples we could mention some episodes of Independence War in US, Vendée

suppression in France during revolution, guerilla actions against French army during the Spanish occupation by Napoleon, Boer War and others.

The aim of the article – to find out how and in what forms, guerilla warfare was used in Lithuania during the uprising 1863–1864 as well as fight tactic used against Bermond forces in 1919. We will try to interpret the guerilla warfare as an expression of identity through history. The region of Northern Lithuania was chosen as area for research. The words guerilla and partisan in article are used as synonyms.

As far as we are working with the guerilla war, we have to keep in mind that this is mainly the militarily form of resistance. However, not every resistance war should be identified as guerilla war. As well as not every fighter should be recognized as guerilla. Theoretically every resistance of society to local regime or occupation is classified into four grades: peaceful (no violence), terrorism (some groups start using violence), guerilla warfare and finally – regular war. As we mentioned, usually resistance to regime starts peacefully – petitions, demonstrations, strikes and so on. In this case the situation is under the government's complete control and society is not ready for the outbreak of violence.

If desired changes were not completed or such minimal results don't meet the requirements some groups of resistance changing strategy and tactic. Actually it means that some opposition groups start using brutal actions and attacks against the government representatives, force structures, officials, attacks against administrative buildings, and even against usually innocent



Picture Nr. 1

countrymen. Every terror attacks are important to fighters. It is vitally important to draw attention to itself.

In case government failed to control the situation the fighters organize a guerilla squads. That means a big headache for government especially in case if guerillas are successful in holding under control a significant area. As a result they are strong enough and are able to create own army what means final stage of resistance – regular war. The latter is not very different from the war between two different countries.

In picture Nr. 1 we may see usual stages of resistance evolution scheme, known and applied since ancient times. The Scythians had used successfully *hit and run* tactic against army of Darius. The Romans conquered Spain's territory only after many centuries, since Iberia was not suitable for large armies, and the locals successfully applied the same tactics¹. Englishman spent two hundred years fighting in Wales hills till they reached control of the territory.

It is clear that guerilla warfare has no special features as exclusive ideology, social class, cultural or chronological characteristics. In this context it is far more important not what unites guerilla warfare or partisans over centuries and even not why or where such tactic was used to fight for, but *how*.

Guerrilla warfare can be described as a entire of tactical decisions as a whole. Trying to find out a unifying feature of guerilla warfare we have answer to the question: how small should fight against big, how weak should fight against strong? As guerillas stays on the weak side, the primary goals are to survive. The second task – to change the balance of power². According to their tasks there we have classic guerrillas fighting tactic – unexpected assault of enemies forces taking advantage of the opponent's weakness. Partisans lowers to opponent by weapons, numbers of fighters, training, but it is becoming the main reason why they are fighting as guerrillas. However, in attack partisans often overcomes their enemies. Hence, they wining single small battles. Mao Tse-Tung in his famous work "On Guerrilla Warfare" wrote:

"What methods should we select to ensure the conservation and development of our own strength and the destruction of that of the enemy? The essential requirements are the six listed below:

1. Retention of the initiative; alertness; carefully planned tactical attacks in a war of strategical defense; tactical speed in a war strategically protracted;

¹ W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla warfare: a historical and critical study*, New Jersey 2009, p. 3.

² *Ibidem*, p. 4.

tactical operations on exterior lines in a war conducted strategically on interior lines.

2. Conduct of operations to complement those of the regular army.
3. The establishment of bases.
4. A clear understanding of the relationship that exists between the attack and the defense.
5. The development of mobile operations.
6. Correct command³.

In order to maintain a tactical advantage, guerrillas must be able to quickly attack and be able to step back in quick. The surprise in this case is the main weapon.

Such guerilla tactics weaken the opponent, both in physical and moral sense. Guerilla activities are the most effective when they act together with regular troops. Possible the best example could be Spanish partisan actions acting with Wellington against French troops. The safe bases is the other fundamental necessity of existence of the partisans. Preferably, they are developed in hard to reach areas, such as swamps, mountains, jungles. However guerrillas can not successfully continue fighting if they are not able to cross border for asylum. Usually it is neutral country where after crossing border guerrillas get rest, help and weapons⁴.

Some of latter tactics were successfully used during the uprising of 1863–1864. As it was mentioned we going to focus on Northern Lithuania region. There should be mentioned that after an unsuccessful battle near Madeikiai (May 1863) rebels lost professional commandment (Zigmantas Sierakauskas, Boleslovas Kolyska, Juozapas Kosakovskis, Mykolas Stanišauskas were arrested by Russians) and after that regular military combat tactics were abandoned. In addition, it is worth to say that by April 1863 in Vilnius military district Russians concentrated military forces in 98 thousand. At the beginning of summer which increased to 123 thousand. Continue to fight in the open fields was meaningless⁵.

During the first half of 1863 more than 90 clashes and battles between insurgents and Russian troops took place in territory of modern Lithuania⁶. In the second half of the year the insurgents had fought against Russians more than 70 times. Of course some of the battles can not be identified as guerril-

³ M. Tse-Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, Washington 1989, p. 96.

⁴ W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla warfare: a historical and critical study*, New Jersey 2009, p. 6.

⁵ E. Aleksandravičius, A. Kulakauskas, *Carų valdžioje*, Vilnius 1996, p. 142.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 144.

las fights. Nevertheless we have found at least 16 which could be described as guerrillas fights. Guerrilla fighting tactic can be found already in the first phase of the revolt.

Table Nr. 1. The battles between insurgents and Russian troops in Northern Lithuania where guerrilla tactic was used (1863)⁷

| MONTH | LOCALITY | GUERRILLA WARFARE |
|--------|-------------------|--|
| April | Biliūniškės | April 2. Russian military unit fall into an ambush by J. Stanevičius squad. Killed many soldiers, the rebels withdrew. |
| | Raguva | April 9. Z. Sierakauskas squad organized ambush to infantry and uhlans squadron. Military unit has passed ambush, thereafter met rebel shots and began to retreat. Has been attacked from the side and front. The Russians retreated disorderly. |
| | Krakės ir Lenčiai | April 16. Kušleika squad attacked army units |
| May | Legečių miškas | May 1. M. Gedgaudo squad had fought with discovered Lieutenant Colonel Pushkin two Infantry Companies and half cavalry squadron. |
| | Šaukėnai | May 14. Šimkevičius squad attacked Russian forces at Šaukėnai. The army lost 13, insurgents – 2. Retreating insurgents destroyed the bridge over the Venta river. |
| | Užventis | May 21. United squads of J. Stanvečius, P. Leskauskas and A. Mackevičius organized ambush to Russian troops. |
| | Tytuvėnai | May 25. Rebels attacked Colonel. Narbutas military unit. After the battle joined squads of P. Leskauskas and Mackevičius. |
| June | Kelmė | June 7. Squads of Šimkevičius and Krasauskas fought with troops. Rebels attacked Russian forces and forced to retreat. |
| | Papilė | June 10. Dluskis squad came to Papilė and held battle with the army. Battle lasted 12 hours. The army attacked a few times, but the rebels were in good position and the Russians had to retreat with great loss. |
| | Linkuva | Squad led by A. Jachimavičius had fought with Russians. Russians were forced to retreat. |
| | Varniai | June 14. Rebels led by Bagdonavičius attacked the Russian troops at Varniai. |
| July | Širvučiai | July 16. J. Stanevičius squad with Bagdonavičius squad organized an ambush against Russian troops. |
| August | Mažuoliai | August 3. A. Bitė squad organized an ambush against Russian troops. |

⁷ O. Maksimaitienė, *Lietuvos sukilėlių kovos 1863–1864 m.*, Vilnius 1969.

Table Nr. 1.

| MONTH | LOCALITY | GUERRILLA WARFARE |
|-----------|-------------|---|
| | Žilaičiai | A. Bitė squad organized an ambush against Russian troops. |
| September | Šilagalis | September 28. Mackevičius squad organized an ambush and forced Russian troops to retreat. |
| October | Notiniškiai | A. Bitė squad organized an ambush against Dragoon Regiment transport. |



Picture Nr. 2. The battles between insurgents and Russian troops in Northern Lithuania where guerrilla tactics were used (1863)

Map was created using Подробный атлас Российской империи съ планами главныхъ городовъ. 1871, С. Петербург⁸.

Different situation was in Lithuania at the end of 1919. The partisans were acting together with Lithuanian army. And that was one of the main reasons

⁸ Подробный атлас Российской империи съ планами главныхъ городовъ, С. Петербургъ 1871.

why guerillas were so successful. First guerrillas appeared in Šiauliai region in the first days of November 1919. Temporary led by partisan headquarters in Šiauliai. Guerillas tasks were to enhance the idea of self-defense among population and in coordination with the Lithuanian army to expel Bermondists troops from Lithuania.

Bellow in table there are 24 successful clashes and acts by Lithuanian partisans against Bermondists.

Table Nr. 2. The clashes against Bermondst forces were guerrilla tactic was used (1919)⁹

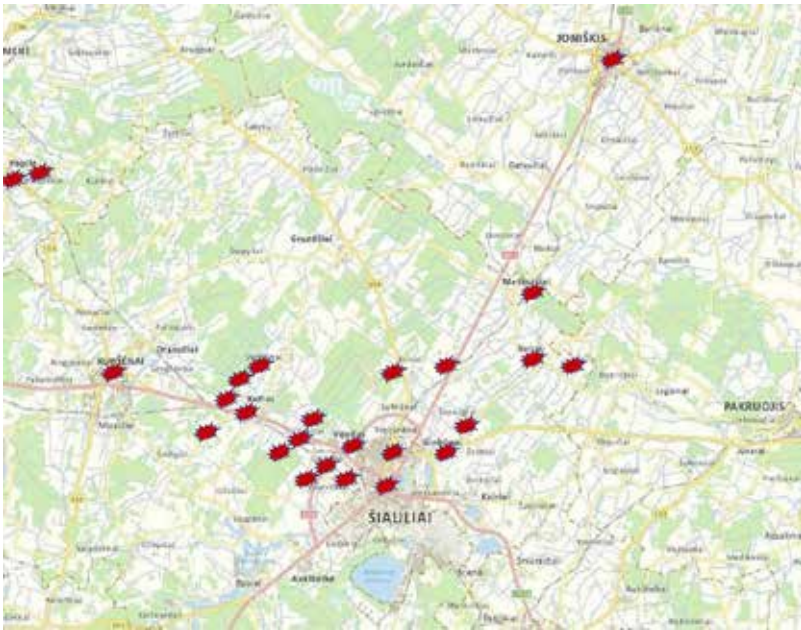
| MONTH | LOCALITY | GUERRILLA WARFARE |
|----------|------------|--|
| November | Pamūšis | November 15. Expelled Germans ¹⁰ . Take away 6 horses and 8 guns |
| | Serekiai | November 18. Killed 2 officers and 4 soldiers |
| | Naisiai | November 19. Expelled Germans. Take away 10 horses |
| | Kužiai | November 19. 2 Bermondists killed 1 injured |
| | Papilė | November 19. 3 Bermondists killed others expelled |
| | Amaliai | November 19. 3 Bermondists captured, one wounded, take away 6 horses |
| | Šiauliai | November 21. Partisans cut off telephone-telegraph wires and isolated town |
| | Bridai | November 21. Guerrillas disrupted railway at Kebliai |
| | Papilė | November 21. Dismantled railway bridge |
| | Joniškis | November 21. Dismantled railway bridge |
| | Kebliai | November 22. The partisans together with Lithuanian army troops stoped train from Jelgava. There was a battle with Bermondists |
| | Toliočiai | November 22. Bermondists expelled. One killed, one injured |
| | Meškuičiai | November 22. Guerrillas fired at train of Bermondists from Mintauja |
| | Amaliai | November 23. Bermondists atacked. 1 officer and several soldiers killed |
| | Lukšiai | November 23. Dismantled railway, stoped train with Bermondists |
| | Kuršėnai | November 23. Hold and captured 50 Bermondists |
| | Tuločiai | November 23. Saved from Bermondists captivity 6 locals |

⁹ V. Steponaitis, *Šiaulių rajono partizanai, Karo archyvas*, Kaunas 1925.

¹⁰ Germans – as written in source.

Table Nr. 2.

| MONTH | LOCALITY | GUERRILLA WARFARE |
|----------|-----------|---|
| | Lukšiai | November 24. Guerrillas fired at train |
| | Amaliai | November 24. Dismantled railway |
| | Vijoliai | November 24. Atacked and forced to retreat Bermondists squad |
| | Lukšiai | November 24. Killed 5 Bermondists, take away 4 horses, 2 machine-guns |
| | Gubernija | November 25. Taken over control of amunition stores |
| December | Ginkūnai | December 2. Ginkūnai mansion under guerrillas control |
| | Šapnagai | December 4. Bermondists squad expelled |



Picture Nr. 3. The clashes against Bermondist forces were guerrilla tactics used (1919) in place of conclusions

How could we describe a regular Lithuanian partisan? If we try to draw a statistical rebel of insurrection of 1863–1864 it will be a typical villager, really not military professional. For the most part hired farm worker. As of 1919 again, regular residents of Šiauliai region – workers, farmers, teachers. Therefore, it is important to emphasize – Homeland defender can become

anyone. Traditionally partisans today largely divided into anti Nazi or anti-Soviet. It is forgotten that Lithuanians held guerilla warfare against every aggressor – the Russians, Bermondists, Soviets. Partisan fighting as an expression of regional identity could be understood through the works of historians. Unfortunately there is established tradition in Lithuanian historiography to represent partisan struggle in the chronological boundaries limited within last century 5–6 decades (1944–1953). Without noting at all or only episodically other periods of guerilla war. And that conception should be changed in the future.

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Streszczenie

W powszechnym przekonaniu wojna partyzancka jest ważnym elementem tożsamości narodowej, dlatego warta jest uwagi nie tylko teoretyków sztuki wojennej, lecz także badaczy kwestii narodowych i politycznych. Artykuł przedstawia formę wojny partyzanckiej prowadzonej na Litwie podczas powstania styczniowego w latach 1863–1864 oraz pokazuje, jaka była taktyka walki oddziałów litewskich przeciwko siłom gen. P. Bermond-Awałowa w 1919 r. Rozważania zaczynają się od przedstawienia wojny partyzanckiej jako jednej z form oporu społecznego, by zakończyć się na dokładnym wyszczególnieniu najważniejszych starć podczas dwóch wspomnianych wyżej konfliktów zbrojnych. Artykuł kończy konkluzją, że partyzantem w obronie ojczyzny może być każdy i że na Litwie to pojęcie jest zazwyczaj niesłusznie wąsko kojarzone jedynie z walką w latach 1944–1945, choć tego typu działania były prowadzone w obronie litewskiej ziemi już dużo wcześniej.