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Landscape of Resistance. Traces of the Military Training of the Lithuanian Liberation Army in Plokštinė Forest, Samogitia, Northwestern Lithuania

Gediminas Petrauskas[a]

In recent years, fortified and open-type campsites of the Lithuanian Partisan War (1944–1953) have become the subject of archaeological research in Lithuania. The military training camp for soldiers of the Lithuanian Liberation Army (the so-called Vanagai, or Hawks) in Plokštinė Forest (Plungė district), Samogitia region, northwestern Lithuania was investigated by the author of this paper in 2019 and 2020. From 15 to 25 August 1944, in the face of the impending second Soviet invasion, the Plokštinė Forest camp was used to train the Samogitian youths in the basics of armed resistance. Archaeological field research carried out in the Plokštinė Forest allowed the determination of the exact location of the Vanagai military training camp and firearms training ground, the collection of archaeological data on the camp, its layout and equipment, as well as the everyday life of the Vanagai, and the weapons they used. This paper presents the results of the archaeological research of the Vanagai military training camp and their analysis. Based on the research data, the importance of the landscape in the selection of the campsite and firearms training ground, their spatial layout and the identification of activity areas are discussed.

KEY-WORDS: Lithuanian Liberation Army, Lithuanian Partisan War, military training, Plokštinė Forest, landscape, campsites, modern conflict archaeology, metal detector survey

INTRODUCTION

Wars and armed conflicts leave tangible and intangible traces on the landscape. Above--ground and underground military structures, mass graves and archaeological finds

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bear witness to past wars. On the other hand, however, the locations of battles, camps and armed conflicts in general have often been determined by the landscape and natural environment, as well as by the presence of water bodies, railways, roads and other human-made features in the area. The archaeology of World War II is a growing sub-discipline of modern conflict research, and the landscape of conflict, its diversity, the environmental consequences of warfare, and the impact on soldiers and civilians is a subject of increasing interest (Carr 2009; Passmore *et al.*, 2013; 2016; Tunwell *et al.*, 2015; Shepherd 2016; van der Schriek and Beex 2017; van der Schriek 2020; Saunders and Cornish 2021).

The landscape of modern conflicts is defined by the terrain, surface cover, traces of human activity and various physical features of a given area. Military, defence, resistance, occupation, oppression, urban, forest and many other types of landscape are distinguished according to their nature, purpose and use (Carr 2009; Woodward 2014; Asadpour 2016; Reinsone 2016; Souza 2019). Conflict sites are undoubtedly an integral part of modern conflict landscape.

Over the past two decades, a large number of World War II sites have been investigated in Europe, North America and the Pacific, including fortifications, bunkers and shelters, military supply facilities, prisoner of war, forced labour, internment, concentration and extermination camps, battlefields, mass graves, etc. (Gaffney *et al.*, 2004; Gilead *et al.*, 2009; Theune 2010; Banks 2011; Price and Knecht 2012; Early 2013; Tunwell *et al.*, 2015; Camp 2016; Mushynsky *et al.*, 2018; Konczewski 2020). Archaeological research has documented the darkest and deadliest moments of the War, revealing the spatial patterns of the sites and their relationship to the surrounding landscape. The regular army and partisan camps, which have left distinct traces in the landscape, testify to the variety of military structures and the daily life of the soldiers and partisan fighters who used them (Kirby *et al.*, 2013; Mikhajlov and Podgornaia 2018; Seitsonen 2021).

The archaeology of modern conflicts is also a new and growing field of Lithuanian archaeology (Petrauskas and Petrauskienė 2020). Over the last decade, archaeological research on modern conflict sites has increased significantly, and attention has been paid to the fortified and open-type campsites of the Lithuanian anti-Soviet Partisan War (1944–1953). Fortified campsites consist of a complex of bunkers and dugouts, surrounding ramparts, trenches and machine-gun nests. Underground food and weapon caches, as well as water wells are often preserved in such campsites. In contrast to fortified camps, open-type campsites usually have no external relief features and their location can only be inferred from archaeological, archival and oral history data (Petrauskienė and Vaitkevičius 2017: 63–64).

Since 2016, four fortified and two open-type campsites have been investigated in Lithuania, but most of the surveys were limited to small-scale metal detector

prospection (Petrauskas 2020a). Among all the campsites, the fortified Žadeikiai Forest camp (Pasvalys district) and the open-type Dulgininkai Forest camp (Druskininkai Municipality and Lazdijai district) are the most noteworthy. The examination of the Žadeikiai Forest camp, where two dugout pits surrounded by a ring of 28 foxholes have preserved, revealed the partisans' working and resting area. Moreover, archaeological research has shown that the dugouts were attacked by Soviet troops. All this demonstrates how archaeological data can change the perception of the "silent" Lithuanian Partisan War sites, which are not directly linked to any historical events or narratives (Petrauskas and Vaitkevičius 2020: 461–465). A partisan fireplace and a dugout a little further away from the camp were discovered in the Dulgininkai Forest camp used in the spring of 1945, and the remains of a hydroelectric power station located in the Dulgelė stream were recorded. The hydroelectric power station consisted of a pine stump with a metal structure that was half-submerged in the water and was supposed to generate electricity when batteries were dead (Petrauskas *et al.*, 2018: 641–644).

In the summer of 1944, as the Red Army units were pushing the Wehrmacht westwards through Lithuania, thousands of Lithuanian Liberation Army (LLA) soldiers (the so-called Vanagai, or Hawks) gathered in the forests of Samogitia, Western Lithuania. One of the gathering places of the Vanagai was the Plokštinė Forest on the south-eastern shore of Lake Plateliai. Remembering the repressions that took place during the Soviet occupation of Lithuania in 1940 and 1941, and in order to muster a force to avoid their repetition, a military training camp of the LLA was organised in Plokštinė Forest in August 1944. It was a training camp where the Samogitian youths were trained in the basics of armed resistance in the face of the impending Soviet invasion (Kasparas 1999: 122; 2002: 96–97).

Archaeological field surveys carried out in 2019 and 2020 in the Plokštinė Forest (Plungė district) allowed the determination of the exact location of the Vanagai military training camp and firearms training ground, the collection of archaeological data on the camp, its layout and equipment, as well as the everyday life of the Vanagai, and the weapons they used (Petrauskas 2020b: 452–460; 2021). This paper presents the results of the archaeological research and their analysis. Based on the research data, the importance of the landscape in the selection of the campsite, its spatial layout and the identification of activity zones are discussed. This paper examines the Plokštinė Forest military training camp through the lens of the landscape and aims to contribute to the understanding of the training of the local population for armed anti-Soviet resistance.

WORLD WAR II AND THE LITHUANIAN LIBERATION ARMY

The Republic of Lithuania, which restored its statehood and declared independence in 1918, lasted for twenty-two years. In March 1939, Nazi Germany handed Lithuania an ultimatum to surrender the Klaipėda region (Memelland), depriving Lithuania of its western territories with the Baltic Sea port of Klaipėda (Memel). Just over a year later, on 15 June 1940, the Red Army entered Lithuania and the country was occupied by the Soviet Union. However, on 22 June 1941, when Nazi Germany launched a war against the Soviet Union and opened the Eastern Front, the Wehrmacht invaded Lithuania.

Taking advantage of the changing geopolitical situation, the outbreak of the Soviet Union's war with Nazi Germany and the desire to restore independence from the Soviet Union, the Lithuanian Activist Front (in Lithuanian: *Lietuvių aktyvistų frontas*) launched a nationwide armed uprising (known as the June 1941 Uprising; for more see Brandišauskas 1998; 2006: 15–19; 2015: 129–133). During the uprising, the then capital Kaunas was liberated, the Lithuanian national flag was hoisted on the tower of Vilnius Gediminas castle, and battles were fought in many smaller towns. Moreover, the Provisional Government of Lithuania was formed and the restoration of independence was proclaimed, but after a week the active fighting in Lithuania ended.

A number of different unarmed resistance organisations were formed during the Nazi occupation of Lithuania (Bubnys 2003; 2015: 207–211). Among these, special attention is given to the LLA, which was founded in Vilnius on 13 December 1941 by Kazys Veverskis (codename Senis; 1913–1944), a former student of the Kaunas Military School (though he did not graduate), and a student of law at the Vytautas Magnus University and Vilnius University (Kasparas 2002). It was the largest secret military, national and political organisation of unarmed anti-Nazi, and later also armed anti-Soviet resistance in Lithuania. It mainly sought by military means to resist the occupation and restore an independent state of Lithuania with its capital in Vilnius and the Klaipėda region (Kasparas 1994; 2002; Kuodytė 2015: 271–272).

The structure of the LLA was similar to that of the inter-war Lithuanian Army, replicating its hierarchical, territorial and functional principles, but also not avoiding new structural forms (Kasparas 2002). The entire territory of Lithuania was divided into military districts, which in turn were organised into detachments, companies, platoons and divisions. From July 1944, the LLA consisted of two sectors – operational and organisational. The former were armed fighters, known as Vanagai, while the latter were legally residing sedentary fighters (often gymnasium students) who, as reserves of the operational sector, were responsible for providing the operational sector with transport, food, stationery, clothing and medical supplies, as well as communications and information (Kuodytė

1995; Kasparas 1999: 113–114; 2002). However, the LLA operated in difficult underground conditions, and not all decisions of the leadership reached the lower organisational structures and their members.

As the Eastern Front broke through and the Red Army pushed the Wehrmacht westwards, due the imminent second Soviet invasion, the LLA declared martial law on 1 July 1944 and ordered LLA members who were able to bear arms to join the Vanagai detachments. At that time, there may have been around 10,000 Vanagai in the forests of Lithuania. The retired Brigadier General Motiejus Pečiulionis (codename Miškinis; 1888–1960) was given the authority to organise and lead the partisan resistance (Kuodytė 1995; Gaškaitė *et al.*, 1996: 124–125). Pečiulionis was the only General from the inter-war period of Lithuania who fought in the ranks of the Lithuanian partisans (unpublished data by Dr Darius Juodis).

At the beginning of July, the Red Army entered Lithuania, and on 13 July captured Vilnius, the historical capital of Lithuania. In response to the changes taking place at the front, the LLA Vanagai were ordered to retreat to Samogitia, and if they failed to resist the Soviets, to continue the struggle underground (Gaškaitė *et al.*, 1996: 125–126; Kasparas 1999: 103–104). In the Soviet-occupied territory, units of repressive structures were established, forced mobilisation of Lithuanians into the Red Army was announced, battalions of *istrebiteli* (collaborant militia, from the Russian: destroyers, exterminators) were formed, and part of the farms were nationalised and their size limited (Kasparas 1999: 163–165; Kuodytė 2015: 274–277). Soviet repression also included mass arrests and imprisonment, deportations to Siberia, and various punitive operations, often resulting in mass executions of civilians (Gaškaitė-Žemaitienė 2006: 27; Anušauskas 2015). The Red Army occupied the entire territory of Lithuania on 30 January 1945, after almost seven months of fighting.

The Lithuanian Defence Committee, established in August 1944, became the political headquarters of the LLA. This committee, like the LLA General Staff, was composed of a number of young and enterprising officers, in addition to its founders Veverskis and Pečiulionis. After the formation of the political and military command staff, and the approval of the programme and statutes, the joint leadership of the anti-Soviet resistance for the whole Lithuania was established (Kasparas 1999: 117–118). The LLA General Staff drafted normative documents regulating the activities of the partisans, which had a significant impact on the further partisan resistance, and organised the training of the Vanagai.

By disseminating the instructions of the headquarters and organising partisan units according to the LLA structural scheme, the members of the LLA, many of whom had served in the inter-war Lithuanian Army, had belonged to the Lithuanian Riflemen Union, or had fought in the June 1941 Uprising (cf., Noreika 2015), became

active freedom fighters in a decade-long Lithuanian Partisan War that lasted into the 1950s. Until March 1945, the LLA was the most important organisation uniting the armed anti-Soviet resistance. However, the influence of the LLA on the resistance was uneven. The LLA was mainly active in Samogitia and Aukštaitija (Eastern Lithuania), while its role in the rest of Lithuania was much weaker (Kuodytė 2015: 280–281). After the arrest of Pečiulionis and several members of the General Staff in November 1945, the LLA ceased to function as a unified structure, and in 1944–1946 the members of the LLA, together with the representatives of other organisations of the anti-Nazi underground, formed the basis of the partisan units (Kasparas 2002).

MILITARY TRAINING IN THE PLOKŠTINĖ FOREST

In the summer of 1944, as the Eastern Front was moving westwards, the Plokštinė Forest became one of the largest gathering places of the LLA Vanagai in Samogitia. From 15 to 25 August 1944, a military training camp was held on the south-eastern shore of Lake Plateliai, where young men from Samogitia (mainly students) with no military experience were trained in military tactics, formation, shooting, weapon maintenance, handling explosives and other fundamentals of war and armed resistance (Kasparas 1999: 122; 2002: 96–97). The Vanagai were trained by Lithuanian officers, based on the experience and example of Soviet partisans operating against the Nazis (Gečiauskas 2010: 13). The claims made by some camp participants that the training lasted three weeks are considered unfounded (Kasparas and Paulauskaitė 2008: 221–222).

On 25 August, the Vanagai were sworn in by Brigadier General Pečiulionis, and Lieutenant Juozas Barzda (codename Klevas; 1913–1944) was appointed camp commandant. According to contemporaries, even Veverskis, the founder of the LLA, visited the military training camp in Plokštinė Forest. Although some camp participants tend to exaggerate the number of trainees to more than 800 or even several thousand (Beresnevičius 2012: 225; Kaunietis 2014: 181; Patamsis 2015: 68), it can be assumed that the number of Vanagai participating in the camp was initially between 400 and 500, and later decreased to 250. The Vanagai were divided into companies, platoons and sections, and the camp was subject to military discipline, with great attention paid to uniforms and neat appearance. Some of the Vanagai, however, wore plain civilian clothes in the camp, as can be seen in photographs taken during military training (Kasparas 1999; 2002; Kasparas and Paulauskaitė 2008). At the end of the training, the Vanagai were ordered to disperse, cross the front line and organise armed partisan resistance in their home areas.

The LLA military training camp in the Plokštinė Forest and the training itself are considered to be a significant event at the beginning of the Lithuanian Partisan War. Its importance has been stressed by researchers of the history of the LLA (Kasparas 1999; 2002), as well as by the participants of the military training camp who have left their memories (Kasparas and Paulauskaitė 2008; Beresnevičius 2012; Kaunietis 2014; Patamsis 2015: 67–70; Klimas 2018). Published works, including collections of memoirs of camp participants, provide a wealth of information on the size, layout, equipment, duration and organisation of the camp. However, the recorded individual accounts are usually contradictory, and details of the camp and military training are often only general. The Plokštinė Forest camp has not been the subject of extensive research to date.

According to the recollections of the participants of the military training, the Plokštinė Forest camp was equipped with a kitchen and a wooden-framed outdoor latrine with a back support (a 5–6 m long, 0.7 m wide and 1 m deep ditch). The Vanagai used horse-drawn carts (the horses were kept in a nearby homestead), one or two anti-tank guns mounted on two wheels with spokes and a low-powered Russian truck (*polutarka*) were taken, as well as 40 kg bundles of explosives were brought to the camp from the military intelligence school in Germany. The guarded camp had a military tarpaulin headquarters tent secured with ropes and nails, but the Vanagai themselves used both German fabric tents and tents made of cut poles covered with spruce branches and straw. In addition, two dugouts were set up in the camp and another had to be built on the slope of Lake Plateliai to serve as a temporary detention centre for the camp.

Historical data reveal that the firing exercises took place outside the Vanagai camp. This must have been on the small Jakumas stream flowing into Lake Plateliai, and the shooting targets were hanging on a high slope of the stream (on the side of the homestead of the farmer Stanislovas Mickevičius), where thick old pine trees were growing (Kasparas and Paulauskaitė 2008; Beresnevičius 2012). For example, Justinas Stonys from Plateliai took part in the exercises twice and fired a total of 10 shots with a Czechoslovakian Mauser rifle made in 1924 and decorated with Lithuanian symbols (Kasparas and Paulauskaitė 2008: 260–261). The witness of bullet holes in the trunk of the pine tree that was the target of the shooting reinforce the image of the pine tree that was "shot" during the exercise. All this indicates that the target area must have been littered with hundreds of cartridge cases and bullets fired by the Vanagai.

Finally, it should be noted that during the exercise, three or four shots were fired from an anti-tank gun at a target in Pliksalė, one of the islands of Lake Plateliai (Kasparas and Paulauskaitė 2008: 260). Although it is not clear whether these weapons

were stored near the homestead of Mickevičius or at the firearms training ground, the recollections of the camp participants suggest the variety of trophy weapons collected by the Vanagai from the front and their preparation for large-scale partisan resistance.

LANDSCAPE OF THE MILITARY TRAINING CAMP

The military training of the Vanagai in the Plokštinė Forest is associated with the hill, known as Vanagas Hill (in English: Hawk Hill) by contemporaries and camp participants, and the commemorations that were held on it in recent decades. In 2004, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the camp, a commemorative sign was erected on Vanagas Hill due to the efforts of the partisan war chronicler Alfonsas Beresnevičius (2012: 64–65). However, the military training and the camp have not yet received due attention from researchers, local authorities and heritage institutions.

The military training took place in a coniferous forest with an undergrowth of deciduous trees on the southeastern shore of Lake Plateliai. The Vanagai camp was located on a massive elongated hill on the edge of a hilly plateau and its eastern foothills (Fig. 1). The hill is 25 by 60 m in size, its northern, western and eastern slopes are sloping, 2.5–3 m high, while the southern slope is moderately steep, reaching 13.5 m high. Vanagas Hill is over 400 m away from the lake, and the same distance separates it from the forest road leading to the *Didieji Vartai* (in English: Great Gate) of Lake Plateliai (to the south and southeast). The marshy 60 to 160 m wide lake strait is situated about 150 m west and southwest of Vanagas Hill (Fig. 2).

Today, the Vanagai campsite is located in a wooded uninhabited part of the Samogitia National Park. However, according to the 1943 Soviet military topographic map (scale 1:50,000), the forest was cleared 100 m east and southeast of the camp during World War II. Unlike today, there were three homesteads 300 to 600 m from the Vanagai camp, one of which was occupied by the family of partisan liaison Razma (information from Antanas Vaškys, a resident of Plokščiai village, April 2019). These homesteads must have played an important role in providing food and water to the camp. The fact that farmers from the neighbouring villages provided the camp with food and water is also mentioned by the participants of the military training camp themselves (Kasparas and Paulauskaitė 2008: 259; Beresnevičius 2012: 51, 84, 227).

Two dugout pits measuring 4.8 by 5 m and 5 by 5 m in size and 1.7–1.9 m deep, with traces of entrance trenches, have preserved on Vanagas Hill. The remains of a rampart can be seen next to one of the dugouts, and its half-filled pit is likely to be an incompletely collapsed dugout roof. Although some authors claim that the dugouts housed the headquarters and commandant's office of the military training camp

Fig. 1. LLA military training camp (Vanagas Hill), seen from the east. 2019. Photo: G. Petrauskas.

(Patamsis 2015: 67–68), the recollections of the camp participants indicate that the first dugout was used for storing food and the second one for weapons (Beresnevičius 2012: 62, 83–84, 227). The location of the temporary detention centre in the camp remains unclear. Two single foxholes were dug at the northern foot of Vanagas Hill and on its southern slope. Four more massive irregularly-shaped training trenches surrounded by ramparts and with traces of an entrance were located at the southern foot of the hill.

The firearms training ground is an integral part of the military training camp landscape. According to the camp participants, it was built on the high bank of the Jakumas stream. The name of this stream, which is commonly used by the local population, comes from the surname of the forest owner Jakumas. The coordinates of the firearms training ground given in the literature are erroneous (Beresnevičius 2012: 62), and its true location was revealed by archaeological field survey carried out in the Plokštinė Forest (the distance between the indicated and the exact location is about 220 m; Petrauskas 2021). It was here, on the right slope of the Žemgrindas stream, that stands a pine tree used as a shooting target, a photo of which graced the cover of the collection of memories compiled by the partisan war chronicler Beresnevičius (2012).

As archaeological research has shown, the Vanagai shooting practice took place on the picturesque coniferous forested edge of the second terrace of Lake Plateliai, as well as on the slope of the right bank, the top of the left bank and in the valley of the meandering Žemgrindas stream (146.5–152 m a.s.l.; Fig. 3). The firearms training ground was bounded to the north by the high escarpment of the lake terrace and to the southeast by marshy lowland. The stream, which is only 600 m long, has slopes of up to 5 m in the north, but the terrain gently slopes downwards in the south where the high banks end.

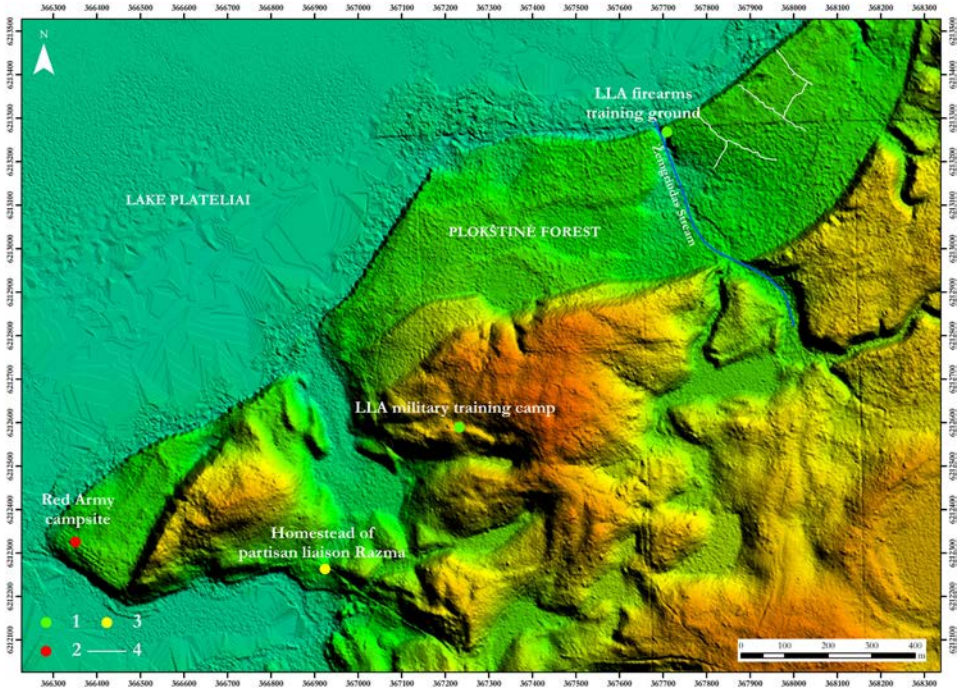

Fig. 2. Situation plan of the LLA military training camp in the Plokštinė Forest: 1 – LLA sites (August 1944), 2 – Red Army site (late 1944), 3 – homestead of partisan liaison, 4 – World War II trenches. Graphic elaboration: G. Petrauskas.

The southern part of the firearms training ground is crossed by a forest road which, according to the 1948 Soviet military topographic map (scale 1:25,000), connected the firing range with the Vanagai training camp 800 m to the northeast. This was the most direct and convenient route from the Vanagai camp to the firearms training ground, and vice versa. Another forest path followed the edge of the terrace, crossed the firearms training ground and joined this road. Furthermore, as can be seen from this and the aforementioned 1943 Soviet military topographic map, the natural environment of the firing range was somewhat different from the present day. During World War II, a large amount of forest was cleared on the right bank of the Žemgrindas stream near Lake Plateliai.

Two dugout pits measuring 3 by 4 m and 2.3 by 3.2 m with traces of ramparts have been preserved on both sides of the forest road on the left bank of the Žemgrindas stream. The dugouts are associated with firing exercises, but their purpose, whether

Fig. 3. North-northwestern view of the LLA firearms training ground, seen from the mouth of the Žemgrindas stream. 2020. Photo: G. Petrauskas.

for training or storage, is unknown. They are separated by a distance of 48.5 m and are about 15 m and 70 m respectively from the stream bank. The firing exercise is also evidenced by 13 square and elongated curved training foxholes. Eight foxholes were dug on the left bank of the Žemgrindas stream (foxholes spaced at intervals of 2.85–12.7 m), and one foxhole was located on the edge of the second terrace of Lake Plateliai. Two foxhole pits have been preserved to the north and one to the south of the forest road, while another foxhole was dug on the right bank of the stream on the same side of the road.

After the camp was abandoned, in October 1944, Red Army troops settled on the shores of Lake Plateliai, thus adapting and reusing the lakeside landscape once again. Three to four rows of dugout pits can be seen on a promontory of the lake called *Beržų ragas* (in English: Birch Horn), with a total of about 100 dugouts. This Red Army camp and the Vanagai military training camp were separated by 800 meters. In addition, another similar Red Army camp was set up on the shore near the *Mažieji Vartai* (in English: Small Gate) of Lake Plateliai, 1.85 km to southwest of the Vanagai camp. According to Stanislovas Jundulas (b. 1943), a commemorator of the Lithuanian Partisan War, up to 1,000 Red Army dugouts and tents may have been dug and erected on the shores of Lake Plateliai (Kaunietis 2014: 201), but their exact number is unknown.

The trench lines recorded on the right bank of the Žemgrindas stream near the Vanagai firearms training ground, and marked on the 1948 map with a conventional symbol in the cleared forest area, are also associated with the Red Army units. These trench lines extend from the southeastern edge of the second terrace of Lake Plateliai to the southeast. The distance between the Vanagai firearms training ground and the nearest trench line (in the east–northeast) is only 75 meters. All this reveals how the landscape of the southeastern shore of Lake Plateliai was adapted and transformed by two different armies for their own defensive purposes in the course of a few months in 1944.

MATERIALITY OF MILITARY TRAINING IN THE PLOKŠTINĖ FOREST

In order to collect scientific data on the military training of the LLA in the Plokštinė Forest, archaeological field surveys were carried out at the Vanagai military training camp in September 2019 and at the firearms training ground in September 2020 (Petrauskas 2020b: 452–460; 2021). Archaeological research has become an integral part of the freedom fights remembrance camps organised by the Directorate of the Samogitia National Park for Lithuanian university students and local schoolchildren.

During the investigation of the Vanagai military training camp and firearms training ground, archaeological data was collected on the camp equipment, weaponry, and the everyday life of the Vanagai, as well as the territory of the firing exercise and the camp areas were identified. At the military training camp, a metal detector was used to examine a 120 by 120 m area on Vanagas Hill, its slopes and foothills (almost 1.5 ha in total). The survey of the firearms training ground covered an area of 100 by 190 m (about 1.8 ha in total) on both sides of the Žemgrindas stream. All metal detector signals were verified during the investigation, and the detected structures and finds were recorded with a total station. This allowed the reconstruction of a detailed plan of the military training camp and firearms training ground, and provided new insights into the Vanagai training that took place in August 1944 in the Plokštinė Forest.

The military training camp yielded 503 finds, the majority of which consisted of construction elements (250 finds, or 49,8% of the total), as well as ammunition and related artefacts (137 finds, or 27.3%). The construction elements included bolts, nuts, hinges and other finds, while the factory-made nails scattered throughout the campsite (228 finds) can be attributed to tents supported by nailed poles. Judging by the ammunition found at the campsite, the Vanagai had a stock of cartridges of various calibres, the largest of which were Soviet 7.62×54 mm R (88 finds) and German 7.92×57 mm Mauser (27 finds). In addition, the Vanagai camp contained isolated Soviet 7.62×25 mm TT and 5.6mm, German 9×19 mm Parabellum, French 7.5×54 mm MAS and British 7.7×56 mm R cartridges (mostly unfired rounds), as well as a Soviet 30 mm signal cartridge base and different stripper clips.

The archaeological research also uncovered a Soviet Mosin rifle bore brush, an unexploded Soviet F-1 hand grenade (without fuse), and a German Eihandgranate 39 hand grenade fuse. Two artillery shell fragments found at the foot of Vanagas Hill testify to the World War II front that passed through the Plokštinė Forest, and a German 37×249 mm R cartridge case is associated with the anti-tank gun mentioned by the participants of the military training camp, which was taken over from the Wehrmacht (Beresnevičius 2012: 51, 75).

Fig. 4. Finds discovered in the LLA military training camp: 1 – Soviet parachute ring, 2 – German gas mask case belt clip, 3 – part of a Wehrmacht officer's cockade, 4, 5 – Wehrmacht uniform shoulder insignias, 6 – Wehrmacht uniform tunic button, 7, 8 – Wehrmacht uniform trouser buttons. Photo: G. Petrauskas.

The pieces of equipment provide information about the inventory of the Vanagai camp. They consisted of a Soviet parachute ring, ammunition belt buckles, a German gas mask case belt clip and a tent flysheet ring (Fig. 4). Uniform and footwear items included a part of a cockade from a Wehrmacht officer's uniform, shoulder insignias, tunic and trouser buttons, and a shoe heel plate. According to the camp participants, the Wehrmacht uniforms were worn by forcibly mobilised and escaped Lithuanian soldiers (Beresnevičius 2012: 228).

Among the household and personal items found in the Vanagai camp were broken glass bottles, a red enamel jug, a spoon, a fork, a part of an axe head, multi-functional, folding and scale knives, files, a key, a German lighter ring, a galvanic cell cover, fragments of a tablet bag, pouch or other leather article, a clothes hook, a devotional medal and 16 coins of different denominations of the Republic of Lithuania, the Soviet Union and the Third Reich. The parts of a star and a bicycle or motorcycle wing badge suggest that the Vanagai had a bicycle in their camp. Meanwhile, a comb, a German razor, a shaving brush made from a Mauser cartridge case and a German porcelain hygiene jar with remnants of Vaseline are evidence of the attention to cleanliness and neat appearance.

A further 369 finds were collected from the firearms training ground, of which 87.3% (322 finds) were unfired rounds, spent cartridge cases and bullets. The Soviet ammunition included 15 7.62×54 mm R cartridge cases and 106 bullets, an unfired 7.62×25 mm TT round, 48 cartridge cases and 39 bullets, as well as a 26 mm signal cartridge base. Judging by the recovered ammunition, the 7.62×54 mm R cartridges could have been fired from both the Mosin rifle and the SVT semi-automatic rifle, while the 7.62×25 mm TT cartridge cases indicate 46 shots from the PPSh submachine gun and 2 shots from the TT pistol.

The German ammunition consisted of 5 7.92×57 mm Mauser cartridge cases and 11 bullets, a 9×19 mm Parabellum cartridge case and nine bullets, and a shortened 7.65 mm cartridge case. One of the 7.92×57 mm Mauser cartridge cases manufactured in 1916 was unfired and its powder had been removed. In addition, three French 7.5×54 mm MAS and two British 7.7×56 mm cartridge cases were recovered at the Vanagai firearms training ground. No bullets of these calibres were found or could not be identified due to their poor condition and other circumstances. Many of the bullets were flattened, bent and badly rusted, making it impossible to identify their calibre. They included 43 rifle-type bullets and two pistol or submachinegun-type bullets, while another 35 bullets were not identified due to fragmentation.

In contrast to the military training camp, construction elements accounted for only 7.3% of the finds, and household and personal items were also less numerous and varied. Among the latter were a multi-functional knife with a handle decorated with plastic scales, a rubber part of a radio receiver(?) antenna, a part of a harmonica, an unidentified lock, a fastener and a wheel axle. Moreover, a letter from a printing press with a mirror image of the number 2, a staple, part of a horseshoe and many other artefacts were found during a metal detector survey at the firearms training ground. The relationship between these finds and the training of the Vanagai remains unclear.

DISCUSSION

The archaeological research of the LLA military training camp and the firearms training ground has provided significant knowledge about the camp and the Vanagai who took part in the training, filled the gaps in the historical data, and significantly supplemented and clarified the sparse accounts of the camp participants. The structures and finds recorded during the research and their distribution have enabled the precise location of the camp and the firing exercises, as well as the definition of its size, boundaries and individual spaces. Moreover, the survey provided documented

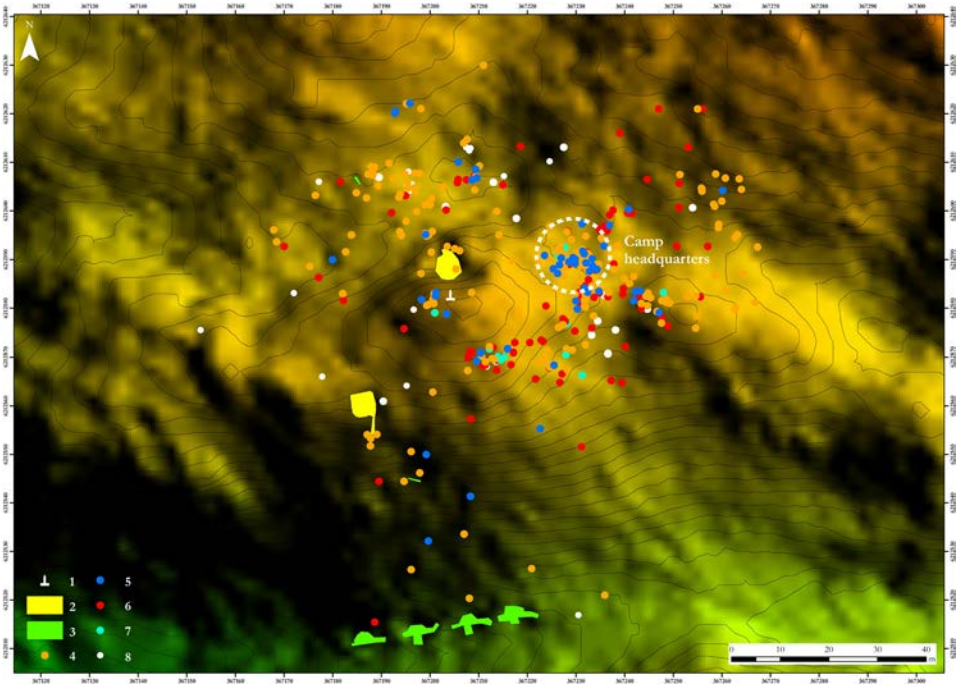

Fig. 5. Situation plan of the LLA military training camp: 1 – monument, 2 – dugout pit, 3 – trench pit, 4 – nails and other construction elements, 5 – household items, 6 – ammunition, 7 – weapons and parts of uniforms, 8 – other finds. Graphic elaboration: G. Petrauskas.

data on the weapons used by the Vanagai and the shots fired during the exercise. All this helps to answer some questions and raise new ones.

Military training camp

Contrary to the prevailing narratives about the Vanagai camp and military training, only 30 isolated finds were found on the highest part of the hill and near the food storage dugout, which did not form any significant assemblage (Fig. 5). The western part of the hill also appeared completely empty of finds. The largest assemblage of finds from the campsite was recorded in a 30 m long and 10 m wide strip at the eastern foot of Vanagas Hill, in a 5 by 10 m area on the southeastern edge of the hill and in a 7 by 10 m area on the western part of another 1 m high hillock east of Vanagas Hill. This assemblage contained 236 finds, representing 47% of the total finds from the military training camp, with the two largest clusters of finds recorded in the northern part

of the eastern foothill. Both clusters were particularly rich in nails, unfired rounds and household items. A number of nails and unfired rounds were also recovered at the southeastern foot of Vanagas Hill, but almost no household items were found here. At the northern foot of the hill, nails also made up the bulk of the finds.

The construction elements were scattered throughout the military training camp. There were 98 nails (42.6% of the total) collected at the eastern foot and southeastern edge of Vanagas Hill, and a further 49 nails (21.3% of the total) at the northern foot of the hill. Single nails were also present near the dugouts and foxholes. Nails were scattered around the campsite, both singly and in groups of 11–12 nails. There is no doubt that these nails, and especially the accumulations of them, indicate the presence of tents supported by nailed poles. In total, at least four groups of tents can be discerned in the campsite. The hinge found next to the weapon storage dugout was probably used to secure the dugout door or window.

Ammunition was collected throughout the entire area of the Vanagai camp, and was most densely scattered at the eastern foot of Vanagas Hill. Unfired rounds accounted for 78.4% of the total ammunition, some of which, such as a cluster of 7.62×54 mm R cartridges (contents of one ammunition box) found on the northwestern slope of the hill, are considered to be ammunition stocks. Unlike the unfired rounds, spent cartridge cases and bullets were mainly scattered around the area of the military training camp and not in the main assemblage of ammunition. The cartridge cases and bullets recovered during the investigation indicate that at least 15 shots were fired, confirming the accounts of the camp participants that the firing exercise took place outside the camp.

The equipment and uniform items found at the campsite were concentrated in two locations at the eastern foot of Vanagas Hill and at its southeastern edge. With the exception of a Soviet parachute ring, all the finds in this group belong to Wehrmacht uniforms, such as a part of a cockade, shoulder insignias, buttons, a gas mask case belt clip and a tent flysheet ring. This suggests that parts of at least two different Wehrmacht uniforms were found in the camp, one of which was worn by an officer during World War II. This uniform probably ended up in the Vanagai camp as a war trophy.

Household items were also scattered mainly over an area of 9 by 11 m at the eastern foot of Vanagas Hill, with only isolated finds in other parts of the military training camp. It was in this part of the camp that 10 coins were recovered, in addition to numerous nails, pieces of equipment and uniforms, and a further three coins were found on the western slope of a nearby hillock. All this indicates that the eastern foot of Vanagas Hill was the central part of the camp. Although some camp participants recall that the camp command post was located in a separate tent in the higher part of the forest (Beresnevičius 2012: 228), a small 4 by 7 m area in the northern part of the find assemblage is considered to be the headquarters of the Vanagai camp. This

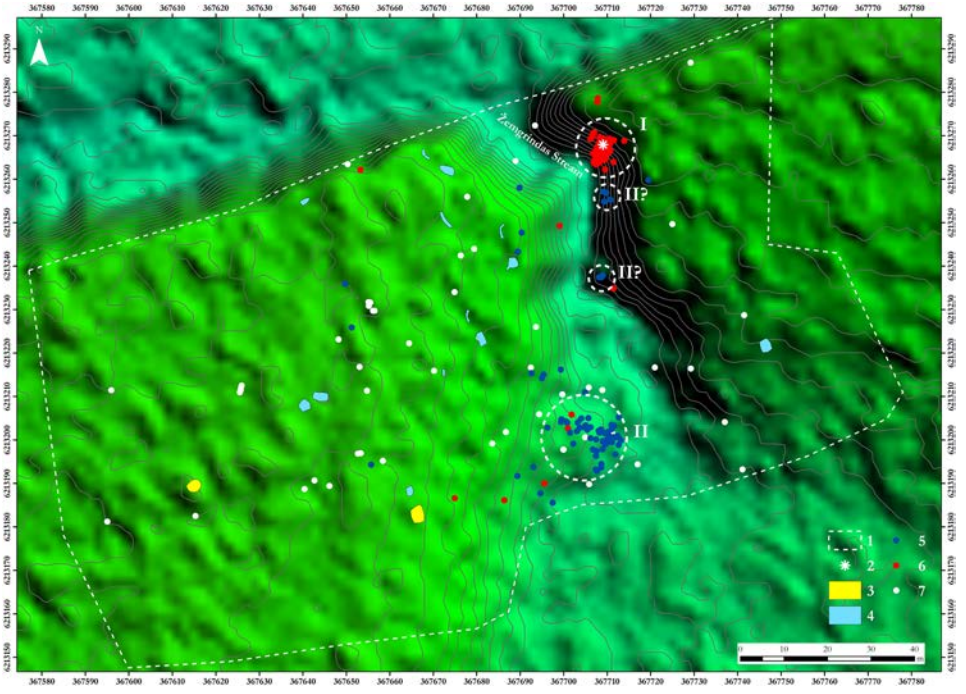

Fig. 6. Situation plan of the LLA firearms training ground: I – cluster of bullets (target), II – cluster of cartridge cases (firing position), 1 – surveyed area, 2 – pine tree (target), 3 – dugout pit, 4 – foxhole, 5 – cartridge cases, 6 – bullets, 7 – other finds. Graphic elaboration: G. Petrauskas.

is evidenced by eight coins, a Mosin rifle bore brush, Wehrmacht uniform tunic and trouser buttons, a comb, a multifunctional knife, etc.

No dugouts, trenches, or foxholes were excavated in the campsite. However, the areas empty of finds indicate that no significant activity or fighting took place in the vicinity of the food and weapons storage dugouts. Although the massive irregularly-shaped training trenches were located in a deep and well-camouflaged area at the foot of Vanagas Hill, surrounded by high hills, it was strategically unsuitable for defence. This suggests that the trenches were dug for training purposes, and each of them was probably installed by a separate Vanagai platoon.

Firearms training ground

Investigation of the Vanagai firearms training ground revealed the largest assemblage of finds on the right bank of the Žemgrindas stream (Fig. 6). On the high slope of the

stream, in an area of 7 by 8 m, 238 finds were found (64.5% of the total number of finds from the site), the majority of which consisted of intact, bent and badly flattened bullets. Most of the bullets were of Soviet origin, with 97 bullets classified as 7.62×54 mm R and 38 bullets as 7.62×25 mm TT. The German ammunition consisted of 11 7.92×57 mm Mauser bullets and 8 9×19 mm Parabellum bullets. The calibre of the remaining 80 bullets could not be determined due to corrosion, poor preservation and fragmentation.

As many as 91.8% of the bullets (214 out of 233) were recovered in a small area of 3.5 by 4.8 m on the slope of the stream in front of and next to the pine tree (as seen from the left bank of the stream; Fig. 7). Bullets were also found in broken pieces of wood, bark and even embedded in the trunk of the pine tree at a height of between 0.2 and 1.4 m, while some of the bullets found deep in the ground had remnants of wood on their surface. The southwestern and western sides of the pine trunk were riddled with bullets and had numerous bullet marks. Although metal detector signals can be detected throughout the entire pine tree, the exact number of bullets that penetrated deep into the trunk is unknown.

The composition of the find assemblage and the number of fired bullets found suggest that the pine tree was the target of the Vanagai firing exercises. The pine tree was fired at with different weapons and many shots were fired directly at it. The single bullets detected on the opposite side of the pine tree must also be related to the firing exercises. Based on the fact that no other similar bullet deposits were recorded during the survey, the Vanagai had only one target at the firing training ground. The U-shaped staple found near the pine tree was probably used to attach the target to the trunk.

The age of the pine tree is about 120 to 150 years, and at the end of World War II it must have been one of the oldest trees (45 to 75 years old) on the right bank of the Žemgrindas stream (consultation by Donatas Grigalauskas and Juozas Bernius, forester and deputy forester of Plateliai Forest Inspectorate, September 2020). At that time, the forest on this side of the stream had been cleared and only a few mature trees remained. The trunk of the pine tree has a circumference of 1.75 m (measured at a height of 1.3 m), but the "wounds" left by the bullets have practically stopped the tree from growing. The trunk grew mainly on the other side of the tree, which was not fired at by the Vanagai. The irregular crown of the pine tree is also an indication of impaired growth.

Many of the bullets recovered on the right bank of the Žemgrindas stream were not found on the surface itself, but at a depth of 10–25 cm or even deeper. However, a cross-section carried out near the pine tree refuted the initial assumption that a protective embankment may have been built at the Vanagai firing target. No layer

Fig. 7. Pine tree (target area), seen from the north-northwest, from 2020. Photo: G. Petrauskas.

of poured sand was observed near the trunk of the pine tree, indicating that the bullets lodged deep in the slope of the stream had been covered with loose hillside sand during the 75 years after the firing exercise.

The second find assemblage from the Vanagai firearms training ground was recorded in the valley of the left bank of the Žemgrindas stream. Although the boundaries of this assemblage were conditional and less clear than those of the first assemblage, 57 finds (15.4% of the total) were recovered in an area of approximately 14 by 16.5 m, bounded by a forest road and a meandering stream. In contrast to the first assemblage, 91.2% of the finds consisted of cartridge cases (52 finds). These were mainly 7.62×25 mm TT (33 finds) and 7.62×54 mm R (12 finds) cartridge cases, but the assemblage also included single unfired rounds, spent cartridge cases and bullets of other calibres, as well as a multi-functional knife and a part of a harmonica. This was obviously the main firing position of the Vanagai.

During the firing exercises, different types of weapons were fired at a target on the left bank slope of the Žemgrindas stream. These included a Mosin rifle and a SVT semi-automatic rifle (7.92×54 mm R), a Mauser rifle (7.92×57 mm Mauser),

a MAS-36 rifle (7.5×54 mm MAS) and a PPSh submachine gun (7.62×25 mm TT). In addition, a spent cartridge case from a 9×19 mm pistol was also found here. The firing position was approximately 65–75 m from the target and the firing trajectory followed the bottom of the stream valley surrounded by high hills. All this shows that the firing position was well thought out. However, the PPSh cartridge cases found raise doubts about the excessive distance between the firing position and the target. When firing this type of weapon, the target should be no more than 15–50 m away from the shooter.

Single cartridge cases were also detected in other areas of the Vanagai firearms training ground. Two clusters of 7.62×25 mm TT cartridge cases were located on the right bank slope and in the valley of the Žemgrindas stream. They were separated from the firing target by a distance of 10.85 m and 30 m respectively. Although only nine spent cartridge cases were found here, the topography of the site and the short distance to the target suggest that many of the cartridge cases may have been collected after the exercise, and that the significance of this site was greater than the number of cartridge cases found today.

The ammunition collected at the firearms training ground allowed us to recreate the scale and intensity of the Vanagai firing exercises. The recovered cartridge cases and bullets suggest that at least 226 shots were fired during the firing exercises (35 small unidentified bullet fragments are not included in this figure). The most shots were fired from a Mosin rifle or a SVT semi-automatic rifle (106 shots) and a PPSh submachine gun (46 shots). At least 11 shots were fired from a Mauser rifle, nine shots from a pistol of unknown type, at least three shots from a MAS-36 rifle, and two shots each from a TT pistol and a Lee-Enfield rifle. Due to the poor condition and fragmentary nature of the bullets, the origin of another 45 shots remained undetermined.

Soviet 7.62×54 mm R and 7.62×25 mm TT cartridges, as well as German 7.92×57 mm Mauser and 9×19 mm Parabellum cartridges, which were widespread in the military training camp and firearms training ground, were the main types of ammunition used by the Lithuanian partisans (Zikaras 2013: 219–234). Until the end of World War II battles in Lithuania and for many years to come, replenishing this ammunition did not pose any major difficulties for the partisans. The British Lee-Enfield rifle may have been left over from World War I or the Lithuanian Wars of Independence (1918–1920), and the discovery of the rifle's cartridge cases at the firearms training ground and the unfired round at the military training camp confirm the direct links between the two sites. The French MAS-36 rifle was not common among the Vanagai and Lithuanian partisans in general, but ammunition of this weapon has been found in several investigated bunkers and dugouts of the Lithuanian Partisan War (Petrauskienė *et al.*, 2017; Petrauskas and Petrauskienė 2018).

A comparison of the number of bullets found at the firing target with the number of cartridge cases recovered at the firing positions revealed a distinct lack of cartridge cases (233 bullets and 76 cartridge cases were collected in total). The fact that spent cartridge cases remain lying near the site of the shot, and some bullets ricochet, do not reach the target, and simply do not remain in the archaeological context, makes the lack of cartridge cases even more obvious. The Vanagai firearms training ground is the first case in Lithuanian Partisan War research where the number of bullets found exceeded the number of cartridge cases. It is therefore concluded that, as a matter of routine, in order not to leave evidence or for any other reason, a large number of spent cartridge cases were collected and the area was cleaned up at the end of the firing exercises.

Similarly to the military training camp, no finds related to the firing exercises were found near the dugouts and foxholes dug at the firearms training ground. This indicates that the training trenches were not used for defence purposes and that no significant activity took place in this part of the Vanagai training ground. Only future archaeological research could reveal their true purpose and construction.

CONCLUSIONS

The military training of the LLA Vanagai held in the Plokštinė Forest in Samogitia on 15–25 August 1944 marked the preparation for the anti-Soviet armed resistance and, in a way, witnessed the beginning of the decade-long Lithuanian Partisan War. Extensive archaeological surveys carried out in the Plokštinė Forest in 2019 and 2020 have identified the exact location of the military training and firing exercises, and have provided valuable data on the layout and equipment of the camp, as well as on the everyday life and weaponry of the Vanagai. In setting up the military training camp, the Vanagai cleverly adapted and transformed the hilly landscape of the shoreline of Lake Plateliai, shaping the space of the camp and defining its activity areas. The training and firing exercises that took place in a separate part of the military training camp are evidenced by the dugout pits, massive training trenches and foxholes, as well as the trunk of the pine tree riddled with bullets and hundreds of archaeological finds scattered throughout the area.

The military training camp in Plokštinė Forest is the first archaeologically investigated Lithuanian Partisan War site, dating back to the origins of the partisan war itself. It is also the most comprehensively researched Lithuanian Partisan War campsite to date. The study of the Plokštinė Forest camp has revealed how the landscape was adapted and used to shape the camp and the military training site, in order to prepare

the youth of Samogitia for the armed resistance. In order to uncover the phenomenon of the Lithuanian Partisan War, which has its origins in World War II, landscape studies need to be continued. Landscape archaeology is undoubtedly a very promising and highly potential approach of modern conflict research.

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