

Polish-Lithuanian 1863–1864 Insurrection against the Russian tsar

IN 1863–1864 THE POLES AND THE LITHUANIANS ROSE UP IN REVOLT AGAINST THE FORCED INCORPORATION OF THEIR HOMELAND INTO THE CZARIST RUSSIAN EMPIRE. NO ONE WAS THE FIGHTING MORE BLOODY, FIERCE, OR PROLONGED THAN IN LITHUANIA.



Artur's Grottger's painting — The Battle Polonia, 1863 Series.

THE START: STUDENTS' MOVEMENT IN WARSAW

On three occasions, the Lithuanian people rose up against the Russian government that had been imposed upon them after the Russian, Prussian, and Austrian 1795 partition, which eradicated the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the map of Europe. Immediately following the partition, Lithuanian and Polish military officers who refused to accept Russian occupation fled to France



and continued their struggle against the hated Russians in the ranks of Napoleon's Imperial French Army. As Napoleon marched through Lithuania during his 1812 Russian Campaign, thousands of Lithuanians joined his army, and many continued to fight for him until his final defeat at Waterloo. They also rose up again in bloody insurrections in 1831 and 1863-1864 in vain attempts to restore freedom and liberty to Lithuania.

The 1863–1864 Polish-Lithuanian insurrection began with young Polish and Lithuanian students in



Insignia of the 1863-1864 Insurrection with Poland's, Lithuania's and Ukraine's coat of arms.



1863 Polish-Lithuanian Insurrection Relic Badge, which was usually worn on a hat — Gaidis Collection.



Warsaw talking of rekindling the failed 1831 uprising. This student movement soon spread to the countryside as peasant farmers suffering under oppressive taxation and military induction reached their saturation point. At first, the Czarist police had no problem dealing with isolated student demonstrations or farmers destroying property; but as the number of confrontations escalated, the police were increasingly forced to call upon the Russian military to help. On January 22, 1863, the dissidents in Warsaw formed a secret Polish National Cent-

ral Committee to provide some type of coordination to the growing insurrection. Eventually, this committee proclaimed itself to be a Provisional National Government of Poles and Lithuanians and issued appeals to their Lithuanian brothers to take up arms. Their call was quickly answered by Lithuanian students and farmers, who immediately formed their own revolutionary bodies all across Lithuania.

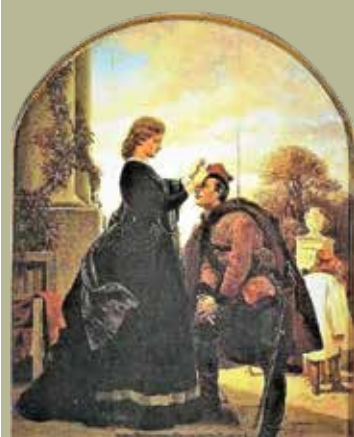
At first, these formations consisted of only two or three likeminded students or peasant farmers talking among themselves about

what could be done about some local irritant. As their numbers grew, these small groups expanded and began to unite with other like-minded individuals in surrounding communities that grew to hate all things Russian. During the early days of the Czarist occupation, many Lithuanian nobles readily accepted Russian rule as a way to preserve their privileged status, frequently leading to their alienation from the local ethnic population. As a result, the people turned away from their traditional leaders and sought guidance from local petty

1863 INSURRECTION ARTIST ARTUR GROTTER

Oddly enough the two most descriptive records of the Lithuanian struggle were preserved by an Austrian and a Pole. The Austrian, Arthur Grotter, produced a series of drawings of events and an anonymous Pole a detailed written account of his joining Reverend Antanas Mackevicius (Mackiewicz) Lithuanian rebels fighting in Samogitia.

Aside from art works of universal value there sometimes appear drawings and photographs that have great significance to an individual or nation. Arthur Grotter's drawings had that significance to the Polish and Lithuanian nations. His first two series of drawings entitled "Warsaw I" and "Warsaw II" were produced before the outbreak of the 1863 insurrection upon receipt of the first reports of street demonstrations and clashes with Czarist police. Two months after the outbreak of the insurrection, Grotter traveled to Lvov while in an advanced stage of tuberculosis. He hoped to observe first-hand the fight for freedom, but his friends convinced him of his unrealistic desire. Grotter's drawings were made following detailed discussions with individuals involved in the insurrection.



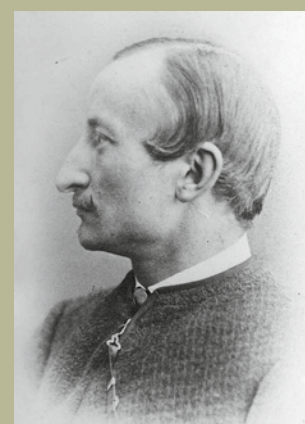
Artur's Grotter's Painting — Fairwell, 1863 Series.

Grotter then started a new series of drawings, entitled "Polonia" which was widely circulated before the final suppression of the insurrection in 1865. His last two series, entitled "Lithua-

nia" and "War" were likewise completed before the last partisan units were suppressed in Augustove, Sandomierz, and Samogitia. Grotter's heroes in the last two series are Lithuanian guerillas fighting and dying for their homeland. He meticulously drew his romantic guerillas in native hunting jackets and ammunition belts. Every picture is a blend of faith, a desire for liberty, and love of country.

Grotter's drawings became widely familiar to both Pole and Lithuanian alike and precious symbols of the insurrection. Looking at his drawings became a ritual in the same manner as listening to Adam Mickiewicz's poems about Lithuania. The artist died a few months after completing his last series at thirty years of age, yet his name will be forever linked with the Lithuanian struggle for freedom. Grotter's drawings have since been converted to paintings which are now displayed in museums around the world. Several paintings based on Grotter's Lithuania series are displayed with this article for our readers appreciation.

Though his name has been lost to history, an anonymous Pole's account of his hazards encountered in joining the Lithuanian rebel "Order of Combatants for Independence" confirms the accuracy of Grotter's drawing.



By Henry L. Gaidis / Bridges

POLISH-LITHUANIAN 1863-1864 INSURRECTION TABLE MEDALS — GAIDIS COLLECTION

125TH LITHUANIAN INSURRECTION COMMEMORATIVE MEDAL



The illustrated 70 mm bronze medal was struck during the Lithuanian 6th Study and Work Symposium held to commemorate the 125th Anniversary of the Insurrection in Lithuania. The obverse of this medal bears a Vytis Shield

with depictions of Insurrection leaders Reverend Antanas Machevicius and Colonel Zigmantas Sierakauskas. Their names appear below their side profile heads surrounded by the inscription "Lietuvos Sukilimo 125 m. Paminejimui" or in English: "To Commemorate the 125th anniversary of the Insurrection in Lithuania".

The reverse of the medal features a map of Lithuania with the name of the major battle area of the 1863 insurrection. Surrounding the map are the various Lithuanian Insurrection dates 1863-4, 1918, 1941, and 1944-52 and inscription "Laisve-Mokslas-Kuryba" or in English Freedom, Learning and Creativity. In the lower center portion of the reverse contains the identify of the issuing organization the "VI Mokslo ir Kuybos Simpoziumas" or in English the 6th Study and Work Symposium, Chicago, Illinois 1989. The designer is not identified and no information is available concerning the number of these beautiful commemorative medals made.

POLISH JANUARY 1863 INSURRECTION COMMEMORATIVE MEDAL

The illustrated 70 mm bronze Polish was struck to commemorate the January 1863 Insurrection. The obverse of this medal features a raised relief of a rendition of Grotter's Uprising illustration from his Lithuanian series bearing the Polish inscription "Powstanie Styczniowe" or in English the January Insurrection designation. The reverse contains a raised 1863 Insurrection Seal featuring the Polish Eagle, Lithuanian Knight, and Ukrainian Angel surrounded by the insurrectionist motto "Wolnosc Rownosc Niepodleglosz" or in English Liberty, Equality, and Independence. This medal was struck by Ptain and issued in Warsaw in 1981. The author does not have any information concerning the number of medals struck.



120TH POLISH-LITHUANIAN 1863 INSURRECTION ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATIVE MEDAL



The illustrated 70 mm bronze medal was struck to commemorate the 120th Anniversary of the Polish-Lithuanian 1863 Insurrection. The obverse of the medal features the Polish, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian coat of arms with the insurgent's motto Liberty, Equality, and Independence surrounded by a Polish language inscription commemorating the anniversary. The reverse side of the medal contains a raised rendition of Grotter's Blacksmith illustration showing partisan blacksmiths busily working making weapons for the insurrection. Grotter's name appears to the rising smoke at the left side of the illustration.

The reverse side of the medal contains a raised rendition of Grotter's Blacksmith illustration showing partisan blacksmiths busily working making weapons for the insurrection. Grotter's name appears to the rising smoke at the left side of the illustration.

By Henry L. Gaidis / Bridges

nobles and priests working among them.

PEASANT PARTISANS START TO ACT

One of the least likely leaders of the Lithuanian insurrection movement was a Roman Catholic priest from a small rural parish. Antanas Mackevičius was born into a family of petty Samogitian nobleman farmers, on June 14, 1828, in Morkiai, a rural community located



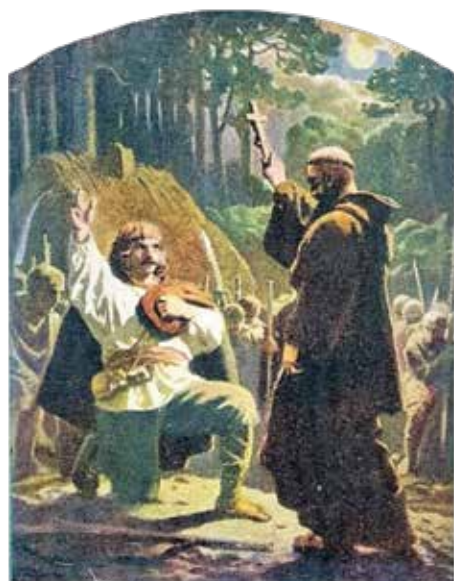
Rev. Antanas Mackevičius

in Raseiniai County. We do not know when Antanas developed his ardent love of country or first began to dream of helping to liberate Lithuania from Russian occupation. Surely as a youth, he heard tales of Lithuania's ancient heroes and the brave struggle waged by his countrymen during the 1831 insurrection in their futile struggle to liberate the nation from Russian rule. While that crushing defeat put an end to the dream of reestablishing the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the minds of many nobles, the dream was kept alive in the heart of the nation's youth.

After receiving an elementary education in Morkiai, Antanas reportedly walked to Vilnius to attend high school, earning his board and lodging by performing menial service in a local monastery. Upon graduating in 1848, Antanas went to Kiev, where he enrolled at the university to study science. Antanas's love for his country was only matched by his love for Jesus his Savior and the Lithuanian peasants who toiled daily across the country under oppressive foreign and native masters. Eventually, his love of God won out, and Antanas left his university studies in 1850 and returned to Lithuania, where he entered the Varniai Catholic Seminary to study for the priesthood. He was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1853, served as an assistant parish priest in Krekenava from 1853 to 1855, and was then assigned pastor of his own church in Paberžė. For the next eight years, he performed the traditional duties of a parish priest: celebrating Sunday mass, preaching, and officiating at baptisms, weddings, and funerals. While performing such services,



The nobleman/soldier is armed with a double barreled hunting shotgun. The peasant/farmer is holding the traditional Lithuanian pike/sickle, made from a farming sickle, he also has an axe stuffed into his belt — these insurgents lacked military weapons and used what they had.



Two drawings by Artur Grottger from his series "Lithuania" (1864–1866) *The Rebel's Oath* and *Samogitians on the Attack with Hunting Dogs*.

Antanas saw firsthand the plight of the peasants and how they were exploited by both their local lords and the Russian government.

As early as 1861, Reverend Mackevičius began to preach the idea of democracy and social reform from his pulpit and criticized the Polish, Polonized Lithuanians, and Russian landlords who suppressed them. During the summer of 1862, Mackevičius travelled to the shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Poland and, while attending a local wedding, there he reportedly met the future revolutionary leaders, Zigmantas Sierakauskas, Konstantinas Kalinauskas, and Boleslas Kolyszko. While there, Boleslas, a graduate of an Italian military officer's school, taught the future guerrilla leader the rudimentary tactics of warfare.

With the January 22, 1863 proclamation establishing a Provisional National Government in Warsaw and an appeal to their Lithuanian Brothers to take up arms to rid the nation of Russian rule, Reverend Mackevičius did not hesitate to join the liberation movement. During a Sunday mass, Mackevičius read the Provisional Government's manifesto to his parishioners, calling for the support of the Lithuanian people in their fight for human rights and free-

dom. He not only called for their support, but took command of some three hundred men from his parish armed with hunting rifles, sickles, axes, and any type weapon available to a peasant farmer. They immediately started training and, as information about his unit began to spread, volunteers from the surrounding area soon joined its ranks. When his force had grown to about five hundred men, Mackevičius led them into the field with a cross in one hand and a sword in the other.

On March 15, 1863, Mackevičius's peasant partisans attacked four Russian infantry com-

panies supported by an artillery squadron that had been sent against them at Naujaberžė and handily defeated these professionally trained soldiers. On April 9, 1863, Mackevičius's forces again defeated another Russian force near Raguva that consisted of three infantry companies and a squadron of cavalry. In May 1863, he again defeated another enemy formation near Panevėžys and then freed the city from Russian occupation. Fighting valiantly, similar insurgent groups across Lithuania were victorious against small Russian formations as the Russians withdrew from the countryside and concentrated their forces in the main towns.

As Mackevičius's success became widely known, many volunteered to join his insurgent band. A Polish newspaper, *Niepodległość* (Independence), in its August 23, 1863, edition, published an account by an anonymous Pole about his meeting the Lithuanian rebel commander. This brief article provides a glimpse of the legendary leader and the life of a Lithuanian insurgent in the field. After an arduous process, which confirmed he was not a Russian agent sent to infiltrate the partisans, the Pole was passed along from one contact to another until he found himself seated around a campfire with an old man in a dense Lithuanian forest.

"In less than half an hour, we heard from the far side of the clearing the soft murmur of rustling branches and careful footfalls, accompanied by the characteristic hooting sound that was to serve as our password. The old man answered. Shortly thereafter, we saw several



1863–1864 Insurrection saber with the insignia — Gaidis Collection.



1863–1864 Partisan dressing.

figures move into the open from behind the trees, evidently the vanguard. All the men were dressed in long grey coats reaching to the knees and tied with a leather belt. All sported four-cornered caps, carried double barreled shotguns in hand, and had hatchets thrust under their belts. Each man carried a fairly bulky sack of crude linen and a hunting horn.

...Finally emerged the Reverend Mackevičius, the detachment's leader, dressed in a priest's frock with tucked-in tails, a sword at his side and a pistol thrust under his belt. He came in a circle of young officers wearing fur caps — this was evidently his whole staff. All marched on foot. There was not one horse in the camp, no food reserve, except the foodstuff carried by each in his linen bag. ...My guide spoke to the leader and introduced me, relating all of my past. During this conversation, I was able to observe closely the face of Father Mackevičius. His face was sunburned, features clear cut, a long dark beard, thick eyebrows, a wrinkled face composing one sullen whole, full of energy and power that commanded respect.

...The officer bowed and led me to my squad, already seated around a log fire... Our squad was made up of four peasants from Ignatavas, three burghers from Panevėžys, the son of a well-to-do gentleman from Šiauliai, a teacher from Kaunas, and myself... I learned that all of the attacks are executed at night, while the days are spent resting, unless the Muscovites are sitting hard on our necks. Tonight they covered more than twenty American miles and therefore intended to rest all day in the clearing.

...The sun had come up, when there was an echo of a horn and an order shouted — Prayer!



Col. Zigmantas Sierakauskas, Supreme Commander of the insurrection in Lithuania.

It was an inspiring sight, these several hundred men, tried in battle, kneeling with bared heads. In front of us, before a Crucifix and the picture of Our Lady on the detachment's banner, knelt Father Mackevičius and intoned... Around us was the pristine native forest — our forest. Above us was our God and future."

COL. SIERAKAUSKAS'S STRATEGY FOR VICTORY

Although such small Lithuanian partisan

groups were initially successful, all knew that it would only be a matter of time before the Russians would send a massive army to suppress their insurrection. Only in unity could they hope to be successful, and these groups soon sought to combine their forces. Within a short period of time, Colonel Zigmantas Sierakauskas, a former Russian General Staff Officer, was given command of the combined insurgent forces in Lithuania. Legend holds that a small group of his former Lithuanian officers travelled to see Colonel Sierakauskas at his home in St. Petersburg. Upon opening the door and seeing his old comrades, Sierakauskas reportedly said, "You bring a death sentence for me." With these words, Sierakauskas accepted the position as Supreme Commander of the Lithuanian insurgent forces. He resigned his Russian Army commission the next day and immediately left for Lithuania, where he assumed his command in the field.

Colonel Sierakauskas's strategy for victory was simple: unite the insurgent bands into one force and carry the fight to the enemy before he could build up his strength in Lithuania. Under his leadership, the partisans began attacking small Russian garrisons to draw manpower from the large nearby Russian fortress in Daugavpils, Latvia. Sierakauskas then anticipated capturing the weakened fortress and from there spreading the insurrection into Russia itself under the "Land and Liberty" banner.

Having been promised weapons and eventual English intervention by the Garibaldist revolutionaries in Western Europe, Sierakauskas quickly captured a landing place in the Palanga area and awaited their arrival before



A Samogitian insurgent by Artur Grottger from his series "Lituania".



General Mikhail Muravyov, the Russian Governor for Lithuania (in white coat), presides over the hanging of several rebel leaders in Vilnius (from an old drawing)

A DISCOVERY OF THE CENTURY: THE REMAINS OF THE INSURRECTION LEADERS



In August 2017 on the top of the Gediminas Hill in downtown Vilnius the Lithuanian archeologists from Vilnius University found the remains of the bodies of the participants of the Polish-Lithuanian 1863–1864 Insurrection.

Twenty-one insurgents were executed in the Lithuanian capital's Lukiskes Square between 1863 and 1864 and were secretly buried on the hill, which was closed to the public at that time. Archeologists have unearthed the remains of 20 of the 21 executed insurgents, including those of their leaders, Zigmantas Sierakauskas (Zygmunt Sierakowski) and Konstantinas Kalinauskas (Konstanty Kalinowski).

The scientists had no major doubts as to the identification of the remains of Sierakauskas as they have found his engagement ring with the inscription "Zygmunt Apolonija 11 Sierpnia/30 Lipca 1862 r (Zygmund Apolonia August 11/July 30, 1862)". The archaeological and anthropological data collected also supported the assumption that the remains of Konstantinas Kalinauskas were among the uncovered human remains.



REBURIAL OF 1863 UPRISING LEADERS: A SPECIAL MOMENT FOR LITHUANIA, POLAND AND BELARUS

The remains of participants of the 1863-1864 uprising against Tsarist Russia were reburied in an official ceremony in Vilnius on November 22.

Lithuanian and Polish President Gitanas Nausėda and Andrzej Duda as well as Belarusian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Petrishenko gave speeches at a farewell ceremony at Vilnius Cathedral. The events were attended by Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Dmytro Kuleba. Also several hundred Belarusians holding white-red-white national flags of Belarus, often used by



the opposition to the existing regime, gathered outside the cathedral at the beginning of the ceremony.

"The remains of the participants of the 1863–1864 uprising were hidden so that they would never be a source of inspiration to new generations of freedom fighters. But they stayed in our hearts and minds. And when the time came, the remains were uncovered to testify about the disrupted march to freedom. Today we can be justly proud of Lithuanian archeologists, historians, art professionals and other experts who have made it possible for us to recover a valuable part of our historical legacy. Detailed research helped to reconstruct the complicated and dramatic life paths of the insurgents. Today we are fulfilling our duty to give a proper burial to the remains of those who completed their earthly journey long ago but continue to spread the truth and light among us," President of the Republic of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda said during the ceremony. He also admitted that the stories of the Insurrection leaders encourage not only Lithuanians, but also Poles, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Latvians to take a new look at the 1863 uprising, admire the courage of the insurgents and derive inspiration from them.

Led by Lithuanian and Polish guard troops, the coffins with the remains of Zigmantas Sierakauskas (Zygmunt Sierakowski in Polish) and Konstantinas Kalinauskas (Konstanty Kalinowski), the leaders of the Lithuanian uprising, as well as those of another 18 uprising participants were taken from the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania to Vilnius Cathedral. The remains were taken in a procession from Vilnius Cathedral to the old Rasos Cemetery.

By Ilona Skujaitė

Photo credits: Alfredas Pliadis





Straightened scythes were basic armament of the 1863–1864 insurgents.



Insurgents assault a Russian garrison (from an old engraving.)

advancing on Daugavpils. While awaiting these promised firearms, Sierakauskas learned that General Mikhail Nikolayevich Muravyov had been appointed the new Russian Governor and was enroute to Lithuania with a large military force to suppress the insurrection. Muravyov's first goal was to unify his forces with those Russian troops that had concentrated themselves in the major cities and to find and defeat Sierakauskas. Upon learning of the advancing Russian forces, Sierakauskas decided to start his march up the Latvian coast, hoping that the promised English weapons would reach him along the way. While on the march, Sierakauskas was intersected by the advancing Russian column and forced into an unplanned engagement. Although the insurgents fought valiantly, without the promised weapons and

ammunition, they were decisively defeated on April 25-27, 1863 in a battle at Medeikiai near Biržai. Colonel Sierakauskas was wounded and captured and his surviving units scattered. He and other captured rebel leaders were then taken to Vilnius, tried and hanged. Although the promised weapons eventually arrived, most were lost during the landing attempt in a violent storm, and few if any weapons actually reached the insurgents. One can only speculate what could have happened had those weapons arrived in time for the Medeikiai battle.

Reverend Mackevičius and other surviving insurgents retreated back into the Žemaitija (Samogitia) region, where they continued a guerilla hit-and-run struggle through October 1863 against an ever increasing number of Russian units sent into the area. During November-December

1863, Mackevičius became the commander of all the Kaunas region insurgents and attacked the Russian Army wherever he could. When he was no longer able to repulse the encroaching Russian units, Mackevičius withdrew his dwindling forces toward Kaunas, hoping to build up strength over the winter and renew the struggle with promised assistance from abroad in the spring. Whereas the Russians were once content to occupy towns and villages, they now constantly hunted Mackevičius and his partisans. On November 26, 1863, near the village of Vilkija, Mackevičius was wounded and forced into hiding.

On December 17, 1863, Mackevičius was captured, reportedly while he and two companions were attempting to cross the Nemunas River, and imprisoned in Kaunas. Although Mackevičius was promised that his life would



Monument to General Muravyov "The Hangman" erected in a Vilnius square by the Czarist regime in the 19th century.

be spared if he betrayed other insurgent leaders, he steadfastly refused. While in prison, Mackevičius continued to bitterly denounce injustice, the exploitation of the peasants, and the venality and greed of Russian officials in his homeland. As a result, Mackevičius, was tried by a Russian military tribunal on December 12, 1863 and sentenced to be publicly hanged. The execution order was twice confirmed by General Muravyov, who would forever be remembered as the "Hangman of Vilnius" of the 1863-1864 insurrection. On December 28, 1863, Mackevičius, while standing on the gallows, was again offered mercy in exchange for information regarding the insurrection. His simple reply was "I have done my work, now you do yours."

Lithuanian partisans continued to fight after Mackevičius's execution, but their numbers and engagements progressively dwindled. The last Lithuanian partisan attack on Russian forces, undertaken by a small band of rebels, occurred on October 12, 1864 near Panevėžys. Russian military documents record some 119 clashes with rebels in the Kaunas region, 38 in the Vilnius region and 17 in Suvalkai. It has been estimated that some thirty thousand poorly trained and armed Lithuanian insurgents engaged approximately one hundred and forty-five thousand regular Russian troops during this futile attempt to regain their freedom and independence. Thousands of rebels and their supporters were deported to Siberia.

Today, the Revered Antanas Mackevičius is an honored hero in Lithuania, where countless towns have streets named after him. In the Paberžė churchyard, where there are dozens of tombstones for the parishioners who fell fighting alongside him during the 1863–1864 insurrection, there stands a large wooden cross in traditional Lithuanian style in memory of this country priest who gave his life for his people.

Although the struggle continued after his death, the partisan numbers continued to dwindle. The last Lithuanian partisan attack on Russian forces occurred, on October 12, 1864, by a small band of rebels near Panevėžys. Russian military documents record some 119 clashes with rebels in the Kaunas region, 38 in the Vilnius region and 17 in Suvalkai. The total rebel strength in Lithuania probably was no more than 15,000 men who engaged some 90,000 Russian troops in their struggle for freedom. The end of this insurrection commenced the most brutal of all Russian retaliations. Even the Lithuanian language itself was outlawed and the Catholic religion suppressed. Still the willingness of these Lithuanians to fight against all odds would foster other generations which would eventually be more successful in restoring the nation's freedom. ■

By Henry L. Gaidis / Draugas

Photo credits: flickr.com, Gaidis personal archive



Cossacks on horseback lead a group of insurrectionists to Siberia (from a 19th century engraving).

KONSTANTINAS KALINAUSKAS (KONSTANTY KALINOWSKI) – A LEADER AND A WRITER



He was one of the leaders of the Polish, Lithuanian and Belarusian national revival and the leader of the January Uprising in 1863 in lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The Kalinowski family hailed from the region of Mazovia and bore the Kalinowa coat of arms. After graduating from a local school in Świsłocz (now Svislach in Belarus) in 1855 he went to Moscow, where he started studying at private law school. Soon he moved to St.

Petersburg, where he continued his studies at the University of St. Petersburg and got involved in several Polish students' conspiracies and secret cultural societies. After graduating in 1860 he returned to the area of Hrodna, where he continued to work as a revolutionary.

He also started publishing *Mużyczkaja prauda* (Commoner's truth), one of the first periodicals in Belarusian (written in Łacinka) and two other Polish language clandestine newspapers. In his literary work, Kalinauskas underlined the need to liberate all peoples of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from Russia's occupation and to conserve and promote the Greek-Catholic faith and Belarusian language. He also promoted the idea of activation of peasants for the cause of national liberation, the idea that was until then dominated by the gentry. He also referred to the good traditions of democracy, tolerance and freedom of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as opposed to national oppression of cultures dominated by Imperial Russia.

After the outbreak of the 1862-1863 Uprising he was involved in the secret Provincial Lithuanian Committee in Vilnius. Soon he was promoted to the commissar of the Polish government for the Grodno Voivodeship. His writings made him popular both among the peasants and the gentry, which enabled the partisan units under his command to grow rapidly. Because of his successes he was promoted to the rank of Plenipotentiary Commissar of the Government for Lithuania, which made him the commander-in-chief of all partisan units fighting in the areas of today's Eastern Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine.

After initial successes against the Russian armies, the Russians moved a 120,000 men strong army to the area and the revolutionaries started to lose most of the skirmishes. Finally Kalinauskas was betrayed by one of his soldiers and handed over to the Russians.

He was imprisoned in Vilnius, where he wrote one of his most notable works - the Letter from Beneath the Gallows, a passionate credo for his compatriots. He was then tried by a court martial for leading the revolt against Russia and sentenced to death. He was publicly executed on Lukiškės Square in Vilnius on 22 March 1864, at age 26.

