



STRENGTH OF THE PAST FOR THE PRESENT

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On April 29, 1943, Vladislovas Telksnys and fifteen other Kaunas intellectuals working in the press were deported by the Gestapo to Stutthof, one of the most brutal concentration camps in Nazi Germany, where they lived through a true "hell on earth."

Thanks to Danutė Marcinkevičienė, the daughter of Rima Šimonienė and Vladislovas Telksnys, the personal archive of this resistance member, memoirist and writer was handed over to Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum. On the occasion of commemorating the 80th anniversary of the deportation of Lithuanian intellectuals to Stutthof concentration camp, we are presenting to the public an interesting historical documentary material introducing Vladislovas Telksnys, a sensitive and deeply religious personality who unconditionally loved his homeland, Lithuania. The documentary material testifies to his active participation in the activities of the Catholic organisation "Ateitininkai" during the interwar period, his experiences in Stutthof concentration camp, and the persecution by the Soviet security during the first and second Soviet occupation.

Part I

From Runioniai Village to Kaunas

The fate of Vladislovas Telksnys, a Lithuanian patriot and member of "Ateitininkai" organisation, was difficult. A member of the resistance movement during the two occupations, he was interrogated and imprisoned in Kaunas prison during the first Soviet occupation; later, he was transported by the Nazi Gestapo to Stutthof concentration camp, where he faced death and suffered cruel bullying and hunger. After returning from prison eleven months later, during the second Soviet occupation, he was hiding under a different name in order to escape deportation to Siberia. In the confusing twists and turns of political life, walking his thorny road of life, when it was necessary to find wise solutions in difficult situations, he looked to God and managed to withstand all the trials, preserving his honesty, faith, devotion to his family and homeland.

V. Telksnys was born on June 1, 1915, in the lake region of Eastern Lithuania, in the village of Runionys, Alanta District. In his memoir book "From Kėgžlys to Alanta", he wrote the following about his childhood places: "I spent my childhood in Runionių Village, near small lake Kėgžlys, which was a kingdom of water birds. The images of my homeland memories still shine with the generous light of my childhood. From here, as I explored the hilly fields, my horizons were broadened, and paths were laid to the surrounding area, and even further ahead, from where I often return in my mind."

The future journalist-memoirist grew up in a large family of middle-class farmers. His parents, Mykolas and Uršulė Telksniai, were known as progressive farmers and bright people in Alanta area. They were almost the only ones from Runionių village who educated their children at school; they were among the first in the village to replace a burning piece of wood with a kerosene lamp, and to buy a wall clock instead of rooster crowing in the morning. His father, who finished Alanta two-class school, wrote letters and requests to the authorities at the request of his neighbours. Thanks to the organisational skills of Vladas's sister Eleonora, in the spring of 1920, a barn theatre performance was staged at the Telksniai homestead.

At the age of eight, Vladukas started Alanta Primary School. After completing four forms at this school, he continued his education at Molėtai Pro-Gymnasium. The spiritual environment at home and the authority of his older brother, priest Steponas, preconditioned his active participation in the Catholic "Ateitininkai" organisation. This organisation helped young people to develop their creative, cultural and political abilities, and to mature intellectuals who worked for the benefit of Lithuania and the Lithuanian nation. For Vladislovas, the meetings of the organisation were "gatherings of concentration, friendship and education [...] as well as a place where one could express his/her thoughts, discuss and take the first creative steps. The motto of the organisation "Renew all things in Christ!" shone throughout hardship and pain." When Vladislovas was studying in Molėtai, the Minister of Education, Konstantinas Šakenis, signed an order banning the legal activity of the "Ateitininkai" organisation. The movement went underground. Telksnys' skills in underground activities became particularly useful when Lithuania was occupied by the Soviets and later by Nazi Germany. By taking part in what he called a "catacomb" organisation, he learned to keep secrets, to be cautious, to control his emotions and not to lose his temper in a critical situation.

After completing four forms at Molėtai Pro-Gymnasium, 19-year-old Vladas came to work and study in Kaunas. He was living in priest Vincentas Byla's home. In the temporary capital, he attended "Pavasaris" adult gymnasium (now Kaunas Maironis University Gymnasium) and made a living doing various jobs. In 1936-1938, he completed his compulsory military service and graduated from the Sanitary Non-Commissioned Officers' School. V. Telksnys continued to be active in the underground organisation "Ateitininkai."

When priest Aloyzas Lapė invited V. Telksnys to work as an administrator of the Catholic magazine "Pavasaris," the enthusiasts of "Ateitininkai" and the Catholic organisation "Pavasaris," which patronised it, undertook the initiative of erecting an oak cross of Catholic youth decorated with national ornaments in the War

Museum garden in order to honour the memory of the Unknown Soldier and the heroes who had fallen in the fights for independence. From their own modest funds, "Ateitininkai" raised the necessary sum and commissioned the cross from the folk craftsmen at Kaunas Town Hall Square. In his memoirs, Telksnys wrote: "In 1937, we carried the cross, which had been consecrated in the Cathedral by priest Viktoras Dabašinskas, on our shoulders to the War Museum garden [now Vytautas the Great War Museum]. We had already received permission to build it from the head of the War Museum, General Vladas Nagevičius. He was the first person to meet us in the Museum's garden when we brought the cross."

When the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania in 1940, the coercive power structures brutally destroyed cultural and spiritual values and imposed a communist system. The sanctuary of the War Museum garden was also destroyed: the sculpture "Freedom" by Juozas Zikaras was torn down, the eternal flame was extinguished, the tomb of the Unknown Soldier was desecrated, the monumental busts of Lithuanian intellectuals who had led the nation to independence were demolished, and the crosses were cut into pieces. However, the upper part of the "Ateitininkai" cross was hidden and preserved in the hiding place of Museum archive.

"We had to fight an unequal battle against the enslavers [...] We had a real enemy against whom we had to act with a weapon that was accessible to all Lithuanian people. The first weapon that was fired was the press," wrote V. Telksnys in his memoirs. Patriotic Vladislovas, together with his friends - Kazys Grigalavičius, Kazys Ambrozaitis, Aloyzas Mickevičius, Kostas Šipkauskas and Povilas Malinauskas - started to fight the invaders underground. It was necessary to warn the people of the enemy the nation was facing in order to maintain spiritual resistance, to defend culture and language, to help the people who are experiencing hardships to keep up to their principles. It was necessary to inform society about the political situation in Lithuania, the repressions being carried out and the false communist propaganda. During the day, Telksnys worked as a medical assistant in the Soviet-run "Inkaras" factory, and at night, he and his

friends "scratched the foundations of the Soviet system" by printing and distributing proclamations against the occupiers. In Kaunas, they were attached to telephone and electricity poles, fences, house walls and staircases. The first issue of the newspaper "Laisvoji Lietuva" ("Free Lithuania") printed in Malinauskas' apartment in Mūrava Village (Kaunas District), was also published, which later reached as far as Berlin.

Although Vladislovas had experience of working in the underground, he did not evaluate the surveillance system perfected by the occupiers well and did not realise that his every move was being watched everywhere, even in the church, and he was arrested by the Soviet security. Telksnys was kept in the KGB headquarters (now the building of the Police Commissariat, located at the crossroad of Laisvės Avenue and Vytauto Prospektas) and later transferred to prison. Interrogations and threats began. Demanding to tell the names of his comrades, Vladas was threatened that "the bullet is ready for you" and dared to retort: "Shoot. Shoot, don't wait." One evening in June, something changed in the prison. Telksnys wrote in his short story "I asked to be shot": „[...] there was indescribable silence in the corridor. One does not hear the guard shouting, the clatter of his boots, [...] noone shouts, noone swears, noone jangles the keys. No guard is seen walking." This meant that the war had begun. The Soviet prison guards left the premises, the road to freedom remained open, and the occupation was over. With his strong attitudes and faith, Telksnys survived the difficult months of trial in prison and waited for the start of the Soviet Union's war against Hitler's Germany.

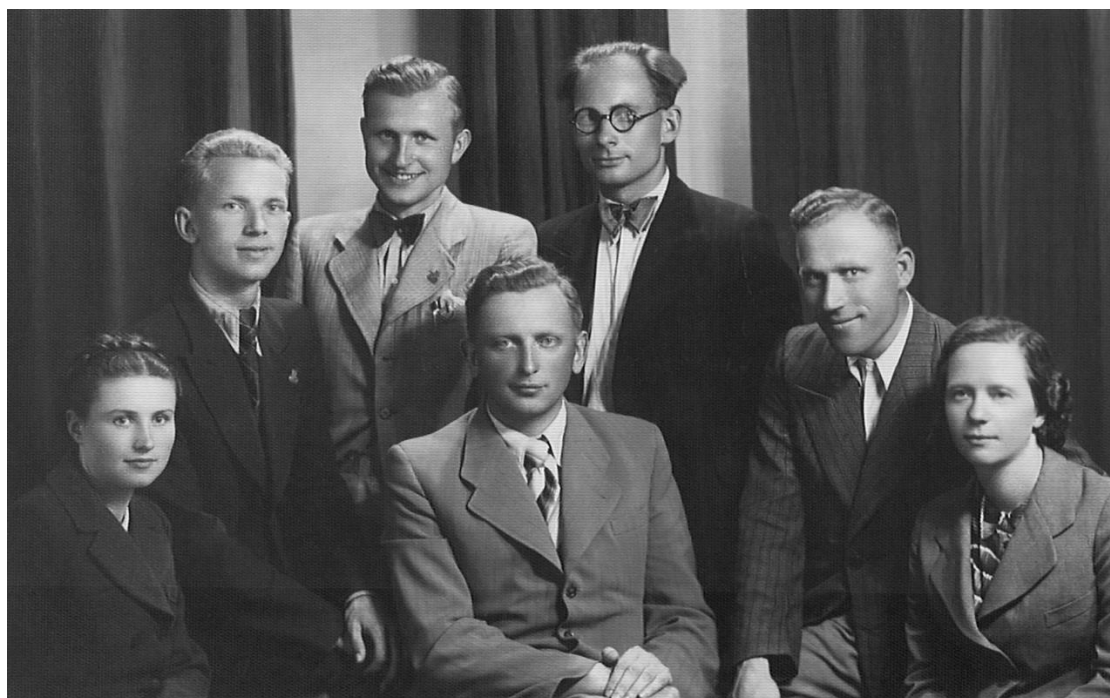
Maybe it will be better under the German rule?



Vladislovas Telksnys (first row, on the right), a student of Molėtai Pro-Gymnasium, a member of the "Ateitininkai" organisation. Molėtai, 1928. © KDFM



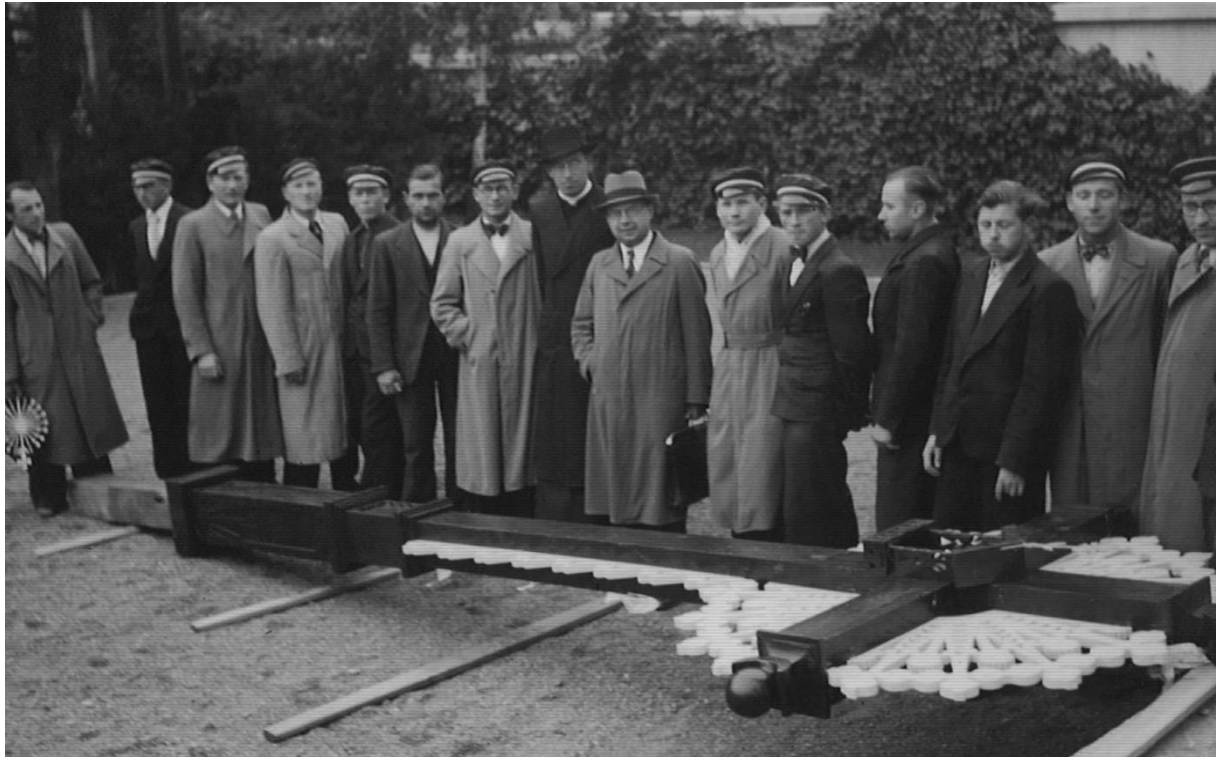
Vladislovas Telksnys (top row, on the left) studies at Kaunas "Pavasaris" Adult Gymnasium. Kaunas, 1934. © KDFM



Editorial office of the magazine "Pavasaris". From left to right, in the first row sitting: A. Šoliūnaitė, priest A. Lapė, A. Valaitis and K. Karpavičiūtė. In the second row, from left to right: V. Telksnys, K. Ambrozaitis and S. Šliūpas. Kaunas, 1940. © KDFM



Antanas Valaitis, Secretary General of the Federation "Pavasarininkai." Kaunas, 1940.

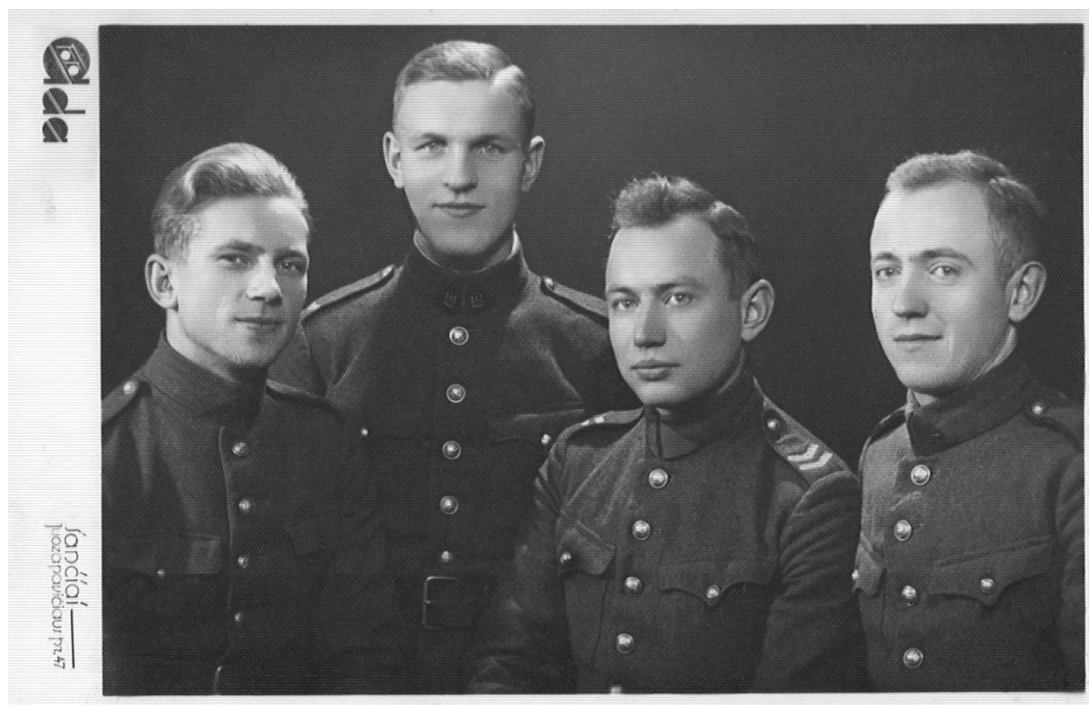


"Ateitininkai" and "Pavasarininkai" at the cross in memory of those who died for the freedom of Lithuania, brought to the War Museum garden. From left to right: cross-maker (surname unknown), S. Balčiūnas, J. Terebeiza, Č. Surdokas, L. Selenas, the second cross-maker (surname unknown), S. Šliūpas, priest. V. Dabašinskas, J. Leimonas, A. Maceina, V. Telksnys, K. Šipkauskas, the names of the other three persons are unknown. Kaunas,

1936. © KDFM



General Vladas Nagevičius, the Director of the War Museum, is meeting "Ateitininkai" and "Pavasarininkai" who brought the cross in memory of those who died for the freedom of Lithuania. Kaunas, 1936. © KDFM



Vladislovas Telksnys (on the left), a student of the Sanitary Non-Commissioned Officers' School. Kaunas, 1938. © KDFM



Vladislovas Telksnys (on the right, half lying on the ground) with the students of the Sanitary Non-Commissioned Officers' School, visiting the homestead of Martynas Jankus, the patriarch of Lithuania Minor and printer, in Bitėnai (Pagėgiai Municipality). 1937.

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Vladislovas Telksnys and his comrades, with whom he printed and distributed proclamations and published the newspaper "Laisvoji Lietuva" ("Free Lithuania") during the first years of the Soviet occupation. Vladislovas Telksnys. Kaunas, 1939; Kazys Ambrozaitis. Kaunas, 1939; Povilas Malinauskas. Kaunas, 1945; Aloyzas Mickevičius. Kaunas, 1940; Kostas Šipkauskas. Kaunas, 1967. © KDFM



Vladislovas Telksnys' brother, priest Steponas Telksnys. Kaunas, 1935. © KDFM



Priest Steponas Telksnys, Kaunas, 1964 m. © KDFM



Vladislovas Telksnys moved in to priest Vincentas Byla home after coming to Kaunas to work and study. Kaunas, 1936. © KDFM