

THE IMPORTANCE OF HUNTING ARMOR AND MILITARY PREPAREDNESS IN ENSURING NATIONAL BORDER SECURITY

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Abstract. *Hunting is a widely practiced activity around the world, as humans have been hunting since the dawn of civilization, continuously refining their skills, techniques, and methods. Hunting, or the pursuit and killing of wild animals, requires hunters to be adept at camouflage, accurate shooting, navigating the terrain, and reading tracks left in the forest. In essence, hunting involves skills that are also valuable in military contexts, especially for small combat units (such as commandos or snipers). Hunters are among the most knowledgeable about the forests of Latvia and could potentially operate individually or in small groups behind enemy lines in times of national threat. There are approximately 25,000 hunters in Latvia, making up about 1.3% of the population. Many hunters are also serving in the National armed forces, the National guard, the police, and the Border guard.*

The purpose of the study: Analyze the armament available to Latvian hunters, the level of military training in hunting associations and the possibilities of involving hunters in ensuring border surveillance.

Main tasks:

- 1. Study the armament and military training of Latvian hunters;*
- 2. Analyze the possibilities of using hunters in ensuring the security of the border;*
- 3. Make proposals in which way it would be possible to use hunters in ensuring the security of the land border.*

Research methods:

- 1. Empirical research method (survey);*
- 2. Qualitative research method (situation analysis);*
- 3. Method of logical analysis.*

Keywords: *associations, hunters, National Armed Forces, skills, weapons.*

Introduction

Hunters use firearms designed specifically for hunting during their activities. Depending on the type of hunting (size of the game, shooting distance, and other factors), these firearms are suited for various types of hunting. The firearms used by hunters are essentially identical to those used in military conflicts. Utilizing hunters in national border security would enhance the capabilities for border surveillance and protection and improve cooperation between hunting groups and the Border Guard units, which would be beneficial for overall national defense.

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In Latvia, there are approximately 25,000 hunters, most of whom are actively involved in hunting activities. The majority of active hunters are members of some hunting association. A hunting association is a legal entity where individuals with a common profession, field of activity, or shared beliefs come together. People with common interests in hunting generally form associations. An association is a voluntary group of people established to achieve the goals set out in its statutes, and it is non-profit in nature. Such associations often engage in various activities, such as organizing hunting events, promoting wildlife population management, providing training and education on hunting ethics and safety, and participating in the conservation and protection of natural resources (Law on Associations and Establishments, 2003).

An association obtains legal entity status when it is registered in the Register of Associations and Foundations in accordance with the Associations and Foundations Law. During registration, information about the establishment of the association is submitted, signed by the founders, and the statutes in the current edition are provided, along with the designation of the association's board and chairman. An association must consist of at least two like-minded members, and its statutes may specify a maximum and minimum number of members.

The main difference between hunting associations and other organizations is the use of firearms. Hunting associations predominantly use firearms in their hunting activities and are sometimes considered armed internal formations that could potentially provide support for national external and internal security, or pose a security threat if led by individuals disloyal to the state.

In Latvia, as of 2023, amendments to the Firearms Circulation Law were enacted to prevent internal threats by revoking firearm permits for non-citizens. These legal changes forced many hunting associations to alter their hunting activities or even expel members from the associations, as hunters whose firearm permits were revoked could no longer fully participate in the hunting activities organized by the associations.

1. Basic principles of applying hunting equipment

Hunting is a set of activities or individual actions in which hunting firearms, tools, or techniques are used to track, search for, capture, injure, or kill game animals (Hunting law, 2003).

Hunting weaponry encompasses various protective gear, hunting accessories, and hunting weapons that ensure safety and successful execution of hunting activities. The main and commonly used types of hunting weaponry and equipment are:

1. Safety glasses;
2. Animal tracking devices;
3. Safety vests and hats (in orange color);
4. Hunting firearms.

It is crucial to choose hunting weaponry that is suitable for the specific hunting conditions and types, as well as in compliance with legal regulations. Many types of hunting weaponry are used to ensure maximum safety by reducing potential risks associated with hunting.

In this work, the author will focus primarily on hunting firearms among all the previously mentioned types of hunting weaponry, as hunting firearms will be used in national defense situations and will essentially be equivalent to combat weapons. In Latvia, the regulation of all types of firearms is governed by the "Weapons Circulation Law," where a firearm is defined as any portable weapon with a barrel that, as a result of the action of gunpowder or another propellant, fires a projectile and is designed or can be modified to fire a projectile. A hunting firearm is essentially identical to a military firearm, with only the application specifics differing. In Latvia, firearms and ammunition are categorized according to their technical parameters into categories A, B, C, D, E, and F, and by their usage. Based on their use, firearms and ammunition are categorized as follows:

1. Self-defense weapons and their ammunition;
2. Hunting weapons and their ammunition;
3. Sports weapons and their ammunition;
4. Collection weapons;
5. Weapons intended for historical event representation and their ammunition (Arms Traffic Law, 2019).

A hunter is first and foremost a citizen of the Republic of Latvia, and only then a part of a community that has united in an association based on common interests. According to the Law on the Circulation of Weapons, a Latvian citizen (hunter) can acquire all types of weapons in their possession, but no more than 10 firearms, provided that they have completed the appropriate courses (if required) and received permission from the State Police. In Latvia, hunting mainly involves two types of hunting firearms: rifled firearms (see Fig.1) and smoothbore hunting firearms (see Fig.2).

Rifled hunting firearms (carbines) are mostly equipped with optical sights and are designed for long distances, being technically identical to sniper rifles. Hunters who use such firearms in hunting can be compared to snipers, capable of neutralizing enemy personnel (infantry) from long distances. Each year, hunters are invited to participate in long-range shooting sessions called "United for the Nation," organized by the National

Armed Forces and the Latvian Hunters' Association. The goal is to strengthen cooperation between hunters and the National Armed Forces, as well as to explore the potential involvement of hunters in national defense efforts.



Fig.1. Carbine Browning X-Bolt SF MAX (Browning, 2024)

Smoothbore hunting firearms (shotguns) are short-range (50-70 meters) hunting weapons, primarily used for hunting game birds with shot (pellets). This type of firearm can also be used for clearing rooms and trenches, as the shot covers a wider area at close range and can neutralize the enemy.



Fig.2. Double-barrel break-action shotgun Fabarm ELOS A2 AL (Fabarm, 2024)

As of 2024 in Latvia, Latvian citizens own the following types of weapons:

1. High-energy pneumatic weapons - 38;
2. Gas weapons - 12,938;
3. Firearms - 74,607 (Ministry of the Interior, 2024).

Out of the total number of firearms, hunters own 62,665 hunting firearms, which could be used in the event of a military conflict:

1. Rifled firearms - 28,614;
2. Smoothbore firearms - 34,051 (Ministry of the Interior, 2024).

These types of hunting firearms are intended for hunting with the goal of killing game animals, but military weapons are designed to eliminate

enemies (people). In times of war, hunting weapons would fulfill the same function. The author of this work conducted a survey involving 100% (15 hunters) of hunters of the "Piekūns" Hunters and Fishermen's Association (hereinafter - HFA "Piekūns"), that agreed to take part in the survey, and received answers to the following questions:

- What type of firearms do you own and in what quantity?
- Are you a member of the National Guard?
- Do you work in law enforcement or a military institution?
If so, which one?
- Would you defend the country if necessary?
- Would you support the involvement of hunters in military training and in ensuring the security of the state and its borders?

In summarizing the information for question 1, the author found that the hunters of HFA "Piekūns" collectively own 15 rifled firearms and 18 smoothbore firearms, as well as 3 pistols (personal defense firearms). This represents a significant and sufficient arsenal to form a sniper team, a small armed unit (squad) for conducting sabotage in enemy territory, or for the temporary capture and holding of small objects.

Hunters not only have firearms and the skills to use them but also possess modern equipment and knowledge of local infrastructure. Of course, the military field has its own specifics and skills that must be acquired to avoid endangering oneself and others, but a hunter is a potential guarantor of national security and a significant resource of trained armed individuals in the event of a national threat.

2. Level of military preparedness in hunting associations

The author, continuing to analyze the answers to the survey questions related to military preparedness, found that among the 15 (fifteen) hunters of the HFA "Piekūns" there are:

- 2 border guards;
- 1 national guard member;
- 2 soldiers (a corporal and a senior soldier);
- 2 who have completed mandatory service in Latvia;
- 4 who have completed mandatory service in the Soviet Union;
- 4 have had no connection with the military field.

Overall, it can be said that the majority of HFA "Piekūns" hunters have had contact with the military, and among the hunters are members of the National Armed Forces, who in an emergency could take on a leadership role by forming a small armed unit. The presence of militarily trained individuals in hunting associations is a positive factor, as they will shape the internal atmosphere and lead a unit consisting of hunters who know how to

use hunting firearms in hunting but not in wartime situations.

In response to the survey question, "Would you defend the country if necessary?" all HFA "Piekūns" hunters unanimously said "Yes," which confirms their loyalty to the state of Latvia and their readiness to defend it in case of threat. According to the author, such patriotism among hunters is linked to the ongoing war in Ukraine, which demonstrates that military conflicts are still possible in modern Europe. The National Security Law stipulates that Latvian citizens are obligated to resist an aggressor by any means available, and hunting associations or hunters are a part of society that has a significant resource at their disposal, such as firearms.

Analyzing the last survey question and understanding that military tactical knowledge, such as search operations, reconnaissance, observation, and other military skills, is not included in hunter training, it is clear that, in essence, these are similar skills to those used by hunters in hunting, such as tracking and searching for game animals, scouting hunting locations, observing animals (stand hunting), and many other tasks that are essentially equivalent to military skills. The survey responses indicate that all hunters are willing to undergo training aimed at national defense, but emphasize that it would be useful to organize training for hunting associations near the border with a focus on securing the state border, while for hunting associations within the country, the focus should be on ensuring national security.

The Latvian Ministry of Defense should start considering how to provide knowledge to those hunters who are Latvian patriots and wish to participate in national defense but for various reasons cannot join the National Guard, so that they do not become easy targets in a crisis situation and are able to operate autonomously.

Conclusions and suggestions

The author of the study on the significance of hunting weaponry and military preparedness for ensuring state border security has drawn the following conclusions:

1. Hunters are a significant but undervalued resource for national defense.
2. Hunters possess a large number of hunting firearms, which are comparable to military firearms.
3. The techniques used in hunting (observation, tracking, shooting) are similar in principle to military techniques.
4. Hunters do not have weapons designed for destroying military equipment.
5. Hunters lack training focused on mutual cooperation in emergency situations.

6. In order to study current theme more thoroughly, this article should be continued within broader research (e.g., within a bachelor paper), including a survey of several hunter's associations in different territorial regions of Latvia and a survey of State border guard officials in order to state the necessity of cooperation between hunter's associations and the State border guard.

Main recommendations:

1. State border guard should consider a possibility to propose the National Armed Forces to develop an action plan for hunters that live in border areas, outlining what they should do in the event of a military conflict, especially if they have not managed to evacuate to the interior of the country and find themselves behind enemy lines.
2. In order to enhance border security, State border guard in cooperation with the National Armed Forces should consider organizing seminars (online/in-person) in various regions of Latvia, particularly in border areas with Russia and Belarus, to prepare hunters informatively for emergency situations.
3. The National Armed Forces should consider a possibility develop a training program involving hunting associations to train cooperation between hunters and soldiers in various military conflict scenarios.

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