

JUOZAS DAUMANTAS

FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM



**Lithuanian Partisans
Versus the U.S.S.R.**

FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

Lithuanian Partisans Versus the U.S.S.R.

by Juozas Daumantas

This is a factual, first-hand account of the activities of the armed resistance movement in Lithuania during the first three years of Russian occupation (1944-47) and of the desperate conditions which brought it about.

The author, a leading figure in the movement, vividly describes how he and countless other young Lithuanian men and women were forced by relentless Soviet persecutions to abandon their everyday activities and take up arms against their nation's oppressors.

Living as virtual outlaws, hiding in forests, knowing that at any moment they might be hunted down and killed like so many wild animals, these young freedom fighters were nonetheless determined to strike back with every resource at their command.

We see them risking their lives to protect Lithuanian farmers against Red Army marauders, publishing underground newspapers to combat the vast Communist propaganda machine, even pitting their meager forces against the dreaded NKVD and MGB.

JUOZAS DAUMANTAS

FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

**LITHUANIAN PARTISANS
VERSUS THE U.S.S.R.**

(1944-1947)

*Translated from the Lithuanian
by E. J. Harrison and Manyland Books*

SECOND EDITION
FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

Copyright © 1975 by Nijole Brazenas-Paronetto

Published by The Lithuanian Canadian Committee for Human Rights, 1988
1011 College Street, Toronto, Ontario, M6H 1A8

Library of Congress Catalog Card No.: 74-33547

ISBN 0-87141-049-4

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Prelude: July, 1944	5
Another “Liberation”	10
The Story of the Red Army Soldier, Vasili	14
What’s Yours Is Mine	20
To Arms: For Or Against Slavery	27
Repressed Scholars and Reluctant Spies	37
He Who Hesitates Is Lost	41
When Men Begin to Fear Their Own Shadows	45
“The Right to Rest”	52
Fight Against Prison Famine	56
The Growth of Secret Organizations	66
Armed Resistance	70
Provocation Rampant	78
What Does the Atom Bomb Promise?	83
“Amnesty” for the Partisans	88
Tragedy of Agrarian Reform	93
A Partisan’s Christmas	100
Election Preparations	104
The “Most Democratic Elections In the World”	110
We Cannot Wait With Folded Arms	116
Deportation	119
Graves Are Also Defended	124
Hunted Animals Bite	129
A Storm Cannot Topple All the Trees	136
Despoiling the Egyptians	142
When the Dead Are Resurrected	146
Journey By Train	150
Tell Me, Are You Acquainted With the Sun?	155
A Partisan “Engagement”	162
Aftermath	173
On the Road to the West	178
We Break Through the Iron Curtain For the First Time	183
Among Our Own People In a Foreign Land	185
Getting Back Inside the Iron Curtain	187
Danger Among Our Own Kind	193
Lithuanians Help Starving Germans	197

CONTENTS

Nightmare Becomes Reality	200
Fight Against Thousands	205
Armed Resistance Prepares Cadres	209
Underground of Death	216
“Devil’s Dozen” Saves Situation	220
“Stand Not Upon the Order of Your Going”	224
Journey to Rouse the West	228
“Abomination of Desolation”	232
Blood Flows at the Iron Curtain	239
Armed Greetings for Polish Communists	244
Christmas In Stable Straw	249
Epilogue	253
Glossary	279

PRELUDE: JULY, 1944

It is dinner time on a muggy Sunday afternoon in late July, and we are gathered around the table as usual. Father sits at the head, with mother on his right and our maid-servant, Ona, beside her. My four brothers and I are seated around them, filling up whatever places are left.

Wordlessly, father picks up a spoon and starts sipping his cold buttermilk-beet soup. We imitate his example without really wanting to do so. It is too hot and too noisy. Mortar shells destined for distant targets whine and whistle high in the air above our roof. Sometimes their targets are not so distant, and then the resulting explosions shake the walls and rattle the windowpanes. We are anxious and tense as we wait for the inevitable to happen. And we dread it so much the more because we know that it *is* inevitable. We can sense its presence in each other's eyes, feel it all around us in the room, in the house, everywhere. . . .

Half-way through dinner we are startled by the tread of heavy military boots nearby, and look up to see a handful of German soldiers striding into our dining room. Hunger, fatigue, and the same kind of anxiety which has been plaguing us all day are written on their faces. "Essen," one of them whispers and starts to push his way towards the table. His comrades crowd in close beside him, leaving us little choice. We get up and let the Germans finish what remains of our meal. There is not nearly enough to satisfy the hunger of a tow-headed young private, who pulls out his automatic and orders mother to show him the way to the larder. A few minutes later he returns with a huge chunk of smoked bacon which he starts to devour as though it were some kind of prize.

The highest ranking of our uninvited guests has usurped father's place at the head of the table. We cannot help staring at him: for some reason, he has shaved only one half of his chin.

"Those damned Russians!" he grumbles. "They've been hot on our heels all day. The devils didn't even give me time to

6 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

get a decent shave!”

But then his anger suddenly gives way to resignation, and he concludes with a sigh.

“Oh, well. What does it matter? It’s all over, anyway: with us and with Germany.”

Such were the last words of the last German to set foot on our land. . . .

*

The whining of mortar gradually subsides as the scattered German troops retreat farther westward. Sporadic bursts of gunfire continue to be heard for a while; but they, too, are eventually silenced by distance. A lone Red Army trooper appears and turns his hard-ridden nag into our yard. The animal is unencumbered by either saddle or bridle—a length of rope coiled around its neck apparently serving the purpose of both. The rider’s equipment, equally spartan, consists of nothing more than a tattered tent which he carries slung over his back. He is absolutely filthy, and so emaciated that he looks more like a skeleton than an advance army scout.

He greets us cordially enough: “Well, Comrades! The Germans have left you at last! But haven’t you grown tired of waiting so long to be liberated?”

After exchanging a few more pleasantries, he asks us for something to drink. Ona promptly brings out a jug of milk which he drains greedily. He cannot suppress his amazement.

“So there really are places where one can still get milk!”

He thanks us, then nudges the flanks of his horse with his heels and rides away. We see no more Russians for a while. However, we know that several are wandering about in our rye field because we can hear them calling to each other every now and again. They have apparently become separated from their weapons.

“Sasha! Sasha!” shouts one of the lot. “Have you any idea where our cannon is at?”

We feel ourselves beginning to relax a little.

So it had become an accomplished fact, after all; this thing that we dreaded and hoped against hope would not happen. Our land was once again in the grip of the barbarians

from the east. They had clawed their way back slowly but relentlessly, in spite of our opposition and against our will. And now that they were finally here, we could do nothing but accept it. . . .

*

From the very first moment that the Russian and German armies clashed with each other over the possession of our peaceful fields, more than three million Lithuanians realized that they would have to make a choice: should they remain in Lithuania or should they seek refuge among the democracies of the West? For a long time the people weighed these alternatives. Their hearts were heavy. They tried to put off having to make up their minds. Those who decided that their interests would be served best by fleeing waited to do so until the very last minute. Some waited too long and found themselves trapped, the victims of circumstances. But many more decided to stay voluntarily —as was the case with my family and myself. It had not been an easy decision for any of us to make. There seemed to be a complete dearth of objective information. The links with the resistance movement had been broken; and the underground press, which had kept the Lithuanian people so well informed during the Nazi occupation, had inexplicably grown silent of late. Nearly everyone we spoke to seemed so terrified by the approach of the Russians that all they could think of was getting away.

Nor were their fears groundless. The Russian armies had already reached the very heart of Lithuania. Although the Nemunas River had provided a natural barrier for a while, the German lines there were comparatively weak, and everyone knew that it would only be a matter of time before the Russians managed to push their way through. As a matter of fact, they had already succeeded in bridging the Nemunas at Rumšiškė. and had sent some of their tank and infantry units to the western bank. This bridge the Germans had promptly destroyed, along with the troops which had filtered across it. The clumsy Soviet tanks proved easy prey for the German “tigers”; even the infantry units were wiped out to a man although they put up a tremendous struggle. But the Russians

8 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

refused to quit. By massing together all of their artillery, they managed to push the Germans back from the river bank long enough to construct a second bridge —this time slightly below the water line so that German reconnaissance planes wouldn't be able to spot it.

Finally, on July 25th, more Russian units crossed over to the western bank of the Nemunas and took the Germans completely by surprise. The Germans held their ground as long as they could, but the well-organized Russian offensive was simply too much for them. After an hour or so, they were forced to retreat. And then the Russians began to swarm across the Nemunas in droves: some by way of the bridge, others on rafts, still others clinging to ordinary wooden logs. They came so thick and fast that not a few of them were drowned in the melee.

The soldiers belonging to these front-line divisions were armed with a curious assortment of Russian and German weapons. Most of them were also unbelievably ragged and dirty; and nearly every one of them was drunk. There were some women among them—but women such as we had never had occasion to encounter before. They swore and looted, and were otherwise as dissolute in their behavior as the Red Army men. Yet in spite of *everything*, one could not help but notice how tremendously elated both men and women alike had been made by their most recent victory.

Meanwhile, our own people were already circulating all sorts of wild rumors about what course of action the new occupying armies intended to take. Some claimed that the Russians would shoot every Lithuanian who had even half-heartedly attempted to carry out the directives which had been imposed during the German occupation. Others insisted that they were planning to shoot any man who had refused to join the Communist underground movement. A third, more moderate faction limited the carnage to those few who had held government posts under the German regime.

In order to check the reliability of such rumors, some of the more daring individuals risked creeping through to the front lines. They came back feeling rather optimistic. The Russians were not very dreadful after all, they explained. Quite the contrary. The rank-and-file soldiers, especially, seemed understanding and even friendly—only very, very tired. But few people placed any credence in these reports, believing them

Prelude 9

to be Communist fabrications. Fear and distrust of the Soviets continued to run high. The night before Russian troops were slated to enter our village, the residents were so terrified that they concealed their livestock and portable goods in the woods, and spent the following day cowering in hastily constructed shelters.

That was how things stood when the first Red Army trooper directed his weary nag into our yard on Sunday, and his comrades searched all over our rye fields for their guns.

10 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

CHAPTER I

ANOTHER “LIBERATION”

So far, the Lithuanian people had been “liberated” three times in nearly as many years. In 1940, the Russians had come marching into our land to “liberate” us from “capitalist and Fascist exploiters.” In 1941, the Germans had marched in after them and thereby “liberated” us from “Bolshevik bondage.” And now, the Russians were back again —this time to “liberate” us from “the tyranny of Nazi hangmen.” Naturally, they expected us to be overcome with delight. But since we still recalled how they had gone about “liberating” us the last time, we didn’t think we had any cause to rejoice. And we were right: the second Soviet “liberation” turned out to be even worse than the first one.

In keeping with the usual “liberation” reforms, all the elders in our village were promptly rounded up and arrested. The Russians didn’t really care whether these individuals had been guilty of misdeeds or not. Elders were public officials, and that in itself was sufficient grounds for arrest. Many other people were arrested for no other reason except that they had somehow or other managed to offend their neighbors in the past. The initial “reforms” were being carried out by members of advance Red Army units, and a half-bottle of vodka slipped into the hands of any of these men was more than enough to make life very difficult (or short) for anyone its donor happened to dislike.

There were some thirty such Red Army men quartered in our village during the first days of “liberation.” All of them were cavalry scouts, and all of them looked awful. They didn’t seem to have the slightest notion of personal hygiene. They had no qualms about washing their faces in pond water polluted by ducks and geese. Nor were they above plopping their carcasses in any convenient pig-pen for a nap. As for food, they devoured anything they could lay their hands

on —the official explanation being that the field kitchens attached to their unit had not yet had time to catch up with the front lines. But the fact was that such kitchens had never existed and these men had always been forced to supplement their scanty dry rations as best they could. They filched vegetables from the fields, plucked fruit from the trees in the farmers' orchards —and it didn't matter whether the fruit was ripe or not—and even robbed the beehives of honey at night. Liquor they obtained from the local inhabitants in exchange for stolen government property such as boots, blankets, saddles, and tents. They thought nothing of trading a horse for a keg of spirits. But the joy of the individual who received such a bargain was usually short-lived: more often than not, the animal would turn out to have been stolen from some other farmer in the district. Although the Russian officers punished their men for such practices, no amount of punishment could fill their bellies, and so the bartering went on.

Assisting the advance Red Army units in the task of "liberation" were former prisoners of war—Russian soldiers who had been captured by the Germans and subsequently handed over to Lithuanian farmers as day laborers. These individuals were now expected to inform the Soviet authorities which of the farmers had been collaborators during the German occupation, which of them had relatives who had fled to the West, *etc.*

Another "liberation reform" was the immediate conscription of all able-bodied Lithuanian men and women into forced labor gangs. This was especially hard on the farmers because it occurred at the beginning of the harvest season. The ripe stalks of rye were already bent low to the ground under their own weight —almost as though they were begging for somebody to come along and reap them. But nobody did. The farmers would walk out into their fields, sigh at the prospect of having to lose their crops, and then go home. They had absolutely no idea of how much the ruble would be worth in the days to come. However, they were quite sure that taxes and the mandatory quotas of foodstuffs to be "contributed" to the State would be extremely high.

And so, what had traditionally been one of the most joyous seasons of the year, was filled with nothing but sorrow in 1944. There were no neighbors helping other neighbors to bring in the rye. There were no harvest songs, no frolics, no

12 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

games. Only the very old could be seen working the fields that year—feeble, pathetic figures bent nearly double under the strain. Something might yet have been accomplished by using harvesting machinery. Unfortunately, the Germans had either confiscated or destroyed most of these. And even the occasional farmer who had somehow managed to hold on to his cutter or thresher couldn't use it because his horses had been confiscated by Russians.

About the only commodity we seemed to have left was candidates for arrest. More and more people in our village were being rounded up each day. Soon even Juozas and I became concerned about our safety and decided that it might be best for us to lay low for a while. (After all, Juozas had belonged to some sort of political student organization at the university; and as for me—I had actually been jailed during the first Russian occupation because of my political activism in *high school*.) Granted, we lived on such excellent terms with our neighbors—including those for whom the doors of the new authorities had lately been flung open—that there was little danger of anyone's turning us in. Still, there was no sense in pressing our luck, either. We therefore left the village and decided to spend some time with our good friend, Lupaitis, who lived a few miles away. We certainly found plenty to do there. The storm of war had swept away our friend's house clean down to the foundation, and we took it upon ourselves to help him rebuild. We cleared the site of rubble—making sure to salvage whatever bricks and bits of metal we could—then we “borrowed” some lumber from the State forest reserve and fell to work. Although Lupaitis introduced us as hired hands to the men in the neighborhood, the women and children knew exactly what sort of “hands” we really were. Much to the detriment of our progress, they were perpetually interrupting us with cries of alarm, which they did whenever they spotted anyone they didn't recognize.

“Look out, boys! The Russians are coming! Hide!”

And Juozas and I would run to the shelter which we had constructed for just such a purpose and crouch there, quaking, until the coast was clear. This hectic sort of life with Lupaitis lasted about two weeks. At the end of that period, brother Andrius came down to tell us that the University of Kaunas had just reopened its doors. According to the administration, all upper-form students who desired to do so were free to come

Another "Liberation" 13

back and resume their work. Furthermore, the administration had promised to take immediate steps to insure that returning students would be exempted from being drafted into the Red Army. This was good news, indeed. We quickly said our farewells to Lupaitis and headed home to prepare for the trip back to Kaunas and school.

We found Vasili waiting for us at the house. Vasili was a Red Army soldier who had been taken prisoner by the Germans and befriended by Juozas shortly after making good his escape from a *stalag* in East Prussia. Although he had come to bid goodbye to the whole family, it was Juozas he especially wanted to see.

At this point, I should like to relate what happened between Vasili and Juozas in some detail because it was to save my brother from being exiled to Siberia later on.

14 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

CHAPTER II

THE STORY OF THE RED ARMY SOLDIER, VASILI

One day, during the summer of 1943, my brother Juozas happened to be ploughing a field not very far from the outskirts of the forest. The day passed without incident. However, just as dusk was beginning to fall, a figure darted out of the woods and made for the spot where my brother was still hard at work.

‘Thank God!’ the figure exclaimed in Russian and collapsed with relief right in the middle of a furrow. Closer inspection revealed it to be that of a man—obviously a P.O.W. He had, in fact, only recently escaped from a German *stalag* in East Prussia. He looked perfectly awful. He had no shoes, and his clothing consisted of rags which were close to falling off altogether. Although he seemed to be no more than nineteen years old, his face was already deeply marked with the lines of fatigue. He begged Juozas to bring him something to eat; he even offered to take over the ploughing while Juozas went back to the house to get it. Juozas agreed. Turning the plow over to Vasili, he hurried home and explained the situation to mother. But as he was returning to the field with a generous bundle of food which she had prepared, he simply had to stop and laugh. Vasili was obviously no farmer: the plough kept slipping out of his hands and spoiling the furrow, while Vasili himself was already dripping with perspiration.

They sat down to eat. Between mouthfuls, Vasili began to relate how he had managed to obtain food after his escape from the East Prussian prison camp. He would hover near farms which lay close to the outskirts of the forest, waiting until the women came into the fields to milk the cows. Then he would go up to them and beg them for a little milk. (He even carried a small pail for the purpose.) The women seldom turned down his request, and in this manner he had managed to subsist for nearly five weeks. But it was a dog’s life at best. Could Juozas

The Story of the Red Army Soldier, Vasili 15

get him some sort of work as a day laborer with people who could be trusted? Vasili didn't think it advisable to travel any farther just now. He would certainly never be able to reach his home town, which was somewhere in the vicinity of Moscow. Nor did he expect to find such generous people in other parts of his own country as he had found in Lithuania. So what about it? Would Juozas be willing to help him? Juozas promised to do what he could. And it was only because of his help and protection that Vasili survived to see his own kind again.

Now, he was leaving to rejoin his old Army unit, and had come over to say good-bye. In order to express his gratitude, he had brought along parting gifts of honey and home-distilled vodka. He had also prepared an affidavit in his own handwriting to the effect that Juozas had concealed and protected him, a Russian, at the risk of his own life and liberty all during the German occupation. Juozas did not want to accept this affidavit at first, but Vasili insisted. A time would come when Juozas would be thankful for it, he said—adding that he knew how many people in our village had already been arrested simply because they had been unable to show concrete proof of their loyalty to the Soviets. Under the Communist regime, the mere inability of a suspect to prove his innocence afforded sufficient grounds for a jail sentence. And Vasili, having been born and bred in the “Soviet Paradise,” knew its *modus operandi* only too well. As a result, he kept pestering Juozas to take it until the latter had no choice except to give in. Then, after hearty handshakes all around, we parted. We promised not to forget each other. Neither time nor the misfortunes of war, we felt, could weaken the bonds of our mutual friendship.

*

Soon after Vasili's departure for regions unknown, Juozas and I embarked on our own journey to Kaunas. We reached Kaunas without incident and headed straight for the university to pick up the draft exemption cards which the administration had promised us. Then we wandered about a bit, looking for any colleague who might have arrived before us. We found quite a few of them already hard at work on various repair projects around the campus, even though the

16 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

start of the new semester was still a long way off. Not to be outdone, Juozas and I decided to join a group which was cleaning up after a detachment of Red Army men had been using the university as their headquarters until a little while ago. These individuals must have gone far out of their way to turn the place into a shambles, for they had managed to leave it looking just a trifle worse than a pigsty. Weeks of back-breaking labor were needed to put everything back to rights—only Juozas and I had to beg off after a couple of days because we found ourselves running short of food. Neither of us had thought it necessary to bring very much from home, figuring that by this time we would be able to buy at least some of the essentials in the Kaunas markets. Unfortunately, we had figured wrong. There was not a morsel of food for sale in the entire city—leaving us with the options of starving to death on campus or making the long trek back to the farm. Needless to say, the latter alternative seemed far more enticing to us.

But trying to leave Kaunas turned out to be something of a feat in itself. Civilian train service had been suspended at the beginning of the occupation, and no one was really sure whether the trains were running again or not. As for motor cars or buses, they might just as well have never existed for anyone who wasn't in the Red Army. In short, if we hoped to get anywhere at all, we would have to start walking. And walk we did, right out of the city: Juozas and I and our colleague, Jurgis, who lived in a neighboring village.

Just outside the city of Garliava, we spotted three Red Army officers coming up behind us in an American jeep. We waved, and the jeep screeched to a stop. The sergeant-major who was at the wheel offered to take us wherever we wanted to go in exchange for a bottle of vodka. Naturally, we accepted his proposition at once. As a matter of fact, we even tripled the going rate and promised to give each of the Russians a bottle—not to mention a hearty supper on top. At first, we asked to be taken no further than our aunt's house, since it was easily accessible from the main road. However, when we happened to mention that we were university students, the other officers (a captain and a lieutenant, respectively) became very affable and insisted on driving us all the way home. Somewhat reluctantly, we agreed. Although we were happy not to have to trouble our aunt, we had great doubts about

The Story of the Red Army Soldier, Vasili 17

being able to reach our village without suffering some kind of mechanical breakdown. The road over which we would have to travel was long and in the worst possible condition, and the jeep was overloaded already. But the sergeant-major merely laughed at our fears. The road hadn't been invented that could stop a jeep, he informed us. And he was right, too. This marvel of American ingenuity carried us straight to the door with no trouble whatsoever.

Mother was overjoyed to see us. She and Ona bustled about the kitchen preparing the promised meal, while I busied myself with the task of opening up bottles. I couldn't resist teasing Ona a little.

"Well now, Ona," I said. "Isn't this a fine lot of stout, hearty fellows? Why don't you see if you can hit it off with one of them? You know how much they love chasing after Lithuanian girls!"

Ona threw me a dirty look and snorted. "If they're your idea of men, then you can have them! Stinkpots! Nothing but stinkpots is what they are! Reeking of herring and God-only-knows what else! Why, a body can't even walk past them without wanting to throw up. That's for your so-called men!" she added, giving the most buxom of her anatomy a resounding smack.

*

Shortly afterwards, my brothers came in from the fields and we sat down to eat. We didn't break up until some two hours later. The sergeant-major was the first to finish. He rose from the table and staggered to our storage room for a nap. (Luckily, we had already taken the precaution of securing our valuables under lock and key!) Then the captain also excused himself and went off to sleep God knows where. And with his departure the lieutenant suddenly found his tongue.

"How I envy you this Saturday evening," he sighed. "How pleasant it must be for the whole family to get together! Do many families in your country get a chance to do the same thing?"

"You'll find them almost everywhere," said brother Andrius.

"Then you are indeed fortunate people! But we. . . . Many of us don't even know who our mothers and fathers are. We

18 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

have been torn from our parents as infants.” The lieutenant stopped speaking and looked thoughtful for a moment. Then he went on.

“How I would like to be spending such an evening with my own family: chatting with my brothers, and sharing their troubles and cares. . . . We Russians are human beings, too!” His eyes filled with tears and he fell silent again.

Then he glanced around the room before continuing, “When we were fighting at Ilman. . . . at Minsk, we were told over and over again that we were doing it to liberate the proletariat from the exploiters. But we have been in Lithuania nearly a month, and we have yet to meet anyone who has been exploited. We haven’t heard of anyone being dencounced as an exploiter, either. The only ones the people seem to be denouncing are the Red Army men. Because we brought you slavery. But do you think we wanted to? How I hate this damn uniform!”

With a sudden movement, the lieutenant tore the medals from his jacket and flung them away. They made such a clatter as they fell to the floor that our cats jumped up from where they had been sleeping under the table and scattered in every direction of the room.

“My father’s bones are rotting away in a Siberian concentration camp while I. . . . I’m helping his executioners to enslave millions of others! And why do you think I’m doing it? Because I don’t want to end up like him! Oh, I know, the government promised us the world! Anything to make us lay down our lives for them! Look here! They even started spreading rumors that each *kolkhoznik* would get his own plot of land after the war. But it won’t happen, believe me! What will happen is that *kolkhozes* will be introduced in your country, too. And then you’ll have nothing of your own, either. And they’ll keep telling you how good life in the Soviet Union is. But we who have lived there know better! Look here! Two armies have ravaged your land, and you still have plenty of everything left. That’s because you work for the love of it—for yourselves and for your families. Your tables are piled high with food. Why, you even have enough to feed me—a stranger and an enemy soldier. But in my motherland—in the wealthy Russia—people are walking around in rags and starving!

The lieutenant might have gone on in this manner all

The Story of the Red Army Soldier, Vasili 19

night if we hadn't decided to shut him up. We were still sober enough to realize that he could get himself into a lot of trouble with such talk if he was sincere. On the other hand, if he was just doing it to provoke us into saying something derogatory against the Soviet Union—well, we already had troubles enough. At any rate, Jurgis gathered up his medals and weighed them thoughtfully in the palm of his hand.

“Pin them on again, Kolya,” he urged. “Believe me, we appreciate what they stand for as well as you do. Pin them on and then we'll all pay my village a visit.

Although the lieutenant seemed very reluctant to do so, he finally pinned the medals back on and left the house with Jurgis and Juozas. Much to the captain's annoyance, he did not return until mid-morning of the following day. The officers had orders to report to Command Headquarters at the front by twelve o'clock noon, and they would have to rush quite a bit because of his tardiness if they wanted to make it. After a hurried breakfast and a solemn promise to visit us again soon, they departed.

Only then did I become aware of how much this little hitchhiking episode had actually cost me: my wrist watch was missing! It must have been filched by the sergeant-major while I was asleep sometime during the night. Since I had also bedded down in the storage room, I must have provided him with an opportunity which he couldn't resist. He had been so light-fingered, too, that I never even noticed the loss until the Russians were well out of sight. Needless to say, we never heard from any of them again.

CHAPTER III

WHAT'S YOURS IS MINE

After the front had become temporarily stabilized beyond the city of Marijampolė the advance Red Army units which had been carrying out the “liberation reforms” in our district were replaced by several units of the NKVD. Apparently these units “had also “left their field kitchens behind,” for the women soon began to grumble about the way the *enkavedisti* were making themselves at home in theirs. But this was only a diversion. The real business of the NKVD was of a much more serious nature. To begin with, they conducted systematic purges of the local population. Not a day went by that we didn't hear about this or that person being arrested. They also made sure that the people discharged whatever obligations the authorities had imposed on them —the most important of these being trench digging and airfield construction work.

Although the Russians had been advancing steadily throughout the summer, they could not rid themselves of the fear that the Germans might yet rally and destroy them with a sneak attack. In fact, they became so obsessed by the possibility that they began constructing networks of trenches as far back as sixty-five miles behind the front. This operation was conducted on a massive scale all autumn long by means of forced labor. Every Lithuanian man and woman capable of wielding a shovel had been drafted for the purpose. Each one was expected to dig a stipulated number of trenches per day, and each one had to keep working until this daily quota was fully completed. Since the Russians did not supply these workers with food, they were also obliged to make frequent trips to their homes for securing provisions. This was particularly hard on those who had been recruited from distant communities. (Some of them from as far as fifteen miles away.) They had to spend most of their free time traveling, and were

consequently deprived of much-needed rest.

Another type of forced labor imposed on our people was the clearing of land for airfields. About a hundred and fifty of them were constructed in Lithuania during the autumn of 1944, and the necessary road building and repair work was carried out concurrently. The entire burden of this operation had been placed on the shoulders of the rural population. The results were disastrous, especially where next year's crop was concerned. The farmers simply didn't have time enough to sow their winter wheat—and many of them couldn't even get around to digging their potatoes, which were left to freeze in the fields. The weather didn't help anybody, either: it rained nearly every day.

But what plagued the farmers and the villagers more than anything else was the incessant thievery on the part of the Russians. Rank-and-file soldiers, Red Army officers, and the government officials of every designation were robbing the people blind—and had been doing so ever since the first day of "liberation." Perhaps the most notorious of the "official" bandits were the civilians who had attached themselves to Red Army units as territorial administrators. These gentlemen would simply climb into their automobiles, drive up to some farm or other, and requisition anything they wanted. And when the farmers asked them to issue receipts for the "requisitioned" items, so that they might be counted towards their quotas of mandatory contributions, the officials would bluntly refuse. Most frequently victimized by such "requisitioning" parties were farms which lay close to the main roads and could easily be reached by car.

Much less sophisticated but a great deal more devastating were the wholesale robberies being committed by Red Army soldiers. They would descend on a farm in hordes and grab whatever they could lay their hands on. Even the farmer's wife's undergarments would not be spared, since Red Army women usually participated in the raids and took great delight in such feminine finery. Needless to say, an individual subjected to one or two of these predatory visits was bound to be left totally destitute. Worse yet, he had absolutely no hope of obtaining redress. Appealing to Soviet officials didn't do any good because they invariably dismissed such complaints as mere fabrications. Besides, everyone already knew that the Soviet regime tacitly condoned pillaging by its rank-and-file

22 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

soldiers—the idea being to make them all the more eager to push the Russian offensive further and further westward in the hope of securing still greater spoils.

About the only thing the villagers and farmers could do under these circumstances was to try fending off the Red Army men on their own. Those fortunate enough to be living in areas where partisan units were operating had a relatively easy time of it. Not only did the partisans do their best to supply such individuals with weapons to defend themselves—they also went after the robbers personally, wiping out whole gangs of them and restoring the stolen items to their rightful owners. Granted, the risks involved in seeking or receiving help from the partisans were considerable. The Russians had declared them to be outlaws or “bandits,” and inflicted severe punishment on anyone who was even remotely suspected of having dealings with them. Nevertheless, most farmers and villagers were more than willing to chance it, and jumped at the prospect of obtaining partisan aid.

As for the individuals who found themselves outside the sphere of partisan influence, they had to handle the situation in the best way they could. And if some of the safeguards which they adopted were not altogether practical, at least they showed a great deal of ingenuity. The Pakaunë farmers, for instance, came up with the idea of installing loud gongs on their premises. Whenever one of these farmers happened to spot Red Army soldiers anywhere in the vicinity, he would sound the alarm by repeatedly striking his gong. The others would immediately follow suit. And the noise generated by dozens of gongs clanging in unison was so great that it frightened the intruders away. Or at least it did the first couple of times. Unfortunately, they were quick to see through the ruse, after which no amount of gong ringing could frighten them. This is not to imply that the gongs were rendered totally ineffective, though. They still served as excellent devices for warning the community. And if enough people could be alerted of an impending Red Army raid, they had a good chance of preventing it by taking prompt and concerted action.

Something of the sort occurred in the village of Vaintrakai. At midnight, the entire village was aroused by the incessant clanging of a gong which seemed to be coming from the direction of villager G.'s house. The gongs of his neighbors promptly picked up the alarm. However, it was obvious that

What's Yours Is Mine 23

they weren't doing any good because the next sound the villagers heard was a desperate cry for help. At this point, eight husky youths each grabbed a club and ran to assist G. as fast as their feet could carry them. Along the way, they very nearly collided with G.'s daughter, who was running breathlessly in the opposite direction. According to what she told them, the place had been invaded by a trio of Russian soldiers. All three were armed: one with an automatic pistol. Apparently the girl had escaped at the very last minute, because she said that the robbers were already starting to demolish the living room when she fled.

The villagers found G. in his door-yard, crouched down behind some bushes near the porch. Four of them joined him, while the remaining four crawled up to the windows and took up positions beneath the sills. The idea was to ambush the robbers as they were emerging with the "loot." Any other alternative—such as trying to capture them inside the house would have been far too dangerous because the villagers carried no firearms. The looting continued uninterrupted for about two hours. Judging from the awful commotion they made, the robbers were going at it with a vengeance. Every few minutes or so, the night air would be rent by the sound of some piece of furniture being smashed to pieces. This would invariably be followed by a long string of obscenities in Russian—after which the whole sequence would start all over again.

Finally, one of the robbers discovered that he simply couldn't stuff another thing into his sack. So he said good-bye to his comrades (who were still looting away) and headed for the door. But he had no sooner stepped over the threshold, when G. throttled him and sent him sprawling to the ground. The others pounced on him almost immediately afterwards, looking for hidden weapons. They did manage to locate a hand grenade. However, in the process of extricating it, G. lost his stranglehold on the fellow's throat—whereupon the latter let loose such a yelp that his cronies dropped everything and rushed outside to see what in blazes was happening. But the moment they spotted the rescue party, they stopped short and doubled back.

For a while they remained barricaded inside the house doing absolutely nothing. Then one of them hurled a hand grenade out of the window. Just as he did so, the other one

24 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

flung open the door and shoved his sackful of stolen goods onto the porch. He was undoubtedly planning to make away with it while the attention of the villagers was being diverted by the explosion. Only he didn't get very far. He came charging through the door so fast that he ran right into the sack and fell flat on his face on the ground. Taking no chances, villager J. made sure that he stayed there by delivering a smart blow to the back of his neck.

At this point, the robber who was still at large realized that things were getting serious and started blasting away. He did manage to wing one member of the rescue party, but had absolutely no luck with the other seven. These simply waited it out until he had exhausted his ammunition, after which they marched into the house and subdued him with no trouble at all.

There remained only the matter of notifying the district authorities. Since this was the duty of the village secretary, he was immediately summoned and dispatched to Panemunė with orders to get there as fast as his bicycle could carry him. As for the robbers, each of them was given a sound thrashing, and then all three of them were thrust into G.'s cellar until such time as the authorities should arrive.

To say that the Panemunė authorities were pleased with the village secretary's report would have been an understatement. They were positively delighted. At last, the villagers had done them proud by behaving like true public-spirited Soviet citizens. Eager to get his hands on what he believed to be a trio of Lithuanian partisans, District Executive Committee Chairman Savickis ordered a truck to be brought around at once. Then he and the local NKGB chief with eight of his men climbed aboard and drove full speed ahead to the scene of the crime.

When they reached G.'s house, the NKGB chief greeted the villagers assembled there with a laudatory oration. He heaped lavish praises on G. and on the brave citizens who had single-handedly apprehended the "bandits," and he urged everyone else to follow the fine example they had set. He continued speaking along these lines for some time, after which he and Committee Chairman Savickis provided themselves with heavy sticks and ordered G. to lead the way to the cellar.

"Now, then, my dear fellows. Out you come!" drawled the NKGB chief sarcastically as soon as G. had thrown open the cellar door.

What's Yours Is Mine 25

Ever so slowly, the head of one of the bandits began to materialize inside the dimly-lit aperture. This was an opportunity which District Executive Committee Chairman Savickis simply couldn't resist. He raised his stick and *wham!* brought it down full force right on the fellow's noggin. The latter let out a blood-curdling yell and scrambled back into the darkness for safety.

Suddenly, the NKGB chief turned as white as a ghost.

"Stop it, God damn you!" he shouted. "That is Lieutenant Shchipin you're beating! I'd recognize his voice anywhere!"

A tense silence followed. The NKGB chief stared at the crowd of assembled villagers, then at the cellar door, then at the villagers again. Finally, he decided to take the bull by the horns and addressed himself to the aforesaid Lieutenant Shchipin:

"You can come out now, Comrade Lieutenant. It's all right. Nobody will hit you, I guarantee it. Please, Comrade Lieutenant —and you other men, too —please come out of the cellar and show yourselves."

One after another, the objects of the chief's entreaties began to emerge. Sure enough, there was Lieutenant Shchipin with fresh blood all over his forehead. And there were his companions: two privates from an artillery unit stationed in Panemunè. It was a pretty mess, indeed. Neither the NKGB chief nor any of his subordinates had the faintest idea of what to say or do. They just kept staring at the three men and cursing them under their breath.

As for District Committee Chairman Savickis, he was beside himself. How could he have been so thoughtless? Why, he had very nearly succeeded in fracturing the erstwhile lieutenant's skull! He stood a little apart from the others with his eyes focused intently on the ground and contemplated the possibility of finding a hole to crawl into. He looked so ridiculous that it was all the villagers could do to keep from laughing out loud. Nor was this their only source of amusement. They also rejoiced at the fact that they had finally been able to unearth the truth —and had even managed to rub the noses of the Panemune officials in it. Although none of them uttered a word, the smug expressions on their faces were enough to fill volumes.

"Well, well, gentlemen!" They seemed to be saying. "So

26 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

you didn't believe us when we told you that Red Army soldiers were robbing us blind. You called us liars and slanderers of the glorious Soviet Republic. Liars, indeed! Take a good look and just try calling us liars now!

Curiously enough, Lieutenant Shchipin was the only one of the Russians who did not seem to be in the least embarrassed. While everybody else was standing around red-faced, he was busy working himself into a rage at the very idea of anyone's daring to assault an officer of the Red Army. He stomped up and down, heaping torrents of curses on the head of the scurrilous mongrel and threatening the villagers with instant perdition unless they disclosed his identity at once. (All this to the great consternation of Committee Chairman Savickis, who was undoubtedly wishing himself elsewhere!)

Heaven only knows how this little farce might have ended if the NKGB chief hadn't decided to intervene. Displaying great presence of mind, he promptly herded everybody into the truck and ordered the driver to take off for Panemunė before things could get any further out of hand.

Later on, villager G. wanted to demand compensation for the damage done to his house. But his neighbors talked him out of it.

"Leave well enough alone," they urged. "And thank the Lord that the whole thing is over. You'd never get justice from *that* lot—not unless birds of a feather suddenly start pecking each other's eyes out!"

CHAPTER IV

TO ARMS: FOR OR AGAINST SLAVERY?

Not only did the Russians force our people to do their heavy labor, but they also expected us to fight their wars. Thousands of Lithuanian young men were eventually drafted into the Red Army, although the feat was not accomplished until a great deal of blood had been shed. At first, the Russian mobilization order was ignored altogether. After all, it was as illegal as a similar order which had been issued during the German occupation: no occupying power had the right to recruit men for its armed forces on foreign soil. But unlike the Germans, who eventually realized the error of their ways and abandoned the scheme, the Russians simply redoubled their efforts and chose to ignore the fact that they were trampling over our national rights.

On the day set aside for reporting to recruiting stations, armed NKVD men were sent out to scour the countryside for likely "recruits." (They had already learned from the first occupation that no Lithuanian in his right mind would enlist into the Red Army unless a bayonet was pointed at his back.) Rounding up the first batch of conscripts proved to be relatively easy because the poor fellows were taken completely unaware. But when these same "recruits" were being herded to induction posts, every able-bodied male who saw them promptly took off for the woods. And when the *enkavedisti* saw *them*, they started shooting. In this manner alone, Lithuania lost several thousand of its men.

Even more men of draft age were killed because they sought to avoid recruitment by concealing themselves in stables or barns. These were extremely hazardous hiding places. The *enkavedisti* always searched them thoroughly and fired their machine guns point blank into the piles of straw and hay which were stored there. Only those individuals who were

28 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

able to keep themselves from crying out or moaning after they had been wounded ever lived long enough to tell their tales. As for the rest, they were quickly flushed out and finished off on the spot.

One such search of the barns and stables in a small village not far from mine resulted in the deaths of eighteen young field hands.

*

Under these precarious circumstances, I began to wonder whether my student draft exemption card would do me any good if I remained on the farm. I therefore decided to return to Kaunas somewhat sooner than I had intended. I might starve there, but at least I wouldn't be drafted. Little did I know that I would very nearly be "shanghaied" along the way! Just outside Kaunas, a Russian patrol intercepted me and demanded to see my papers at once. The Mongolian sentry who examined them decided that they were not in order. So, with an automatic pistol pressed against my spine, he pushed me towards a kiosk where his superior officer was stationed. The officer also found my documents wanting. Why was there no seal on the card which exempted me from military service? Why had I, a student, left Kaunas University in the first place? Did my family really need me so badly to help out on the farm? I did my very best to answer the officer's questions, but he must have found my answers wanting, too, because it wasn't long before he ordered the sentry to detain me.

The Mongolian then took me to a spot beside a ditch where some fifteen other young men were already assembled. As I stood there, wondering what to do next, another student—a friend of mine—came riding up on his bicycle. True to form, he was stopped and ordered to dismount. This my friend did immediately. However, instead of producing his papers, he made motions to draw the Mongolian aside. At first the latter didn't know what to make of such strange behavior and instinctively reached for his automatic. I held my breath. Was the Mongolian really going to use it? But, no. All of a sudden a broad grin flashed across his face, and he looked down with delight at his hands—into which my friend had just pressed a brown paper-wrapped parcel.

To Arms: For Or Against Slavery? 29

“All right! Papers in order!” he barked, and the next thing I knew, my friend was pedaling away, laughing. He was still laughing when he pedaled past our sad little group.

“What in the world are you fellows doing standing beside that ditch?” he shouted. “Hasn’t anyone told you that Russians are simply mad about bacon? Or are you saving all of yours so you can have something to munch on in the Army?”

We acknowledged his jest with rueful smiles, wishing that we had been half as resourceful as he was.

After twenty of us “draft dodgers” had been rounded up, we were separated into groups of five and marched off to a recruiting station on Gediminas Street. Here, they told us to wait until we were summoned for a hearing before some kind of special interrogation. It was quite a while before my turn came around. During the interim, two more young men of draft age were dragged in and given the same instructions. According to what they told the clerk on duty, I gathered that they hailed from Pakuonis. There was nothing out of the ordinary about this. Pakuonis was just another town. But it did strike me as strange that one of the sentries should come running over to talk to the clerk only moments after the name had been mentioned. What possible interest could a Russian have in Pakuonis? My curiosity was aroused, and I edged a little closer to the desk so that I might hear what the sentry was saying. I managed to catch the general drift of it, although I missed a few words here and there because he was doing his best not to speak above a whisper. Apparently there had been some sort of violence in Pakuonis on the previous day. Certain individuals —“bandits,” the sentry called them —had laid siege to a building in which newly-captured Lithuanian “recruits” were being held, and had managed to set every single one of them free. While they were at it, they had also killed every one of the sentries —which probably explained why this particular sentry had been so startled when he heard that the two newcomers were from Pakuonis, and why he kept casting fearful glances in their direction all the time that he spoke. I made a mental note to find out more about the incident if and when I was released from this place.

At long last, somebody called out my name and directed me to the special interrogator’s office. For reasons which have yet to be explained, the interrogator refused to have any

30 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

dealings with me until he had first made certain that I was standing exactly four paces away from his desk. Then he took down my name and address, and proceeded straight to the heart of the matter. To wit, he wanted to know why I — a healthy and apparently intelligent Soviet citizen — hadn't enlisted in the Red Army long ago. Where was my sense of obligation? Where was my loyalty? Didn't I realize what a glorious opportunity was being extended to me? Wasn't I anxious to get my hands on that monster, Hitler, and to rid the world of him once and for all?

I saw right away that it would take quite a bit to impress this character —so I decided to give him back a dose of his own medicine. Of course, I wanted to see Hitler destroyed, I said. Of course, I was completely loyal and devoted to the glorious Soviet Union. And, yes, I dearly longed to take advantage of the wonderful opportunity being offered to me. But what could I do when the Council of Commissars had already decreed that my type of individual was better able to serve the State by obtaining an education than by fighting or laboring with his hands? Being a loyal and devoted citizen who knew where his obligations lay, I couldn't even dream of placing my personal preferences above the mandates of the Council. To do so would have been selfish and unpatriotic—if not downright treasonable.

Perhaps the special interrogator was impressed with my oratory; perhaps he wasn't. He merely pointed out that student draft exemptions were not his department and turned me over to the Commissariat for Academic Military Affairs. This particular body quickly handed down a ruling in my favor—very likely because the only Commissar who happened to be on hand at the time was the same one who had failed to affix the required seals to my student draft exemption card in the first place.



It was a relief to be outdoors again, and to be able to roam from place to place without some meddlesome guard tagging behind me. After taking a leisurely stroll through the streets, I walked over to the university where I was supposed to meet my brother Juozas. I found him waiting impatiently for me and wondering why I should be so late in arriving. (He had set

out for Kaunas a few days before I did, and hadn't encountered the least bit of trouble along the way.)

The first thing on our agenda was to look around for a suitable place to live, since it was obvious that we would have to remain in Kaunas from now on. We inspected the various residences which the university administration had made available to its students and finally hit upon a boarding house which seemed to be a trifle less dilapidated than the rest. Having made our decision, we filled out an application and waited. Because our friends Julius and Jurgis were supposed to come in with us, we had requested a whole apartment rather than just a single room. We sincerely hoped we could get it. There were a number of advantages to having a place all to ourselves, not the least of which was the comfort of knowing that our room-mates weren't spying for the NKVD.

We obtained the apartment without any difficulty whatsoever. The difficult part came later — when we were faced with the prospect of having to make it fit for humans to live in. The place had been occupied first by Germans and then by Russian soldiers — and to say that it was an absolute mess was to give it a compliment which it didn't deserve. Both groups of previous tenants had left so many revolting mementos of their sojourn behind them that the cumulative effect was enough to make us cringe every time we stepped through the door. (In actual fact, we were fortunate to have a door at all — never mind that the lock and the doorknob were missing! — because the soldiers had removed everything else, right down to the windowpanes.)

Only after weeks of back-breaking labor were we able to restore this hovel to some semblance of decency. Eventually, we even fashioned a make-shift lock for the door. We never could do very much about the windows, though, except to board them up.

*

When we weren't slaving away in this manner, we could be found at the university where we spent long hours trying to get back into the tempo of academic routine. Yet as busy as I was during these first few weeks, I still found enough time to make inquiries about the Pakuonis incident, and I finally obtained a full account of it from some of my better-informed colleagues. According to what they told me, two Lithuanian

32 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

partisans — Tigras and Šarūnas — had planned and carried out the operation all by themselves. The story went something like this. On “recruiting” day last, the *enkavedisti* had managed to bag several dozen young “volunteers,” and had locked them up under heavy guard inside the Bajoraitis Mansion. But when Tigras and Šarūnas got wind of the fact, they decided that they didn’t much like the idea of these young men being held captive. So they filled a couple of sacks with hand-grenades and set out to remedy the situation. As soon as it had grown dark enough for them to move about undetected, the two men crept into the yard of the Bajoraitis Mansion and hurled their entire stock of grenades right through the windows of the guard house. So deadly accurate was their aim that it took them less than a minute to blow every single sentry to bits. And once this had been accomplished, it was a simple enough matter to break down the doors of the mansion itself and to release the prisoners.

These same colleagues went on to inform me that the Pakuonis incident was by no means unique. Quite the contrary. It was just one example of what was beginning to take place everywhere. A few days earlier, for instance, something along these lines had occurred on the outskirts of Prienai. Here, a band of partisans under the leadership of group commander Dešinys had ambushed a whole convoy filled with “recruits.” Not only did they succeed in setting the lot of them free, but they also wiped out the entire NKVD escort while they were at it. As for the vehicles (American-made Studebakers, every one of them) they were promptly doused with gasoline and ignited so that they could never again be used to carry Lithuanian young men into slavery.

There were many other ways in which the Lithuanian partisans were making their presence felt. For one thing, they had redoubled their efforts to protect Lithuanian farmers against Red Army marauders. For another, they had recently initiated an all-out campaign against collaborators. Not a day went by that at least one or two Lithuanians who had sold themselves to the Soviet cause didn’t drop out of sight under mysterious circumstances. And with each new disappearance, the people who heard about it would nod and exchange knowing looks. So-and-so has gone fishing, they whispered. Such-and-such is off hunting hares; this or that individual has

been spirited away by a fox. . . .

Needless to say, the remaining collaborators (district administrators, officials, and paid agents of the NKVD) were quick to catch on. Seeing how many of their number had already vanished under the very noses of the Russians, these gentlemen suddenly became extremely reluctant to remain in their posts. And the Russians, anxious to stimulate the waning zeal of their puppets, responded by subjecting other Lithuanians to stricter repressive measures than ever before. It was a vicious circle because the end result of such tactics was to swell the ranks of the partisans, thereby enabling the movement to conduct its activities on a still wider scale.

The increasing militancy of the armed resistance members provided a fairly accurate indication of the national temperament at this time. Instead of submitting like sheep to their Russian oppressors, the Lithuanian people were becoming more and more determined to resist them — even to the point of arming themselves and becoming outlaws in Soviet eyes. Granted, the risks involved were tremendous. The Russians had vast numbers of troops stationed throughout Lithuania, not to mention an extensive network of agents who seemed to be everywhere. As for their methods of dealing with offenders — these were only too well known and much too cruel to be described except superficially. Yet in spite of all this, more and more Lithuanians were arming themselves and joining the underground each day. Outraged by the never-ending waves of arrests, robberies and murders, these men had solemnly pledged to stem the tide in any way that they could. They deemed it better, by far, to die defending their countrymen than to live as virtual slaves.

*

Shortly after I had settled down in Kaunas, I was visited by a friend who had recently joined the ranks of the partisans and had adopted the pseudonym of Uosis. He had come to Kaunas to make arrangements for getting a small printing press out of the city. The Kaunas partisans had been using this press to run off draft exemption cards since the first days of occupation. But now they wanted to turn it over to a partisan group known as “The Iron Wolf,” which was operating in one

34 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

of the nearby rural districts. During the course of our conversation, Uosis explained how he happened to become a member of the armed resistance movement in the first place. He had applied for admission to the university, but found himself rejected on the grounds that his father had been a volunteer soldier during the struggle for Lithuanian independence and had later been awarded the highest Lithuanian order for bravery, the Knight's Cross. Barred from the university, Uosis could look forward to nothing better than arrest or mobilization. And so he decided to cast his lot with the partisans. This way he would at least be able to fight back, he said.

He showed me a couple of draft exemption cards which had been printed on the "underground" press and asked me if I knew of anyone who could use them. He assured me that it was virtually impossible to tell them apart from the real thing. As a matter of fact, he had just recently tested them by deliberately going through three check points, and each time the "Ivans" had looked at his papers and barked:

"All right! Seals in order! You may proceed!"

He also told me how he had managed to outwit the Russians several weeks ago, when he was picked up without any documents whatsoever. He had just left partisan headquarters on a mission when a handful of them obstructed his path. Naturally, they demanded to see his documents on the double. Uosis never did explain to me why he hadn't brought them along, but to the Russians he said that he didn't need them: he was still much too young. He did have a birth certificate back at the house, though. Very well. The Russians would go take a look at it. Now, where was his house? Uosis led them into the woods and wandered around for a while, trying to think of some way to ditch them. Then, all at once, it came to him. He pointed to a ramshackled cottage far on the opposite bank of a swamp and exclaimed:

"There! That's where I live!"

The Russians sized up the place with disappointment. It was obvious that they wouldn't find anything worth stealing there. And since this was the only reason why they had been so eager to examine my friend's mythical birth certificate, they cursed him and stalked away in search of bigger game. "I suppose I should consider myself lucky," Uosis concluded.

To Arms: For Or Against Slavery? 35

“But, to tell you the truth, I was just a little bit sorry that it ended as easily as it did. I was really itching to give those Russians a good fight!”

CHAPTER V

REPRESSED SCHOLARS AND RELUCTANT SPIES

We had returned to the university with every intention of pursuing our studies and graduating. So much for intentions. It didn't take us any time at all to realize that we weren't going to do either unless some miracle intervened. To begin with, there was still no electricity in Kaunas so that if we wanted to get anything accomplished at night, we could only do so by kerosene light. And for an architectural student like myself, who had to submit all kinds of technical drawings, this was absolutely impossible. Of course, we might have accomplished a little something during the day if we weren't constantly being drafted for various and sundry collective work details or spending long hours standing on line in order to buy food.

Although ration cards had been issued to university students, food was a scarce commodity for anyone who didn't happen to be a member of the Communist Party or in the pay of the NKVD. The scarcity wasn't limited to students, either. Nearly every category of worker (except for the two already mentioned) found it next to impossible to obtain food. As a matter of fact, their distress soon became so acute that business concerns throughout Kaunas decided to establish food shops right on their premises in order to help them. (Of course, the Communists and *enkavedisti* had their own food shops, too—but that was another story.)

It wasn't long before the university followed their example by installing a store of its own in the sub-basement of the administration building. Although this store was intended to serve every member and employee of the academic community, it was the students who did all the work. We ferreted out the places where food could be obtained. We loaded the food onto makeshift carts; and we dragged these carts back to the university and unloaded them.

Repressed Scholars and Reluctant Spies 37

Well, at least we didn't have the problem of a variety of items to choose from. Such humdrum staples as groats, safflower oil, and American-made powdered eggs were about all we were able to get in large quantities—and then only with a great deal of good fortune. **As** for bread, that was a real luxury until we managed to locate a concern which agreed to do the baking if we supplied the flour. (Incidentally, our ration cards also entitled us to such items as meat, sugar and butter. But whether any of them ever became available remained a profound mystery to us.)

So much for the back-breaking wholesale aspect of our food business. The retail part of it was sheer murder. Huge crowds of people would rush into the sub-basement the moment anything was offered for sale and form long lines which generally ran four abreast. It took hours of waiting just to get near the food counter, and even longer to obtain the designated portions of whatever happened to be on hand.

Was it any wonder that we should end up by devoting more and more of our time to filling our bellies, and less and less of it to improving our minds?

There was also the problem of how to keep warm. With winter approaching, the university found itself facing a fuel shortage. Or, to be more precise, it was faced with the prospect of having no fuel at all unless the student body could find some way of procuring peat. Actually, peat was completely useless to us because the university's heating system was geared to burn nothing but anthracite coal. However, the administration hoped to be able to exchange it for coal with one of the Kaunas factories. And so, vast student work gangs were duly organized and sent out into the peat fields. They dragged back wagon loads of peat. But the net result of all this labor amounted to zero; the peat had been collected in rainy weather, and the factory rejected it as being too damp.

Realizing that I wouldn't be able to settle down to serious work until the university had regained at least some semblance of normalcy, I accepted a post as assistant in charge of renovation for one of its several schools. At the time that I started this job, Kaunas University had obtained permission to take over the Kaušakis Villa. I was appalled to see the state to which its previous occupants (Red Army and NKVD men — who else?) had reduced this once-beautiful dwelling. All the doors in the place had been torn off from their hinges and

38 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

burned for fuel. Every sink and toilet bowl had been smashed to pieces; and there was not a single electrical outlet or socket which was not a gaping hole. On top of all this, there were dried human feces in practically every corner. And in one corner we came upon what looked like a hastily disassembled prison cell. It was about a meter and a half long, and just over a meter wide. Here and there, we were still able to make out a word or two of the messages which its former occupants had tried to leave on the walls. Close to the floor boards — where the NKVD men had not bothered to check very closely — we discovered a whole sentence;

“And still I remain silent. . . .

Father.”

Underneath it was a smear of dried blood.

Later on, I learned that quite a few of these make-shift cells existed in Kaunas. Only they were intact and being put to the “fullest possible” use. I wasn’t surprised. It made perfectly good sense, especially since the regular prisons were already packed way beyond their capacity. How else could the *enkavedisti* even hope to keep pace with the mounting wave of arrests?

*

It didn’t take long for the Russians to start arresting students and professors. In fact, the arrests began shortly before winter set in. Heretofore, university people had been left pretty much alone, mostly because they had taken a very active part in the anti-Nazi resistance movement. But anyone who had dared to protest against injustice and oppression was, *per se*, suspect to the Soviet mind. Such people had to be watched. Agents had to be planted in their midst. And since there were very few Communists on campus, it was deemed necessary to create agents by force. That was the real reason behind the arrests.

The procedure went something like this. The NKVD would accuse the arrested students of having been enemies of

Repressed Scholars and Reluctant Spies 39

the people. But their concept of an enemy of the people was so very nebulous that it was almost impossible for the students to clear themselves. Then, after a period of interrogation and imprisonment, the *enkavedisti* would tell the students that they could buy back their freedom by agreeing to cooperate: *i.e.*, to spy on their friends and acquaintances and to report anything suspicious to the NKVD. Only by such collaboration could they hope to “redeem their guilt” and become “honored citizens of the Socialist Fatherland.”

There were many among the arrested who told the NKVD point blank that they preferred a lingering death in Siberia to the betrayal of their fellow countrymen. But those individuals who were motivated by a weaker ideology, or who simply couldn't endure sustained pressure and pain, yielded to the temptation and consented. Very often they were not even aware of the sort of despicable work which lay ahead of them when they agreed. Only after they had signed the “pledge” and received their final instructions did they realize what a terrible price they had paid. Some of these students contacted their friends as soon as they had been released from prison and informed them that they were now NKVD spies. They also warned their friends to be careful not to say anything derogatory either about the Soviet Union or the *status quo* in their presence. It was imperative that the warning be obeyed, too. One never knew how many other NKVD collaborators who *liked their work* might be participating in any given conversation. As a matter of fact, this was a common way of testing a new collaborator's reliability. And if it turned out that he was unreliable, he would either be killed or sent to a concentration camp.

Fortunately, every one of the students in our boarding house was loyal and trustworthy. About thirty of us lived there, dispersed among six apartments on three floors. We had already spent several years studying together and knew one another thoroughly well. Even now, we felt free to spend many an evening engaged in discussions of all kinds. We might talk about our studies or about the resistance work in which we had been engaged during the first Russian invasion and the subsequent German occupation. We discussed the current Russian occupation, and we all agreed that it had deprived us of the most basic human rights. We also tried to assess what the future would bring; and, quite frankly, our outlook was

40 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

most optimistic. We did not believe that the Western Allies would allow the Communists to destroy the peoples of Eastern and Central Europe. We solemnly believed that freedom and the rights of men were the sacred things they had been declared to be in the Atlantic Charter. We therefore did not even consider the possibility that the Allies might not continue to carry on the fight until that freedom and those rights had been restored. It seemed inconceivable to us that Western statesmen could be so very gullible as to be taken in by the kind of intrigue and double-dealing for which the Soviet Union had long since become notorious. In short, we were thoroughly convinced that Lithuania and the other European democracies still under Communist domination would soon be given back their independence.

The love of liberty burned like a bright flame within our hearts. It was this very same flame which had burst into the holocaust of a mass revolt against the Nazis in 1941, and which had continued to glow undiminished in the form of underground resistance afterwards. And now, under the threat of being snuffed out by our new oppressors, it was gradually beginning to illuminate the course which most of us would eventually be compelled to take —the path which led to the ranks of the Lithuanian partisans.

CHAPTER VI

HE WHO HESITATES IS LOST

Because the beginning of 1945 found the Russians preparing for an all-out offensive against Germany, their mobilization efforts in Lithuania were redoubled. But the Lithuanian people reacted just as they had always done, and refused to report to Russian mobilization stations. And NKVD units were once again sent out into the countryside to round up whatever young men had not yet joined the partisans. A few of the "volunteers" thus obtained were sent off to prison, while the rest were clad in Red Army uniforms and formed into so-called "Lithuanian" battle units. ("So-called" because all the officers were Russian and only the Russian language was used for giving out commands.)

As a rule, these hastily thrown-together units received no military training whatsoever. Nor were they provided with weapons of any kind. They were rushed off to the front "as is," with orders to pick up arms from the enemy as best as they were able. According to the standards of Western philosophy, such treatment was horrible. However, it was a perfectly normal procedure where the Communists were concerned, since their philosophy places no value on individual human lives. Besides, in this particular instance they were also anxious to hasten the extermination of a captive people. The young men who found themselves in the Red Army "death" units had one chance to survive and many fled into the forests, uniforms and all, and joined the partisans. They much preferred to die on their native soil, fighting the Russians, to perishing in some foreign land on their account. But not all of them were able to get away in time. As soon as the Russians realized what was happening, they promptly shipped the remaining conscripts to the Russian interior. And very few of these men ever saw Lithuania again.

42 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

During the early part of January, 1945, I found myself being an eye-witness to the deportation of some of these unfortunates. I happened to be in charge of a brigade of several dozen students who were loading peat into railroad cars at Geležiūnai station. I had already noticed a string of American-made railroad cars standing at a siding. Double bunks had been installed in every one of them, and all the windows were covered with barbed wire. The presence of bunks suggested that the cars were intended for soldiers, but the barbed wire didn't make any sense at all. Only exiles bound for Siberia or Kazakstan were transported in this way.

An unusually large crowd was beginning to gather inside the station. There seemed to be many more women than men; but, whatever their sex, nearly all of them carried carefully-wrapped bundles. They kept looking around expectantly, almost as if they were waiting for something to happen. Curious, I pressed forward. Perhaps I would be able to find out what was going on. Suddenly a band struck up a lively military strain, and a group of men in Red Army uniforms came marching in. They stopped when they reached the special cars on the siding. Almost simultaneously, a horde of *enkavedisti* appeared as if out of nowhere and quickly surrounded the entire railroad station. The music died down immediately. In its stead I could hear harsh voices ordering the Red Army men to climb aboard.

Complying with these orders—reinforced, as they were, by automatic weapons—the men began to enter the special cars. But they did so with obvious reluctance, and even after they had climbed on, they kept crowding against the doors and windows, trying to look out. At first it struck me as strange to see Red Army soldiers behaving this way—or being treated in this way, for that matter. But the moment I saw the *enkavedisti* surging forward to surround the cars, I knew. And I also knew why the men and women who were gathered at the station had been waiting.

For they, too, were now surging forward and running up to the cars in search of their loved ones. It was particularly painful to watch the women as they ran to and fro, trying to find their husbands, sweethearts, brothers, or sons. They yearned for a chance to bid them a last farewell and to hand them a packet of food for their journey into the unknown. Russian voices barking threats mingled with the hysterical

sobbing of these desperate women.

Suddenly somebody blew a whistle. The *enkavedisti* posted beside the wagon doors pushed back the women who were still pressing. Then they slammed the doors shut and drew the locking bars into position. The people who had not succeeded in finding their relatives now quickly undid their bundles and began to press the contents into whatever hands were stretched out to them through the wire-barred windows. From one of the cars came a plea for water, and the very next minute its windows were being bombarded with handfuls of snow which could be melted down into water. Packed inside the snowballs were bits and pieces of bread.

A bent old woman—the village beggar—staggered up to the siding. She set her basket down on the snow and began to empty it. But she didn't seem to have the strength to do very much else.

“Help me, good people!” she cried. “Help me to give them my share! My hands are too weak! Perhaps I've collected food from their parents and relatives. And I'll collect again if God gives me strength. But those poor creatures will see only hunger.”

No! This was too much even for me. Reluctantly, I turned aside to hide my emotions. Do not let the Russians see so much as a tear!

At last, the shrill whistle of the locomotive was heard. The train jerked convulsively several times, and then began its long journey eastward. The four-axled wagons—made in the land of liberty—rolled slowly past, carrying our countrymen into who knows what kind of slavery. Their voices came drifting faintly to our ears. They were singing Lithuanian folk songs: “The linden tree bends by the roadside”. . . “Dear Lithuania, my homeland”. . . “Adieu, Lithuania”. . . . This was their last farewell to freedom and to a land which most of them were destined never to see again.

A few more muffled clangings of steel, and the train disappeared beyond the bend taking with it the plaintive strains of Lithuanian folksongs. The crowd began to disperse. They walked slowly, crying for lost friends and relatives. A little later, the *enkavedisti* also began leaving. Behind me, I heard someone muttering through clenched teeth:

“More bones for the Siberian dogs to chew on!”

I turned around quickly and saw a man from my own

44 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

brigade—not a student but a janitor at one of the university buildings. I wanted to add a little something to his words, but I restrained myself. This member of the “proletariat” had no need of my “learned” opinion: he was quite capable of figuring out the true state of affairs for himself.

*CHAPTER VII*WHEN MEN BEGIN TO FEAR
THEIR OWN SHADOWS

That night, I was tormented by a horrible dream. It seemed to me that I was back in our boardinghouse, when a storm suddenly arose and descended on Kaunas. It was accompanied by ugly blood-red clouds, and it struck with such impact that the whole building began to shake. Terrified, I ran to the cellar, hoping to find shelter there. But even as I was doing so, I felt my feet stumbling over some obstacle. And I grew more terrified still when I looked down and saw what it was. There, right before my eyes, lay the corpses of three men. One of them was my brother Juozas, and the other two were my room-mates Julius and Vilius.

I awoke with a start to find myself sitting bolt upright in bed. My whole body was dripping wet with perspiration. What could have brought about such a horrible nightmare? Was it the fact that I had witnessed the pathetic spectacle of those conscripts being shipped off to the Russian interior? Or was it perhaps the beginning of the psychological crisis which people living in Soviet-occupied countries were known to undergo? Being constantly subjected to all kinds of terrorism, such people eventually ended up by fearing everything—including their own “seditious” thoughts. I didn’t believe that I was quite ready for this category, though. Gradually, I regained my self-control. I thought about what the janitor had muttered just a few hours earlier. His words indicated that my workers had not yet lost their self-control either; and I listened to their snoring as they slept, exhausted after a hard day’s work. Outside, it was so cold that I could hear the fence posts snapping and popping in the frozen air. Finally, I dozed off

46 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

again, and this time there were no dreams. . . .

*

Three weeks later, our peat-loading detail in Geležiūnai was finished and we returned to Kaunas. Here, I said good-bye to my men and started off in the direction of the boarding house. I was so wrapped up in thought that I nearly walked right past my friend Stasys.

“Where are you going in such a hurry?” he shouted. “Not NKVD headquarters, I hope?”

“I’ve just returned from the peat fields. I’m on my way back to the boarding house,” I said.

“Are you mad?” Stasys asked in amazement. “Or don’t you know that every one of your room-mates, including your brother, is behind bars?”

Then he hastily filled me in on what had happened. It seemed that there had been something to my nightmare, after all. A red tempest had, indeed, been raging in Kaunas, and it had blasted our apartment the very same night I had been tortured by the dream. Stasys could not say for sure whether I, too, was wanted by the NKVD. But he suggested that I refrain from showing my face around the premises if I knew what was good for me.

“If they took three, they can just as easily take a fourth one,” he said.

Since I was not guilty of anything, I did not think that the *enkavedisti* would be so hot on my heels as to prevent me from stopping at the apartment for a few minutes. After all, hadn’t I been one of the most zealous among the university’s administrative workers? Besides, I really wasn’t engaged in any anti - Communist activities at the time. I therefore paid little heed to my friend’s warning and continued on my way.

I found Julius’ sister looking after our things. After talking with her and with several colleagues who had been around at the time of the arrest, I managed to form a fairly accurate picture of what happened. My brother and friends had been apprehended early Sunday morning. They had apparently gone out somewhere or other the night before and had come back feeling quite chipper. They were just in the process of opening the apartment door when a gang of *enkavedisti*

When Men Begin To Fear Their Own Shadows 47

jumped them and shoved them inside. Here, my brother and friends were first of all thoroughly searched. Then they were herded into the back room and kept confined while the *enkavedisti* ransacked the rest of the flat. After that, they were dragged off to NKVD headquarters for interrogation.

But this was only the beginning. The NKVD kept a watch detail posted in our apartment for the rest of the day and apprehended anyone who happened to drop by with no questions asked. Most of these individuals accepted their fate with resignation. Not so our colleague Jokūbas. He sauntered in around six o'clock, feeling no pain, and nearly doubled up with laughter the moment he saw one of the *enkavedisti* dashing out of the back room with a gun pointed at him. He laughed even more when that same individual demanded to examine his papers.

In fact, Jokūbas found the whole situation so hilarious (It had to be some kind of practical joke on our part!) that the idea of doing as the *enkavedisti* ordered never even entered his mind. Instead, he promptly seized the fellow by the collar and gave him a swift kick in the rear.

"Very funny, my friends!" he exclaimed. "But enough is enough! If I have to start pulling out my papers every time some nit-wit happens to ask for them, then I might just as well spend the rest of my days in bed."

Unfortunately, the *enkavedisti* who had remained in the back room didn't think it was funny at all. They fell on Jokūbas *en masse* and subjected him to such a severe pistol whipping that he lost consciousness in a matter of seconds and slumped in a bloody heap to the floor.

Neither Julius' sister nor anybody else I spoke to had the faintest idea about my own status with the NKVD. However, they all agreed that it might be a wise precaution for me to move out of the apartment for a while. Quite frankly, so did I. Therefore I told Julius' sister that I would keep in touch and then hurried off to see whether my good friend T. would be willing to put me up at his place. I didn't want to leave Kaunas until I had learned everything possible about the fate of Juozas and our friends. But I was also prepared to take off at a moment's notice if it became necessary to do so. As a matter of

48 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

fact, I had already taken steps to forearm myself against just such a contingency by applying for a three-week leave of absence from the university so that any sudden departure on my part would not arouse the suspicions of the NKVD.

My primary concern was to find out exactly why Juozas and the others had been arrested. They certainly weren't engaged in subversive activities, and they didn't belong to any underground organizations that I knew of. Just to make sure, I spent several nights discussing the matter with their friends and acquaintances. But none of these individuals could figure out why they had been arrested, either. And so I finally concluded that the three of them had been picked up for no better reason than to provide more candidates of NKVD spy school, and left it at that.

At this juncture, my efforts on Juozas' behalf had to be temporarily suspended. The "Red tempest" was beginning to rage again, and this time its fury wasn't limited to Kaunas. Reports coming in from various parts of the country indicated that young men and women were being rounded up everywhere. I had not yet reached the stage of dreading my own shadow, but I was rapidly developing a genuine fear of anything more substantial. Something as substantial as an NKVD-man, for instance, who might be dogging my heels or lying in wait for me around the very next corner. In fact, this peculiar phobia of mine soon began to develop with such leaps and bounds that it forced me to take leave of Kaunas and to spend the rest of my time off at home.

The move was an opportune one in certain respects. Life on the farm seemed not nearly so hectic, and contributed a great deal towards assuaging my fear of NKVD-men. Now I had only Red Army men to contend with. Consider the afternoon of Shrove Tuesday, for instance. There I was, chopping firewood, when three of them suddenly turned their sleigh into our yard. Two of the three were officers: a captain who was about as drunk as anyone could be and a lieutenant who seemed to be well on the way to joining him. But in worse shape than either of them put together was their orderly. He was so far gone that he kept vomiting all over the sleigh without even being aware of it — or of the fact that lieutenant had been bellowing at him for quite some time, now.

"Arkady! Stop it, I tell you! Enough is enough!"

"You'd better stop it, Arkady! And I mean right now! I'm

warning you for the very last time!”

“God damn it, Arkady! If you have to keep throwing up, why can’t you throw up outside the sleigh!”

Unfortunately, comrade Arkady’s condition was such that neither curses nor threats had any effect whatsoever. He remained glued to his seat and kept on retching.

And no wonder. He and his superiors had spent the whole afternoon “inspecting” one farm after another, swilling vodka in every last one of them. They were wont to demand vodka the moment they stepped through the door, and they would consume incredible quantities of the stuff along with many a thick slice of the smoked bacon. After that, they would take a perfunctory look around the place and leave. At least that’s how they behaved whenever they found themselves in the presence of menfolk. But if they ever happened to call on a farm at a time when only the women and children were present, then their behavior became entirely different. (Once, they chased a woman all around the house so they could get their hands on her topcoat—which they tore right off her back after catching up with her and knocking her to the ground.)

*

Naturally, the captain demanded to see my papers immediately. Although I was somewhat astonished by the fact that he could see anything at all, I replied that I would be most happy to oblige. The papers were in my wallet back at the house, I explained and invited him to step inside. There, I located my wallet and asked the captain which of my documents he wanted to look at.

“All of them,” he snapped as he snatched the wallet out of my hand. I should have known that all he really wanted to see was my money — most of which he promptly slipped into his own pocket even though I was standing just a few feet away. Only after that he condescended to examine my documents — and he couldn’t make head or tail of them. He had no choice except to hand them over to his lieutenant — that was how drunk he was. The lieutenant was taken aback to find me so well documented. He actually began to act friendly — although this miracle may have been the fact that he had caught sight of my father and brother approaching than by my excellent credentials. With three of us to deal with, even

50 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

the captain made an attempt to be civil — or he did for a couple of seconds at least. After that, he passed out and fell on the floor. My brother and I attempted to lift him off the floor and onto a bench but the lieutenant told us not to bother with it. “Just roll him under the table,” he said. “And let the cats out of the room, will you? They might take it into their heads to bite him.”

At this point Arkady came staggering into the house. Now that he had stopped vomiting, he felt even worse. He asked me for some sauerkraut juice to help him sober up, and insisted on following me when I offered to get it.

“Who knows what kind of juice you’ll come back with if somebody doesn’t keep an eye on you,” he muttered as he followed me into the pantry. He kept bothering me all the time we were in there, too — demanding to see my papers, wanting to know what my occupation was, and so forth. I didn’t intend to pull out my papers for Arkady because the lieutenant had already examined them. As for my profession — I was an architect if he really wanted to know. Arkady looked puzzled.

“I don’t believe you. Let me see your guns.”

Guns? I told him I didn’t have any guns.

“Then you can’t be an architect because in the Soviet Union all architects are supposed to carry guns.”

I could only suppose that Arkady was confusing the term “architect” with the designation of some NKVD rank or other. At any rate, I did my best to explain that no architect — not even in the Soviet Union — was supposed to carry a gun. And when he still refused to believe me, I suggested that we allow the lieutenant to have the last word in the matter. As soon as we returned to the room, Arkady at once appealed to the lieutenant.

“This bastard claims to be an architect and then has the nerve to tell me that he doesn’t have any weapons! And he won’t believe me when I tell him that all our architects carry guns!”

The lieutenant sneered. “You Idiot! You don’t know what you’re talking about. Where in the world did you pick up such an idiotic notion, anyway?”

Arkady had no choice but to admit his error, although he did so grudgingly, cursing under his breath.

The remainder of my leave was spent without incident, suggesting that I had not been implicated in the affair of

When Men Begin To Fear Their Own Shadows 51

Juozas and my room-mates, after all. Nor was I bothered by the NKVD when I returned to Kaunas. Still, just to be on the safe side, I continued to stay away from the apartment and spent every night in a different place.

52 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

CHAPTER VIII

“THE RIGHT TO REST”

According to the provisions of the much-touted Stalin Constitution, each Soviet citizen was guaranteed, among other things, “the right to rest.” To the average Russian this means little more than the privilege of taking an occasional holiday. Not so to the average Lithuanian. Among Lithuanians, the term “right to rest” had long since become a euphemism for a jail sentence.

For instance, my brother and friends had been resting for two weeks now. And the most I could learn about the nature of their “holiday” was the name of the “resort.” They had been locked up in Prison No. 1 in Mickevičius Street. This prison was well known to me, for I had been given the opportunity to “rest” in the very same place when I was arrested in 1941. Even at that time, the prison had been overcrowded—and now it was busting at the seams. Cells which had been originally intended to house two or three inmates were accommodating fifty or more. So tightly were they packed together that on cold mornings one could see the heat given off by their bodies streaming through the shattered panes of the cell windows like fumes from a steam bath. At night, the prisoners slept doubled up like jackknives because of the lack of room. Only the sick and those who had been badly tortured during interrogation ever got to sleep stretched out full-length. And that happened only because other prisoners gave up their own places and volunteered to spend the night standing up. Political prisoners were frequently squeezed into the same cells with common hoodlums and consequently ended up by being robbed and beaten or both and there was also the annoyance of having to put up with NKVD spies, who had been planted among the politicals in order to sniff out any information the interrogators might have forgotten or had been unable to

extract. But by far the most serious problem in prison was hunger. The rations a prisoner received were pitifully small, and even these were frequently stolen. Unfortunately, it was practically impossible for the families and friends of the prisoners to keep them supplied with extra food. Relatives and friends who wanted to convey food to a prisoner had to apply for a permit from the Interrogation Department. For many the process ended right there.

If the interrogators had the slightest reason to believe that hunger would serve to loosen a given prisoner's tongue, then the permit would not be issued. But even in cases where it was, there were still other hurdles to be faced. People were forced to jostle each other for weeks on end in the food delivery hall before they managed to force their way to the window of the official in charge and submitted the required petition in Lithuanian and in Russian. Then they had to wait some more for a reply. And only then were they able to hand over their precious bundles of food. Although hundreds of people with food bundles crowded around the prisons each day, only a very small percentage succeeded in their mission. (Some never did).

After doing the same in front of my brother's place of incarceration, I came to the conclusion that only three types of people ever managed to attain their goal: (1) those who were very agile, (2) those who were selfishly brutal, (3) and those who resorted to bribes. The rest seemed destined to mill about forever in the streets provided that they didn't freeze to death. Sometimes, I had occasion to walk past the prison at a time when the food delivery had long since been closed. Nonetheless, I invariably found scores of people still waiting. Most of them old men and women and nearly all of them were crying. And whenever I happened to ask anyone of them what had gone wrong, I always received the same answer:

"I couldn't get to the window today, either. . ."

Friends and relatives of prisoners who had been brought in from the rural areas thought they could accomplish something by getting to the prisons as early as the night before. Here they milled about until morning, at which time they began to gather outside the food delivery hall. They did their best to maintain orderly lines, but they rarely succeeded because everyone was eager to get a place as close to the hall door as possible. About thirty minutes before opening time, Russian sentries came by and collected three rubles from every

54 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

individual. Then they passed out numbers and told the people to take positions in line accordingly. But this orderly arrangement didn't last. The impatient and weary farmers fell right back to pushing and shoving their way to the most coveted places up front.

I did manage to get some food to Juozas, but only after three days of herculean effort. It was well worth the struggle, though. The empty sack which came back to me with his signature was like a glimmering spark of life which lifted my spirit. I made up my mind to redouble my efforts in his behalf. A good time was when columns of prisoners were marched outside for exercise. Invariably, somebody or other on line would start to shout "Here they come!" And then all the others would rush from the building immediately — hoping against hope to catch a glimpse of their loved ones as they passed by.

There were other occasions on which prisoners could be seen in the streets, but these were pathetic more than anything else. Some three thousand Lithuanians were being carted off to Siberian concentration camps each month — and every one of these had to be processed at either the Kaunas or the Vilnius central prisons. Prisoners who hailed from rural areas were permitted to make the journey in trains or in convoys of trucks. However, let me hasten to add that the Soviets had not arrived at this particular decision because of any humanitarian feelings on their part. Quite the opposite. It was merely a rapid way of getting their charges to the processing stations — and it also allowed them to inflict various forms of torture without exerting themselves. The prisoners who traveled by truck had an especially harrowing time of it. They had to spend the entire length of the journey down on their knees, and if they dared to express their excruciating agony by so much as a moan, they found themselves staring into the muzzle of a Red Army man's rifle. They also had to kneel after they reached their destination for hours — on the cobblestones which paved both prison yards. And all this time they could never once look up or around. They had to keep their heads bowed low to prevent possible friends and relatives from recognizing them. Those who had been detained in one of the subsidiary city prisons or in the suburbs were herded to the central installations on foot and consequently did not suffer nearly as much. Yet even they could not escape paying homage to the creaking iron gates of

hell, and had to kneel on the cobblestone pavement until they were thrown open.

The very sight of these poor men being deliberately humiliated never failed to move the people who were waiting on the food delivery lines to tears. And whenever some woman happened to spot her husband or son among the prisoners, the scene would be heart-rending, indeed. Nearly choking with sobs, the woman would stagger towards the kneeling column, only to be sent reeling backward by the savage blows of the guards. But no amount of pistol whipping was able to discourage these women from trying to get close to their loved ones — and they would stagger forward again and again, until the repeated blows of the sentries finally sent them reeling to the ground, senseless.

Actually, the city dwellers were the ones who achieved the greatest success in the food delivery department. They were, on the whole, more agile than the farmers and — best of all — they knew how to go about offering bribes. They had greater experience in dealing with Russian officials; as a result, city prisoners were supplied with extra food on a fairly regular basis. However, as I was to learn later on, prisoners shared all their food with less fortunate fellows in their particular group. It was not uncommon for prisoners in a given cell to divide themselves into several groups — each with its own allotment of floor space and common food reserve. Whoever happened to receive a food parcel would share it with the other members of his group. Sometimes it fell out that the composition of one of these groups was discovered by friends or relatives on the outside. Such people invariably contacted each other and pooled their efforts because this made the many obstacles which stood between them and feeding their loved ones far more easier to overcome. It also made it possible to pay exorbitant bribes which the officials demanded to insure the regular and prompt delivery of food. Since my brother Juozas was in a special Lithuanian circle in prison, we outside the prison gates formed an appropriate team of relatives and friends.

56 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

CHAPTER IX

FIGHT AGAINST PRISON FAMINE

To the great dismay of our “outside” group, all food deliveries to the cell in which our loved ones “rested,” were suddenly cut off. “Why?” We wanted to know. Because a 40-day quarantine had been imposed on that cell on account of some highly-contagious disease which had broken out there. We had our doubts. The whole thing might very well be nothing more than another form of harassment, but forty days of it was bound to result in the deaths of at least several inmates. For instance, we knew that two of them — Dr. L. and General B.—were already so weak that they couldn’t rise from the floor without assistance. (Dr. L. was in the last stages of tuberculosis, while General B. had been tortured so brutally during interrogation that he had never been able to get over it.) We would have to do something to prevent it, and after a brief discussion we decided to contact the superintendent of the food receiving section and to offer him a substantial bribe. The execution of this particular task fell on my shoulders because the other members of our “outside” group—all of them women — were frightened of Russians. Since I already knew that the superintendent was not above accepting “subscriptions” to his own, private “charity,” I felt quite sure that I could pull it off. All I would have to do was to approach him when he was alone.

Towards this end, although I knew where he lived I decided against going directly to his apartment because I had no way of knowing whether or not he would be alone when I got there; no, it was much more strategic to arrange an

“accidental” meeting somewhere in the street — preferably as close to a tavern as possible. This I proposed to accomplish on Monday, which happened to be the superintendent’s day off. I set out very early (with a thousand rubles tucked in my pocket) and spent most of the morning keeping my eyes glued to his front door, so that I couldn’t possibly miss him when he decided to step out. At long last, he emerged and began to saunter casually in my direction. I paced my stride so that we would meet at the corner. We did. I tipped my hat and greeted him politely in my most formal Russian. The superintendent replied in kind and even condescended to give me a smile. As we began to stroll along together I tactfully steered the conversation to include the quarantine. “What a nuisance,” I said. “Why only yesterday I stood for hours with a most cumbersome package only to learn that my own brother had been quarantined! But perhaps the superintendent didn’t remember the incident, being so very busy and all that.”

No. . . yes, yes, he was almost certain that he recalled something of the sort happening — last night, wasn’t it?

At this point, I dropped the subject and began to praise the new system of regulating food deliveries which he had introduced. What a clever idea it was to arrange the friends and relatives of prisoners in alphabetical order. He had demonstrated his great humanitarianism as well as his love of order, I said. I did not act in the least concerned about my brother’s future — pretending to have inside information about his imminent release. After all, I pointed out, my brother had been arrested only because some enemies of the people had taken it into their heads to denounce him, but now these individuals had been caught and were forced to confess. . . I tried to behave as though it really didn’t matter to me one way or the other. My works as a university administrator was all that mattered to me. I didn’t seem to get a minute’s rest — but then the superintendent knew just what I meant — being an administrator himself. Still, I was determined to fulfill my obligation to the Soviet Union with interest. If it weren’t for those blasted long lines. . . I stopped right in the middle of the sentence. We had reached the tavern at last. “Why not go in, and warm ourselves?” I suggested. “Why not, indeed?” was the superintendent’s reply. What if the superintendent was just playing me along? Our entire plan would fall to pieces.

58 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

We sat down at a small corner table far away from everyone else and I ordered vodka and beer and whatever food the tavern happened to have on hand. After the superintendent had eaten his fill, I offered him a packet of American-donated cigarettes. Their quality pleased him no end. So did the inscription on the packet, which happened to be in Russian. "To the heroic people of the Soviet Union — U.S.A." The inscription also brought back memories of what he went through during the war and I found myself trying very hard to look attentive — and interested — but I had heard them all before. They were no different from the stories told by soldiers since the beginning of time. A little vulgar humor, a great deal of sentimental self-pity, and extensive catalogues of narrow escapes and heroic deeds. I proposed a toast to all the heroes of the Soviet Union. The suggestion greatly pleased my companion, who tossed down the contents of his glass in one gulp without so much as batting an eyelash. After that we drank some more; and I kept urging the superintendent to keep right on drinking until I felt sure that he was mellow enough to be approached. Then I moved my chair closer to his and said;

"You know, that quarantine keeps preying on my mind no matter how hard I try to forget it. Of course, my brother has nothing to worry about as of now — but those enemies of the people are a wily bunch, as you and I both know. I wouldn't be surprised if they came up with some scheme of fouling up the proceedings just for the pleasure of seeing my brother starve to death."

Having said this much I poured the superintendent another drink and moved my chair even closer. "Say, you know all about such things," I whispered with a conspirational note in my voice. Are they *really* going to keep it in force for the whole forty days?"

The superintendent laughed. "Stop worrying about that quarantine, will you?" He took one more drink and then passed his hands over the beer-stained table. "It no longer exists where you are concerned. See? I remove it as of this minute!"

I experienced a tremendous sense of relief at the realization that I had been able to carry out this part of the assignment successfully. Granted, I was still faced with the problem of how to go about smuggling food in to the

quarantine cell. But here the superintendent himself came to my aid and outlined the procedure I would have to follow in great detail. Having done this, he proposed another toast, after which he fell right back to reminiscing about his glorious days in the Red Army. I noted (without really being surprised) that not a few of the exploits he considered heroic were completely at variance with the commonly accepted standards of valor. Still, I did my best to appear attentive until such time as I could shut him up by filling his mouth with another drink.

And so it went. We drank again; he talked again; we drank some more. . . . By the time we emerged from the tavern, both of us were staggering. We were also beginning to see double, so that we seemed to be forever on the verge of colliding with each other and with the various objects which we encountered in our path. But no amount of liquor could make the superintendent forget his favorite topic of conversation. As a matter of fact, he became more and more voluble in his praises — extolling not only himself but the whole Soviet Union and everything in it. At one point, he nearly stumbled over an empty tin can. He picked it up and peered intently at the label. The legend indicated that the can had originated in the United States of America.

“You see, my dear fellow? We even have the Americans working for us, now! That’s because our factories are turning out such tremendous quantities of canned goods that there simply aren’t enough containers to go around. You know, what with the war and all. . . .So we just ask America to make up the difference!”

I listened to the superintendent’s paeon of praise without comment. I knew very well that he didn’t believe a single word he was saying. But I wondered exactly how much of this nonsense I could take before I blew up completely (mission or no mission). I therefore made up my mind to stop the man’s babbling once and for all by removing the packet of rubles from my wallet and pressing it into his hand.

“I really must run,” I explained. “See you tomorrow?”

“Until tomorrow,” the superintendent responded and started to walk away.

I did the same, wondering just what the morrow might bring. Suddenly, a young woman appeared in my path and started to address me. She said that she remembered seeing me

60 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

in the food delivery hall yesterday. She had also seen me with the superintendent just now and wanted to know how I had gone about getting in touch with him, and if there was any possibility that she could do the same.

Although her husband had been imprisoned three months ago, she still hadn't been able to get a single food parcel through to him.

I remembered the woman right away. Her shyness had made her stand out from the rest of the women in the food delivery hall. Unfortunately, this very same shyness had also made it impossible for her to push her way through the crowd. There really wasn't very much I could tell her that would be of use. However, I tried to console her by explaining that all prisoners had banded together in small groups, and by assuring her that the contents of any food parcel received by an individual member was always divided into equal portions and shared by the other members of the group.

The next day I proceeded as it had been agreed, only I wondered whether that prison functionary would keep his part of the bargain. When the food receiving window opened I saw my friend's face. I stretched out my hand in the queue of other hands. Although I was actually fifth in line, the Russian accepted my application as the second. Apparently our agreement still held, thank God! I moved a few paces away from the window and waited there for the empty sack to be returned to me. Imagine what I felt when I saw it being brought back bulging. I was thunderstruck. What in the world could have gone wrong! And what was I supposed to do about it? However, just then the superintendent called me back to the window and explained that Juozas had refused to accept the parcel because several of the items entered on the accompanying list were missing. Apparently some of the underlings had felt free to help themselves to these things — knowing full well that their chief's own double dealings could hardly put him in a position to reprimand them. I assessed the situation at once and wrote a brief note to Juozas explaining that the 1.5 kilograms of bacon and the kilogram of sausages which he claimed were missing from the package had never been part of it and that I had absolutely no idea how they ever got to appear on the list. Then I submitted

Fight Against Prison Famine 61

the packet again, and waited. As for my “friend” the superintendent, he sighed with relief the moment he realized that I had no intention of making a fuss about the shortage. Otherwise, he might very well have found himself being forced to explain to some higher official just why he had violated the quarantine. . .

After an hour and a half, the sack was returned a second time. This time it was empty and decorated with my brother’s signature. I stuffed it into my valise and hurried off to inform the rest of the group members that their loved ones would not go hungry today.

However, it was not enough just to keep my brother and his cellmates from starvation; it was necessary to devise some plan to save him from Siberia. So, in a week’s time, Andrius and I took steps to find out how his case and the cases of his comrades were progressing. By means of a monetary “offering” Andrius managed to see the examiner, J. After several meetings, it became apparent that J. was not entirely devoid of humanity, even though he was in the service of a regime engaged in exterminating our people. From this man, Andrius obtained many particulars, for which he did not begrudge sacrificing a few ducats.

It happened otherwise with me. With the aid of an acquaintance I secured an interview with a certain Valatka, who discharged somewhat obscure duties in an office attached to the NKVD. We had exchanged barely a dozen words before he requested fifty rubles. Having pocketed them he asked the date of my brother’s arrest, his Christian name and his surname. Then he ordered me to call again in a week and to bring more money. He pretended that this would be needed to steal the data of my brother’s quota and to bribe somebody in touch with them.

When at the appointed time I visited him again, I found him half drunk. This was no surprise to me because like the Gestapo men before them, all the NKVD men drank heavily. Seating himself beside me Valatka began to talk about my brother. He was supposed to be accused of carrying arms. A neighbor had denounced him. From all this I understood that he had not seen my brother’s case with his own eyes and knew nothing about it, but was merely lying. When he tried to

62 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

convince me that my brother would be free in a few weeks and again asked for fifty rubles, I resorted to his own methods — I requested him to wait a few hours at the house so that I could have time to raise and bring him the sum. I also lied.

The information supplied by interrogator J. was exact: my brother had been accused of having been in the same room at the time that colleague Vilius had been reading some kind of anti-Communist pamphlet — and of having failed to report him to the NKVD. My brother promptly explained that he had absolutely no idea of what Vilius was reading — and didn't think it important enough to ask him because he was preoccupied with some reading material of his own. Unfortunately, the explanation did not satisfy my brother's interrogator in the least — especially since Vilius had already made a statement that Juozas might or might not have known what the pamphlet was all about.

Considering that there was no actual proof, but only suspicion, I thought that a lawyer might help. I therefore applied to the Kaunas Bar Association. But here, from the president, I learned that according to Soviet procedure defense counsel could be obtained only for criminal and civil cases. For political cases they had not a single “capable” lawyer. So, once more, I confirmed the truth already known to all: that political suspects were under the jurisdiction of the all-powerful political police, the NKVD.

When I met Mrs. L. and told her about my failures, I learned that she, too, knew something about them. Valatka had already extorted from her seven hundred rubles, but had told her nothing definite about her husband's case. It appeared that there were plenty of “helpers” like Valatka. They had NKVD authorization to fleece and impoverish the families of political prisoners by means of every crooked device. Lured by their offers to help, a prisoner's families would be induced to spend all their savings, to sell the best furniture, clothing, utensils and other family valuables. In order to achieve this purpose, rumors were circulated through agents that such and such an NKVD functionary could help. And sometimes such a “helper” would himself call upon the prisoner's family. As a rule, this occurred whenever the examiners were unable to pin any guilt on the prisoner — not even according to the nebulous Soviet interpretation of the term. Such an agent would visit the accused's family and say he had been himself set free, and

Fight Against Prison Famine 63

mention the person who had helped him — said person being only a more important agent whose business it was to defraud the prisoner's family of their money. These agents not only became fat from bribes, but also tried to obtain information about the prisoner that would worsen his position and be useful to the examiner.

From the particulars obtained, it appeared that my brother was threatened with a year and a half in a Siberian concentration camp. It was almost a "pardon" under the Soviet system. But it was quite a hefty sentence when one considered that upon Vilius's conjecture the contents of his secret paper might have been known to Juozas. However, Andrius and I made every effort to insure that my brother should not be exiled to Siberia because even a relatively short sentence such as his would probably bring about death there.

While working over Juozas' fate one evening, I suddenly recalled the certificate left to me by the Red Army soldier Vasili. Without delay, I set out for home to get it. Nor did I content myself with Vasili's written testimonial. I also collected the signatures of all the persons with whom Vasili, conveyed by Juozas, had been hidden from the Germans. This document I delivered to the appropriate Soviet establishment. With the latter's seals and signatures the truth of the facts was confirmed. I succeeded in having attached to this document the remarks of several Soviet officials — remarks which attested that during the German occupation Juozas had been anti-Nazi in his attitude and loyal to the Soviet regime. All these papers I delivered to Colonel Vorontsov, Chief of the NKVD in the city of Kaunas. These were my last efforts to help my brother because I could think of nothing else. They might just possibly help him; then again, they might do just the opposite.

One day, while I was standing in the queue at the prison to deliver food, someone tapped me on the shoulder. I turned around and recognized my brother Simas. He said: "Let's go home. It's no longer necessary."

The words sent a chill coursing down my spine. The awful thought struck me that perhaps Juozas had died in prison. But then I noticed a smile on Simas' face and felt reassured. Simas explained that Juozas had returned that night. Returned but at what cost! As he was powerfully built, he had not suffered too much physically; he had grown thin and his face was as

64 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

white as a sheet and quite bloated. But the most dreadful aspect of the situation was that unless he was prepared to be a traitor he could no longer hope to complete his studies at the university or live with other people. The truth was that he had been liberated from prison only on consenting to collaborate with the NKVD. When the proposal was made to him at the beginning of May, he was unable for a long time to make up his mind whether to face exile to the terrible Vorkuta or to become an NKVD agent. Finally he signed the agreement for this Judas role, but only after mentally resolving on a third possibility — to stop being a “law-abiding” citizen and join the partisans in their fight against the enslavers and the oppressor of his conscience.

The students arrested with my brother Juozas were not given any choice. After two weeks in absentia they were convicted and only the sentence of the “court” was read to their faces. One of them got several years in a concentration camp and the others more than ten years. After the sentence, they were herded as usual in common cells situated in the prison chapel and storerooms. In these cells the prisoners sat and waited for the day of deportation. Here they were robbed by Russian prisoners who would deprive them of their best clothing and food supplies, and should any one of them venture to resist he would be beaten up. The prison authorities paid no attention to such details.

Inmates from the Vilnius prison were attached to the echelon with which my friends were traveling, and then there were in round numbers two thousand of them. From Moscow the exiles’ echelon was diverted in the North Komi direction. Here the exiles were divided into two groups — one to dig coal and the other to build a railway.

The group assigned to build a railway was unloaded in a totally uninhabited region. With blizzards raging, they were obliged to fell timber for building barracks before they could begin the excavation work for the construction of the new railway line. After finishing work in one place, this group of a thousand men would be transported ten or more miles farther and again begin to build fresh barracks. The climate there was far too severe for the exiles. To prevent themselves from being hurled to the ground by the tremendous snowstorms, the prisoners had to stretch wires along the roads and paths leading to the scene of operations, and hold on to them. Under

Fight Against Prison Famine 65

such frightful conditions the weaker men soon perished. During the first six months, more than half their number died. The places of the victims were taken by others transported from the West. No attempt was made to bury the corpses, which were left lying alongside the railway line under construction. Only in spring, with iron cables hooked to their chins, would the bodies be dragged somewhat farther from the tracks.

Most of the coal-digging group perished in six months from hunger and disease. They did not receive any parcels from home because it was a long time before they were allowed to write or receive letters from the outside. Even then, for a letter to reach Lithuania took about two months, and many were lost along the way. Engineers and doctors were more fortunately situated in this respect. They were usually appointed to posts of supervision, and this enabled them to wangle somewhat more food, if only by illegal means.

CHAPTER X

THE GROWTH OF SECRET ORGANIZATIONS

According to the policy of the Soviet state, organizations which did not serve the interests of the Communist party were strictly prohibited. Nevertheless, a few such organizations still remained scattered throughout the Soviet Union. This was certainly true in the case of Lithuania, whose people deeply resented Soviet domination and were willing to do anything to have their independence restored. Actually, starting an organization was not difficult in itself. All it took was a few individuals who happened to share the same outlook. For instance, when I was trying to save my brother from starvation and exile to Siberia, I pooled resources with several women who were pursuing identical goals and thereby formed an organization. Granted, our objectives had been limited. But the principle was the same. Individuals whose goals were a little more diversified formed organizations which were suited to their needs. And so it went. (Of course, it went without saying that all such organizations had to be kept strictly secret from the Russians.) Perhaps the most important of them all was the *Lietuvos Išlaisvinimo Taryba* (the Lithuanian Liberation Council.) LIT was the first truly extensive resistance organization, its primary purpose being to acquaint the Lithuanian people with international events and to instruct them how to behave during the current crisis. Furthermore, the Council proposed to form a committee for the purpose of restoring the “legal” status of those people who (whatever their reasons) had gone into hiding in all parts of the country. I had been asked to join that particular committee, and for a time I worked there along with Simutis.

Unfortunately, LIT lasted no more than a few months. In

The Growth of Secret Organizations 67

May of 1945 the NKVD managed to learn of its existence and promptly arrested the greater part of its membership. (The remaining members subsequently moved the organization from Kaunas to Vilnius, where they felt it had more of a chance to operate undetected. They were wrong, though. The NKVD sniffed them out even there.)

With the arrest of the Kaunas group members, (particularly Simutis), my own position became precarious, indeed. I, too, might be picked up at any moment. Some of its leaders urged me to go into hiding at once. But I decided against it. Simutis and I had solemnly pledged not to betray each other in the event that either of us happened to be arrested. And Simutis stuck to his word. Although he was subjected to the most excruciating tortures (for instance, the NKVD men crushed the knuckles of both of his hands), he never gave me away. And so I continued to walk about unmolested.

Shortly afterwards, I joined another newly created organization which was known as the Lithuanian Partisans' Union. *Lietuvos Partizanų Sąjunga* — or LPS, for short.) The main objective of this organization was to unite the various bands of Lithuanian partisans which were operating independently of each other throughout the country. It was necessary to bind them into large formations, to coordinate their activities, and to establish a common corps of command. On this particular project I worked together with my colleagues Jurgis, Jonas and Algirdas. By pooling our efforts, we rigged up some radio transmitters and managed to establish contact with a number of partisan groups. A little later we even succeeded in transferring several commanding officers from one partisan unit to another—especially in cases where competent and energetic leaders were needed by that particular group.

Unfortunately, Jurgis and Jonas were killed in June, 1945, along with two other members of our staff. At this point, I got in touch with Jankus, and asked him to use his influence on Colonel Kazimieraitis so that he would consent to come to Kaunas and form the core of our general staff. We also extended an invitation to Major M. and to various other leaders of the resistance movement in Lithuania. However, the LPS was disbanded after only two months because Colonel Kazimieraitis was spotted by several undesirable people in

68 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

Kaunas and had to get out of town. There were no arrests this time. Even so, we didn't try to set up any more organizations: it was practically impossible to keep their existence a secret in the cities and larger towns. In fact, we were convinced that a united Lithuanian resistance movement could be achieved only with the help of the rural partisan units and of the liaison methods at their command.

I have already touched upon the fact that partisan units had been operating in the rural areas of Lithuania as far back as 1944. Having tasted the "joys" of the first Soviet occupation, they wanted no part of the second. As early as 1943 — at which time the German front was just beginning to crumble — they had appointed a special detachment whose sole task was to get hold of as many weapons and as much ammunition as they possibly could. These armaments, gradually acquired, were subsequently deposited in pre-designated spots. Then, as soon as the front had reached the Lithuanian countryside, they were made available to anyone who was willing to fight. There were many men who jumped at the opportunity of getting their hands on both guns and ammunition and shooting down Russians even while the war was still raging on. They were joined by others who did not wish to help the occupation force in any way, and were trying to defend themselves and their countrymen. They were keenly aware of the threats to their personal, national, cultural, and religious rights and liberty. Although all knew that prolonged tribulation, persecution, suffering and death in the most cruel circumstances awaited them, the numbers of Lithuanian partisans constantly grew. In April 1945, a partisan army of about thirty thousand strong was operating throughout Lithuania. Many of the rank and file of this army expected that they would soon be indispensable not only to their own homeland but also to the Western democracies. At that time, war against Nazis in the heart of Germany was drawing to a close. This meant that in Europe there would be left just one huge prison — the Soviet Union. They therefore asked the question: would the liberating Western armies allow this prison of nations and peoples to remain when the Nazi fortress had been finally destroyed? And in his heart virtually every Lithuanian partisan answered, "No!" Even so, his arms might still be useful and necessary to those who had proclaimed the Atlantic Charter.

But such a deflection of policy would have put an end to the Communist regime in Lithuania. Therefore, as early as the autumn of 1944, the Communists organized detachments of so-called "People's Defenders." The people called them "Stribs," a term corrupted from the Russian *istrebitel*, meaning "destroyer." The Russians sought to mobilize some thirty men as such destroyers in every commune. The members of these units were exempted from the call-up to the army and had other privileges. This exemption from the army attracted many people. Moreover, the true aims of these detachments were not made clear at first. The Russians said that they were formed to protect the inhabitants from bandits, German army deserters still hiding in Lithuania, and from other lawbreakers. But actually their most important purpose was warfare against the fast-growing armed resistance movement.

The partisans made every effort to break up the *strib* detachments so that Lithuanians should not shed the blood of Lithuanians. Action against the *strib*s began with personal contacts, appeals, sometimes with threats. All this helped. The *strib*s began to crumble. Some withdrew from service; others even passed over to the partisans. In the ranks of the *strib*s were left only those with criminal tendencies, persons of low moral character, and those weak-minded enough to have been won over by the Communists.

The *strib*s were poorly armed. They had only ordinary rifles and every dozen or so men had a machine gun. Therefore, engagements between the *strib*s and the partisans usually terminated in the disorderly flight of the *strib*s with heavy losses. As the partisans increased in strength, so did desertion among the *strib*s. In spring of 1945, it assumed mass proportions. Those remaining in the *strib*s ranks lost the confidence of the Russians. But this did not mean that the Russians had abandoned the struggle. By no means. They began more and more to make use of their army of political police — the NKVD and NKGB (People's Commissariat of State Security) — against the partisans.

70 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

CHAPTER XI

ARMED RESISTANCE

When the army of the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania in 1940, it did in fact begin an undeclared war against the Lithuanian people, although publicly it proclaimed that it had liberated them from the "Imperialists." The suspension of dividends and pensions, the confiscation of bank deposits, the expropriation of real estate, mass arrests, murders and wholesale deportations were the tactics of undeclared warfare during the first occupation. Between June 14 and June 17, 1941, 40,000 Lithuanians were deported to Siberia, and even the most simple minded citizen realized what this meant. During the second occupation the Russian despots supplemented their earlier methods with compulsory mobilization. The entire nation opposed the undeclared war: some passively, others actively. True, there were also a few opportunists, collaborators, and traitors, but they were powerless to affect the prevailing conviction that the Red "liberators" were a scourge. Since active collaborators and traitors were only tools for the furtherance of Moscow's plans of extermination, it was necessary to fight against them. Although this was a painful operation which evoked conflicts of conscience in cases of severe punishment, there was no other alternative. It was unavoidable to apply to them the same methods as to the occupiers because without their cooperation the Russian Communists would not have been able to carry out their destructive plans. The Lithuanian partisans saw this clearly from the very beginning.

In 1944, armed clashes with the Russians and their confederate traitors — were not on a large scale. It was that the partisans would venture to launch regular attacks. But when

the partisans increased in number and when several groups formed larger units, there would develop considerable actions lasting several hours. Sometimes these conflicts were forced upon the partisans by the occupying forces, while at other times the armed resistance movement itself assumed the initiative. It is out of the question to describe all such encounters, because there were so many of them in various parts of Lithuania. I shall try instead to cite, by way of illustration, a few episodes which took place during the first half of 1945.

In the Garliava, Prienai, Sasnava, and Balbieriškis districts individual Lithuanian partisan groups were operating. They were joined by other groups until they finally formed martial "Forest Brothers" unit. The mythological name of the "Iron Wolf" was given to this unit. My comrade Uosis, whom I have already referred to, served with it.

In mid-January of 1945, a regiment of the Iron Wolf unit began a campaign to rid its district of local Communist activists. Having accomplished this worthwhile task, it decided to undertake a more difficult operation, *i.e.*, to attack Šilavotas where an NKVD detachment was stationed. First of all, fifty men of the regiment managed to fall upon eighteen NKVD privates and stribs in Ilgavangis village, where the Communists had been torturing farmers who had not delivered or were unable to deliver acceptable exactions in kind to the authorities. The sudden appearance of the partisans, their numerical superiority and their skill in the handling of weapons forced the Reds to flee after a half-hour of fighting. Only two Russians reached Šilavotas. With other reserves of the garrison they took motor vehicles and fled to Marijampole. After collecting the arms abandoned by the Communists in these engagements, the partisans occupied Šilavotas without resistance. Here, they gathered booty essential to the partisans' existence and activities *e.g.*, they stripped clean all government establishments and shops (there are scarcely any others in the Soviet order); collected various documents, and confiscated property belonging to the commune and post office. Then they withdrew.

Of course, some time later, the Communist troops rearmed and returned to Šilavotas. Then the men of the Iron Wolf decided once more to attack Šilavotas and teach the NKVD a lesson. For these operations they had to equip themselves with

72 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

more weapons, ammunition, and medical supplies. To gather this material the partisans scoured the entire district. In February, their leader Anglas, while thus rounding up supplies took it into his head to make a detour to visit his home. With catlike stealth he and three of his men crept up to the house. Through the window he saw Russian weapons stacked on the floor of the living room, testifying to the presence of the uninvited guests. Moving even more cautiously, Anglas made his way to the sitting room window and peered inside. There he recognized two of the most active Communists of the Pakuonis commune. They were feasting at the dinner table and flirting with his sister.

Anglas went round to the kitchen. Knocking gently, he called out his mother and asked her to go into the sitting room, engage the guests, and send his sister to him. With his sister he arranged that she should come out ostensibly to draw water from the well and should ask one of the guests to accompany her, since the night was dark. One of the Russians gladly agreed to escort her. But hardly had he emerged through the door into the yard when Anglas greeted him with one blow and quite noiselessly felled him. The other partisans burst into the sitting room and ordered the men there to raise their hands. After that night, two of the most virulent functionaries of the commune were never again seen by anybody. In the partisans' euphemistic terminology, they had gone to the Nemunas River "to fish."

After that the Iron Wolf regiment was re-organized. By secret ballot a new unit commander, one Viesulas, was elected. The unit was divided into four strengthened sections. After the reorganization more serious engagements took place. In March, the unit was attacked in Margininkai by forces of the Pakuonis and Kruonis NKVD. The section commanded by Tigras was the first to retaliate. It was soon flanked by other sections, whose supporting fire helped it to take the offensive. The Communists fled, abandoning munitions and several dead.

There were also partisans who operated in small but well-armed groups. They struck swiftly, putting fear into the hearts of the local Communist activists and appreciably cooling their ardor. For instance, after the successful Margininkai action, a group of six men led by Merkys, came together at Prienai. Wearing Russian greatcoats, they entered the town on market day. Here they found five of the most

fanatical Communists, men who had become notorious for their bloodthirsty outrages, and shot them on the spot. Later they went to the market. Posing as *stribs*, they began to check the prices of foodstuffs. When they found them too high they threatened to confiscate the goods. Some of the saleswomen, who entertained no sympathy for the Russians, explained the matter quite simply: the price level did not depend on them, but upon the demand of hungry mouths. Other saleswomen began to give themselves away as *stribs* and Soviet functionaries. This was all the partisans wanted. They quickly procured vehicles, unbuttoned their Russian greatcoats, showed their badges and, in the name of the resistance, confiscated the wares of the saleswomen who had demonstrated their pro-Soviet sentiments. Then, having made an example of Prienai, the partisans departed, carefully covering their tracks.

Shortly after its victory at Margininkai, the Iron Wolf unit crossed the Nemunas and continued its activities on the other side. Troops from the Kruonis NKVD pursued it for a time, but turned back the moment they tasted partisan bullets. The section commanded by Viesules advanced into the area around Vilnius. Then, after having liquidated Soviet functionaries and NKVD agents at Užugastis, they changed direction and started back toward the Nemunas via Trakai. They moved at night. Guided by reports and complaints received from local inhabitants, they administered en route well-deserved lessons to Communist agents, thieves, and gangs of armed robbers. For some of these rascals a warning was deemed sufficient: to others were dealt out a fixed number of strokes with a cane; placed them beyond the pale and from whom no reformation could be anticipated, were required to take a timely leave of this vale of tears.

At the end of March, just before Easter, the whole unit was back on the banks of the Nemunas, in Paverkniai. At that time the unit consisted of seventy-nine men. During one rest halt they received a report that a very large NKVD force was approaching Paverkniai. According to one estimate it might be a division. From their direction, it was clear that the Russians were headed straight for the partisans. There was too little time to withdraw without being observed. And so, even though they were outnumbered, the partisans determined to test their luck and valor. They swiftly deployed to the edge of the forest

74 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

and, camouflaging themselves effectively, awaited a convenient moment to welcome the “guests.” In little less than a half-hour the entire area was overrun by weary Russians, still searching for the vanishing “bandits.”

The partisans opened fire only when the Communists were within the sights of their automatic weapons. The song of the machine guns and automatic pistols lasted about one and a half hours. Their first ranks were quickly thinned; some died on the spot; others were wounded. Nevertheless, the NKVD-ites kept coming. Their companies were drawn from the entire district. Some fought, while others tried to outflank the Iron Wolf men. Sensing danger, the partisans decided to retreat. Two avenues of escape were blocked by strong NKVD forces, and the Nemunas River had cut off a third. There was only one way left: they had to cross the flooded Verknė River. But when they reached the Verknė and found the ford, they also discovered that some of the enemy troops had gotten there before them. In the battle which followed, the unit lost several men. There were, as yet, no Russians on the other side of the Verknė. It was necessary quickly to withdraw farther without leaving any traces. But while withdrawing farther through the Vebra estate, the partisans countered a reserve unit of the NKVD. This encounter was successful. Leaving several killed and two baggage convoys, the Russians fled. From the captured booty the partisans replenished their exhausted munitions and retreated in the direction of the Birštonas highway. But on the highway they again saw Russian baggage convoys with munitions. The NKVD-ites stationed there did not recognize the partisans and, waving their hands, began to shout;

“Here, boys! Take the munitions!”

Our men realized that the Russians had not yet found their bearings and were unaware of the true identity of the “boys.” Six of them, clad in Russian uniforms, marched up to the convoys and killed the NKVD men. They accomplished this without firing a shot — using cold steel alone — in order to keep their location secret from the enemy. Afterwards, they climbed into the vehicles, and the unit split into sections which dispersed in four different directions.

The Paverkniai episode cost the Lithuanian armed resistance eleven men and the Communists, ninety-four.

When the West was rejoicing over the victorious conflict

against Hitler and the Russians triumphed in Berlin, imagining that in the near future they would occupy all Europe, an undeclared war was still proceeding in Lithuania. For instance, on June 11, in the meadows on the left bank of the Jesia near the Kukoriškis bridge, five sections of the Iron Wolf were practicing tactical maneuvers. At about four o'clock, an outpost sentry reported that large enemy forces were arriving from Pajesis. Presently another report came in from the Klebiškis field that Russians from Šilavotas were moving in the direction of the Klebiškis forest. The partisans rapidly crossed the Kukoriškis bridge; each section posted its forces in suitable places and prepared for battle.

They had just managed to take their positions when, on the path from Skerdupis, appeared several men of an enemy reconnoitering group. As had earlier been surmised, the Russians were proceeding towards the Kukoriškis bridge. Detecting in the meadows the tracks of the partisans, they redoubled their precautions and approached the bridge in battle formation. The scouts were greeted with fire only when they reached the field of farmer Vilkas and were creeping towards his orchard. After several minutes of accurate fire all the NKVD-ites, excepting two wounded, were killed even before they had time to realize from where the fire proceeded. Both the wounded were questioned by the partisans and had to listen to a lecture which was given by Mykalojus (Nikolai), a former Red Army soldier.

“What are you shedding blood for, you blockheads?” he asked. “It’s surely enough that they fool us in Russia. Famine and exploitation of the working classes are raging not here, but in the fifth part of the world which the Communists are destroying. Go back and tell your comrades not to raise a hand against the partisans. Otherwise, we’ll massacre all of them to the last man!” With these words Mykalojus ended his little homily.

Contact was immediately made with the unit commander who ordered the release of the wounded. They were instructed to go back on the same road by which they had come and to report to their comrades all they had heard and seen. But they hadn’t seen much because they had not even observed the well camouflaged partisan position on both sides of the bridge.

On receiving the wounded men’s report, the NKVD-ites evidently paid no attention to the warning because they soon

76 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

appeared moving in the direction of the Kukoriškis bridge. When the leading Communist column appeared in the meadow, the first two partisan sections opened fire. Pressing forward, the NKVD-ites fell, man after man, without reaching the bridge. Only now did they understand that it would not be possible to force a way across the bridge which was defended by well handled machine guns and accurate automatic weapons.

The Iron Wolf men replenished their supply of ammunition, strengthened their outposts, and waited for another attack. When they observed that the enemy forces were heading southward, they strengthened their left wing and prepared for surprises from other directions.

And they were not mistaken. After more than an hour, the Communists forded the river about a mile from the bridge and masses of them began to infiltrate the area where the section led by Kareivis was stationed. This time the attack was longer and more determined. The Russians managed to bring up to the scene of action three heavy machine guns. Most of the shells were bursting, and this obscured the true position of the front. However, the partisans withstood this attack as well.

The third attack was by far the worst. Kareivis's section, which had fought splendidly, could not believe that the Russians would attack in the same place a second time. They therefore felt fairly safe. Meanwhile the enemy's forces suddenly dealt a violent blow and broke through the left wing. While trying to fill the breach, Kareivis was killed, and so were three of the best fighters of his section. Leaderless, the men of the section began to withdraw from their positions and attempted to rejoin the body of the unit. Only with the aid of the first and second sections were they able to hold off the enemy.

As a result of this withdrawal, the original positions were altered. Kareivis's section was moved to the rear and its place taken by the men commanded by Dešinys. The partisan forces shortened their front and began to move towards the Degimai field while checking the enemy with engulfing fire. The engagement took place at close range in the extensive forest thicket near the Degimai field itself. When darkness fell, the Iron Wolf men drew back without anyone in pursuit.

During the course of what I should like to call the Battle of Degimai, the NKVD-ites lost sixty-seven men, among them

the unit commander, a major in rank. We suffered six casualties. Several partisans were severely wounded. The recently-elected unit commander Dešinys was among them.

During the night, not far from the scene of the earlier hostilities, the Russians replenished their forces and made preparations to avenge themselves. However, by dawn, the partisans were about thirteen miles away. The enemy had to collect their dead and return to their fortresses, the towns. Infuriated by their failure, they arrested J. Vilkas, a farmer who lived at Degimai. They also arrested his wife and children, seized his cattle and goods, and burned down his farm.

Perhaps the best known of these encounters and one which the people loved to recount, took place at Kalniškiai, in Southern Lithuania. Four ballads were composed to commemorate it, and their wide circulation among the people has added to its popularity.

During the middle of May in 1945, eighty partisans commanded by Lakūnas had entrenched themselves on the high ground of the Kalniškiai woods. NKVD-ites from Simnas, who had already clashed with the partisans over a dozen times, found out about it, and a long, determined struggle ensued. In a desperate endeavor to storm the positions of the defenders of their soil, the Russians attacked in wave after wave, but they were repulsed without achieving their aim. After several hours of such fighting, when the partisans saw that their ammunition was running out, they assumed the offensive. With their last handful of cartridges, they broke through the deep rings of encirclement and moved to a point where the enemy shell fire could no longer reach them.

In these Kalniškiai engagements the women displayed as much courage as the men. They, too, found that living in slavery had become intolerable. The wife of the unit commander Lakūnas (a former teacher) fought all the time. She stepped in for fallen machine gunners; she did not let go the machine gun even when she herself was wounded in both legs. By her side, with no less bravery, fought another Lithuanian woman whose secret name was Pušėlė

Four hundred NKVD-ites were killed at Kalniškiai. There were also casualties among our ranks. On a hillock in the woods, the bodies of Lakūnas and his wife, of Pušėlė, and of the many other partisans who perished that day have been laid to eternal rest.

78 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

CHAPTER XII

PROVOCATION RAMPANT

During the first period of armed resistance, from the summer of 1944 until the summer of 1945, the Žemaitija partisans were the best organized. They had begun to organize in larger formations when, in midsummer of 1944, the front had become stabilized and the districts were already firmly held by the Russians. At that time, a good many former Lithuanian army officers had gathered in Žemaitija and had begun to organize the partisans and coordinate their operations. It was in the ranks of the Žemaitija partisans that the distinguished Lithuanian General Pečiulionis perished.

In open conflict the Communists could not cope with the well-organized resistance movement. Therefore, in Žemaitija they first of all resorted to provocation methods from which not so much the partisans as peaceful farmers and other inhabitants suffered. For example, in February 1945, between Tauragė and Raudondvaris, a detachment of several hundred armed men played the role of partisans. But they did not play it very well, for thus they killed every Soviet functionary who chanced to fall into their hands, irrespective of his behavior, and contrary to the practice of genuine Lithuanian partisans who always exercised discrimination when making examples of captured Communists. They inflicted the death penalty upon the more active and malevolent Communists, and either warned the others or compelled them to help the resistance movement with special services. As came to light later, the provocateurs murdered mostly Soviet functionaries who had been secretly helping the inhabitants. After several weeks of running amok, the detachment vanished. It reappeared a few days later. However, its men were now wearing NKVD uniforms. And then, there began an even larger-scale massacre of the inhabitants than before. All those that had previously

Provocation Rampant 79

helped them in their guise of partisans, either voluntarily or through fear, were punished without mercy. Within a few days, many farms were burned and hundreds of people shot or arrested. Infuriated by the brutality of the provocateurs, many inhabitants joined the resistance movement.

For a long time the Russians had proclaimed that armed resistance was nothing more than the work of German agents or German parachutists dropped into Lithuania for sabotage operations directed against the Red Army. The NKVD apparently encouraged such rumors and set its provocateurs to work proving them true.

By July of 1945, in all of Europe, not even one solitary armed German could have been found. One night, a large number of Communists disguised as German soldiers were parachuted into Kazlų Rūda. They all wore German army uniforms and bore German arms. Following the example of the armed resistance movement, they set up a camp in the forest and through local residents attempted to make contact with our partisans. They gave the impression to some of the district farmers that they really were partisan parachutists. These, in turn, led them to the partisan detachment of Dabušis Švyturis which was operating in that locality. The detachment commander behaved unwisely. Instead of requiring the supposed German parachutists to submit unconditionally to his orders (as other leaders used to do when parachutists appeared anywhere), he began to make friends with them. At an appointed time, several provocateurs came to the partisan camp and invited the entire commanding cadre to visit them — in order to become better acquainted, to discuss important matters, to be entertained. The number of those invited was fixed at twelve, out of these only nine consented to accept their hospitality. Three refrained because they sensed that something wasn't right.

Those remaining in the camp soon heard a volley of gunfire resounding from the direction of the parachutists camp. Then, as abruptly as it had started, the shooting stopped, and everything was still. The incident aroused the partisans' suspicions because nobody discharged automatic weapons in the forest without good reason. It did not appear to be an encounter with NKVD-ites because the series of shots was of such short duration. The men therefore hurriedly left the camp. Only scouts remained to observe what followed next.

80 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

The foreboding of the cautious ones had not deceived them. Hardly an hour had elapsed after their withdrawal than the camp was surrounded by hordes of NKVD provocateurs. They had hoped to wipe out the entire partisan unit. However, they found only an empty camp. Seeing that their little game had been unmasked, the provocateurs speedily assembled some two thousand other NKVD-ites and began to comb the woods of adjacent regions. Concurrently, they murdered and arrested the inhabitants who had trusted them. The farmer Bielskis was tortured in a most gruesome way. He was found dead in the forest, with his legs tied to the low branch of a tree and his head thrust into a large anthill. Bielskis was the first victim because he had most lavishly helped the supposed partisans with food.

Even more savagely tortured were eight of the nine partisans who had accepted the invitation to visit the parachutist camp. Their naked corpses were discovered a week later, each tied with wire to a tree. They had been skinned, their limbs had either been burned or hacked off, and their eyes gouged out. Each of them had the Lithuanian emblem of the Knight's Cross cut into his breast. Their mouths were stuffed with rags. On the ground lay scattered bits of blackened skin and pieces of flesh, and the trampled moss reeked with the blood of the tortured victims. The detachment leader, formerly a lieutenant in the Lithuanian army, had been stabbed through the throat with his own bayonet, which had penetrated into the trunk of the pine tree from which his corpse was suspended.

Only one of the nine, the section leader Stumbras, had escaped torture. His body was found some distance away, riddled with bullets. It seemed that he alone had succeeded in throwing off the NKVD-ites who tried to disarm him. He was apparently the first to reach for his weapon, and the ensuing shoot-out, in which he lost his life, was what had alerted the partisans back at the camp and made it possible for them to get away in time.

The Communists continued their reign of terror for six weeks, during which time the bodies of the tortured partisans remained unburied. At long last, they were laid to rest in shallow graves which the local inhabitants covered with wreaths — in mute expression of their love for those who had sacrificed their lives on the battlefield of this undeclared war against the Lithuanian people.

Provocation Rampant 81

Realizing that appreciable results could not be achieved by improvised provocation, the Russians began to train NKVD-ites in special schools for such duties. They were familiarized with the habits of our partisans and with Major Sokolov's printed instructions on how to fight against the armed resistance movement.

Groups made up of such trained Russian NKVD-ites and their agents were set to work on a large scale at the beginning of 1947. These provocateurs wore uniforms belonging to members of the resistance movement, complete with unit insignias on their sleeves and regulation caps. They had obtained these uniforms from slain partisans: that was why the corpses of partisans exposed in town squares were usually naked. When calling on residents, the provocateurs also imitated the discipline of armed resistance fighters, and behaved like friendly, polite and pious men.

Not far from Kaunas, in the region of Žiedas, a detachment of such provocateurs passed themselves off as Žemaitija partisans who, during an engagement, became separated from their units. Some of them remained in the Vaisvydava wood, while the rest of them arrived about midnight at farmer P.'s farm. Rousing the farmer and leaving four sentries outside, they crowded into the house. Of eighteen provocateurs, only three did the talking because the rest apparently could not speak Lithuanian. After the fashion of our partisans, the leader of the detachment had a beard, and on his sleeve wore not only the unit insignia but six wound stripes. The weapons of all the provocateurs were of various kinds, apparently collected from our fallen comrades. The bearded leader asked the farmer's wife for food. When she refused, the provocateurs began themselves to look for it saying that they had not eaten for twenty-four hours. Before and after eating all tried to make the sign of the cross, but the sharp-eyed hostess noticed that they did this clumsily.

After their meal the impostor partisans asked the farmer to take them to the local partisan unit. They pretended that they had exhausted their ammunition and without it would be lost. They spent about two hours trying to induce the farmer to guide them to the local armed resistance men. Since the farmer continually repeated: "I know nothing, men; I know nobody," the provocateurs went away to seek victims among other residents. Meanwhile the farmer reported the "bandits" to the

82 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

chief of the communal MGB (Ministry of State Security), the former NKGB or People's Commissariat of State Security.

On the following night the provocateurs appeared about seven miles farther off. Here they murdered two district chairmen as Communist mercenaries, although in fact these people were collaborating with the secret resistance movement. After committing these murders they went to other residents and asked for help. When they refused to help, the provocateurs took them into the forest to torture them as Russian collaborators. In this manner, they compelled some people to betray themselves who might have contact with our armed resistance movement.

On the following day, the provocateurs engaged in a mock battle with units of the political police (MGB). At about 11 o'clock, two truckfuls of MGB soldiers pulled up at the edge of the forest. The soldiers got out and charged into the woods. Shots were heard. In the evening MGB troops brought two corpses in partisan uniforms to J. village and dumped them in the square.

Then the provocateurs started going back to the homes of all the people they had visited while pretending to be partisans. At the homes of those who had admitted them and supplied them with information about the real partisans, they arrived in MGB uniforms and carried out executions. But at the homes of any who had refused to give them help, they arrived in partisan disguise and dealt out punishment for treachery, as a result of which two of their comrades were supposed to have perished.

As discovered later, the corpses brought to village J. after the mock engagement were those of German prisoners. The provocateurs had conveyed them from a prisoners' camp, dressed them in partisan uniforms, murdered them, and dumped them in the market square.

When the armed resistance forces sought to combat these provocateurs they experienced great difficulty. Although they watched the villages and reconnoitered for weeks on end, the provocateurs somehow managed to evade them. And when the provocateurs were finally tracked down in Aguriškės, they managed to get away without firing a single shot. Our machine gun fire at night did not cut off even one of them, and all attempts to surround them failed.

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT DOES THE ATOM BOMB PROMISE?

Several of my friends and acquaintances had some time ago gone over to the armed resistance movement. From them I had heard about the engagements of their detachments, their surroundings and losses. I myself had, with a radio transmitter, largely helped the fighting units to combine into bigger formations and to coordinate their activities, but in February of 1945 I was as yet living within the law. Although comrades working with me had fallen or been confined in NKVD dungeons, I was still at liberty. Nevertheless, I felt that these days would not last longer and must soon come to an end. I therefore no longer contented myself with the links that were serving information; I set about looking for closer contact with the partisans who were operating in my own neighborhood.

At the beginning of June I obtained permission to meet commander Kardas of the Iron Wolf regiment. He had replaced Desinys. Armed partisans escorted me to the spot where the detachment leader was at that moment.

On seeing him I was astonished. It turned out that not only were we acquainted but that we were blood relatives. At first I had visualized him otherwise. But it was the rule that people knew every armed resister only by his deeds and secret name, and knew nothing about his past even when Mother Earth claimed him.

With Kardas I found eleven other partisans, among them two women. One of these was N., a secondary school teacher. Several months ago, the NKVD had forced her to shut the doors on her legal existence. Now she was called Audronè and was fulfilling the duties of a higher detachment liaison officer. The other woman, called Laimutè, was a detachment medical orderly. Six months before, she had left the M. city hospital

84 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

where she was working as a sister-of-mercy. From the same hospital five more sisters left with Laimutė. They were all allotted various duties with armed resistance detachments. Every one of them had been sent as far from her home as possible. In this way, if the Russians found out about them they would not be able to resort to repressive measures against their families.

There was active movement all night. Partisans were continually arriving to discuss matters with the detachment commander because Kardas was a rare guest in this area and was required to decide a number of problems. Towards morning Papartis arrived and reported that eight robbers, for whom the partisans had long been searching, had finally been captured in a neighboring village, a little more than a mile away. These drunken bouts were responsible for sixteen robberies — some on a larger, some on a smaller scale. Most of them received no more than a good flogging and a warning that if they ever tried to steal anything in the future, they would be shot. They were also ordered to make restitution to the people from whom they had stolen and to abstain from intoxicants for a year. Two of the robbers, however, were severely punished because they had committed murder during the course of their crimes.

The next afternoon Liūtas came to our headquarters to report that in the village there had been captured on Jankauskas, the deputy chief of the communal “stribs.” This citizen was one of the cruelest Communist activists, a professional thief, who robbed not only the inhabitants of the commune but also his own comrades, other communal functionaries.

Jankauskas was promised his life if the following night he would help eight partisans to “regulate” the active elements of the NKVD and NKGB in Veiveriai.

During the investigation this *strib* was quite frank and promised to help with the operation. There was no chance for him to lie because Speigas who took part in the investigation, had only a fortnight before fled from the *stribs* to the partisans. He was thoroughly familiar with the composition of the entire NKVD and NKGB network, and knew the whereabouts of its chiefs of staff as well as their work and influence.

What Does The Atom Bomb Promise? 85

The partisans were out to get the NKVD and NKGB chiefs, the NKGB interrogator and NKGB headquarters. The first three big fish were to be hooked without a shot. Jankauskas was to summon each of them from his room into the darkness. The NKGB headquarters was also to be wiped out with the help of Jankauskas. With a secret password he was to approach the guard and shut his mouth, after which our men would come bursting into the bedrooms of the NKGBs. It was decided to use only cold steel so that the operation would not be noticed by the Red Army forces moving eastward through Veiveriai after their victories in the West. The operation would have to be drastic, but these Bolsheviks had been tormenting the district inhabitants with undeclared war far too long already.

We talked with the detachment leader Kardas about a number of vital questions concerning the resistance movement. We arranged to transfer to the location of his detachment a radio transmitter and receiver which were presently situated in Kaunas. From Kardas I learned that in Suvalkija there was already an urgent need to link up the entire armed resistance movement and give it a common command. It was also deemed necessary to provide the detachments with uniform structures and to fix the precise limits of their activities. I obtained a few copies of the partisans' newsletter, entitled *Laisvės Žvalgas* (Scout of Freedom). Toward evening, after taking leave, I returned the way I had come.

A considerable interval had elapsed, but I was still walking around free. Suddenly, on August 20, through the liaison officer Audronė, I received an invitation to proceed to the Milkaline forest where something important was in the wind. Escorted into the depths of the woods, I saw in a clearing a group of men. They were all gathered round a radio receiver. Here was Major Mykolas-Jonas, whom Audronė had mentioned to me. All the men were listening with intense interest, undoubtedly like the rest of the world, to a BBC commentator who was reporting the effects of the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, a few days before.

When the broadcast was over, we rubbed our hands and with heightened morale exchanged ideas and impressions. We had forgotten that the Potsdam conference had passed over

86 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

Lithuania's fate in silence and had left us in the arms of the Soviet Union. We had forgotten that the same conference had transferred Lithuanian East Prussia to the Eastern despot. We thought little about those who had perished in Japan from that potent heretofore unheard - of - weapon. We were too deeply engrossed in our longing for freedom. We believed that the Americans would no longer make naive concessions to the Russians, but would utilize the might of the new weapon radical changes in international relations. Fearing the atom bomb, the Soviet Union would be forced to withdraw from the countries she occupied and to renounce the idea of world domination through warfare — declared or undeclared. For, if she didn't she might be expected to share the fate of Japan.

We never suspected that Western statesmen would prove incapable of utilizing politically the vast superiority conferred upon them by possession of the atom bomb. We did suspect that the Soviet press would try to pass over in silence the efficacy of the atom bomb. And that is just what was to happen subsequently: Japan's collapse was to be ascribed to the power of the blows delivered by the Red Army.

Anticipating this, the partisans at once pounced on their typewriters and mimeograph machine to issue extra editions of *Laisvės Žvalgas* in which our people were informed about the splitting of the atom and its use against the aggressors.

After several hours' work, when it was already dark, the special edition of the newsletter was ready for distribution. Copies were distributed to the combatant detachments, towns and more distant neighbors.

While others were busy with the newsletter, the reason for my investigation was explained to me. On August 25, at Skardupis, there was to be held a congress of the Suvalkija partisans. I was asked to represent the Iron Wolf regiment at this congress because none of the men of the detachment had travel documents. I consented.

I also became more closely acquainted with Mykolas-Jonas, who was to become an important instrument in the more effective organization of the armed resistance movement. Mykolas-Jonas told me how some two months before, the Communists had managed to discover that during the Nazi occupation he had worked in the Kaunas district of the Lithuanian underground. This did not please the Russians because experience had shown that most such anti-Nazi

What Does the Atom Bomb Promise? 87

resistance men were now working against Communists. Luckily, when the NKVD-ites arrived to arrest Mykolas-Jonas he was not at home and neighbors warned him in time not to go back there. Without taking leave of his family, he set out for the woods. However, *strib*s from Šilavotas caught him along the way. They charged him, a townsman, with having dared to travel without a permit from the authorities, and locked him up. After several days of surreptitious and intensive work, he had managed to gouge a hole in the wall near the window bars. Then he wrenched out the bars and fled, leaving the *strib*s still waiting for word from Kaunas that he was wanted by the authorities there. Later, the Russians would have good reason to regret the escape of “the biggest bandit.”

Meanwhile, with an automatic pistol strapped to his shoulder, Mykolas-Jonas rejoiced in the atom bomb.

88 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

CHAPTER XIV

“AMNESTY” FOR THE PARTISANS

The projected congress of partisan commanders took place on August 25. Almost all those invited attended. All the partisan detachment in Suvalkija were combined into a single Tauras district and divided into four representative groups: Vytautas, Iron Wolf, Žalgiris, and Šarūnas . A chaplain was attached to the district staff. The establishment of the welfare committee was endorsed. Although the armed resistance movement always extended material and moral assistance to the families of partisans, political prisoners, and deportees, the newly-appointed committee would enable it to do so in an organized way. A separate committee to decide political questions was formed in connection with the district staff. Considerable attention was devoted to press publication, especially *Laisvės Žvalgas*, because only through our own press could information be conveyed to the general public. In this manner the armed resistance movement in our district passed into a new phase of coordinated activity.

With reorganization questions out of the way, there followed an animated discussion on how to treat a proclamation of amnesty for the partisans made by the NKVD Major-General Bertašiūnas. This officer had urged the partisans to lay down their arms and return from the forests, at the same time promising not to punish those who surrendered, nor to take any repressive measures against their families and relations. Most partisans felt that this amnesty was bogus because the Communists did not honor their most solemn pledges and showed no mercy for ideological and political opponents, especially if they were armed. Although it was clear that the amnestied persons who laid down their arms would in due course be arrested and either deported, shot, or forced to become agents, it was nevertheless resolved not to

forbid the men to lay down their arms and be registered. Two objective motives determined this decision. In the first place, with no likelihood of a speedy change in the political situation in Europe, the number of armed resisters was too large for the tasks imposed upon them. Secondly, it was difficult to support a large number of partisans. Having resolved to allow the combatants to decide freely for themselves the question of amnesty, the congress came to the conclusion that those registering themselves and handing in their weapons would be forthwith eliminated from the organization. This was essential as a precautionary measure against treachery when the men handing in their arms were being interrogated and coerced.

The next congress of the Tauras district partisan commanders took place at the end of September on the eve of St. Nicholas Day. Among other things, a constitution for our local armed resistance group was drawn up. All those attending the congress made confession, received Holy Communion and had an opportunity to join with their brethren in legal life in hymns sung in church. They prayed fervently to the All Mighty for freedom and good fortune in battle, and implored St. Nicholas to be the protector of the armed resistance movement.

As a result of re-organization, partisan activities in our district became more intense. This was observed by the Russian intelligence service. Moreover, widely circulated copies of *Laisvės Žalgas* containing an appeal to the nation in the name of the Supreme Lithuanian Liberation Committee (*Vyriausias Lietuvos Išlaisvinimo Komitetas-VLIK*, for short) had fallen into the hands of the NKVD and had put their agents on the alert. Soon they succeeded in tracking several go-betweens engaged in transporting the press. The Communists did not at once arrest them, but trailed them farther in an endeavor to reach more responsible leaders.

The calamity befell us on October 18. During that night the NKVD arrested seventeen important persons. The arrests did not cease on the following days although they did not yield the Communists conspicuous successes. Nevertheless, these arrests came as a severe blow to our fledgling armed resistance movement. It was necessary to suspend the activities of some branches and temporarily to cease publication. The press had to be conveyed to a new place. The staff officials had to change their headquarters and it was not so easy to find new ones.

A month after these arrests the NKVD was getting ready to pounce on me. This I learned from a colleague N. who rushed into my room to tell me that the previous night (November 18) NKVD soldiers had surrounded the lodgings which I had left three days before. I had continued at liberty only because I had misled my landlady by giving her a false forwarding address when I moved out. This I had done deliberately because I had sensed that my horizon had become overcast.

From this same N. I also learned other particulars. The NKVD men who had come looking for me, had arrested B., who had taken over my old apartment. Moreover, MGB men had been observing the premises from a house across the street. Failing to spot either me or my brother, they sent a girl to the apartment. She told the landlady that she was a student and knew me and had come on university affairs. When my landlady replied that I had already moved, she did not believe her and repeated her visit in the afternoon when she noticed B. returning home. At dusk the NKVD men occupied my old apartment, although the girl had not discharged her task. After keeping watch until dawn the NKVD men withdrew and arrested B., not at my old quarters but during lectures at the university, in order that nobody could inform me. Fortunately, I still had some friends left.

It was essential to act swiftly before my luck ran out. I was aware that I was being closely shadowed. All places I had visited during the interim, even though they had nothing in common with resistance activity, were investigated by the NKVD men and arrests had been made. Therefore, I hastily concealed any and all material connected with secret political activity; then I effected contact with appropriate persons and set out at full speed in the direction of the Iron Wolf headquarters.

My youngest brother Simas, who had no ties whatever with the underground, risked staying in Kaunas. He believed that the flight of myself and of another brother would not interfere with his studies. However, he was mistaken. The NKVD men had already succeeded in discovering our new quarters. The following night they drove up in an automobile to the street in which we lived, extinguished their headlights and silently pushed the car close up to our dwelling. After rousing the landlady, some of them surrounded the outside of the house while the rest forced her to open the door explaining

“Amnesty” For the Partisans 91

that they had important business. Hardly had the door opened than several pistol muzzles appeared in the glare of the re-started headlights.

But this time too the Communists drew a blank. Since they did not find whom they sought, they began to interrogate Simas. He asserted that I had not fled to the partisans, but had gone to Vilnius several days ago. They evidently did not believe this. They uttered loud oaths and rained blows upon him. But realizing that through him they were not likely to reach me, they contented themselves with confiscating his documents and ordering him not to leave Kaunas without their knowledge. And then, without even waiting until morning, they went away.

Left without documents, Simas felt that his studies were finished and that he had better take his vacation. Without further preliminary, close on the heels of the NKVD men, he hastened to find a safer harbor while it was still dark.

Before leaving Kaunas I had had time to meet Jankus. From him I ascertained that one Daunoras had arrived with a friend from abroad. They had been sent by those Lithuanians who a year before, while the war was still proceeding, had got away to the West. We expected to hear from them whether our compatriots living in the free world were adhering to our struggle; whether our country's bondage would last long; and whether the Western democrats would sit at the same table with the Red Eastern totalitarians. I undertook to transmit this important news about our guests' arrival to the Tauras district administration.

When one realizes, for the first time, that the NKVD men are shadowing him one wants to creep alive into the earth or make one's self swiftly scarce elsewhere in preference to being pursued like a hare by greyhound. I was not reduced to such a degree of fear because I had been somewhat hardened by my underground experiences. Still I left Kaunas by way of a different route in order not to fall into the Communists' hands. From then onwards, among the partisans, I had to defend myself with arms.

Life in the armed resistance movement was pursuing its customary course. Merged into a broader organization, the combatants felt even bolder. For instance, some time before my arrival, my proposed Iron Wolf headquarters had on November 1, during All Saints, prepared its annual feast with

92 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

the consecration of a new standard. All the men of the headquarters had made confession, attended Mass, received Holy Communion, and before the newly consecrated standard reaffirmed their solemn pledge to keep on fighting until the conflict with Red totalitarianism had been won.

In the meantime, the Western Allies were preparing for the Nuremberg trials.

CHAPTER XV

TRAGEDY OF AGRARIAN REFORM

After the occupation of each country, the Moscow Red Fascists at once set about the introduction of the so-called agrarian reforms. They would simply announce that the land would be expropriated from the large landowners and transferred to the workers and small landowners. Farmers whose holdings were neither large nor small would be allowed to keep 15 to 30 acres for their own use. But, in actual fact, all those who received land or were allowed to keep it became State tenants, since the land had to be taken over by the State (nationalized) before it could be re-distributed. The aim of such "reform" is to destroy the independent farmers, as a class, compelling them by means of heavy taxes and exactions in kind to enter the collective farm system, and to conscript all agricultural workers into the network of Communist agents in order to exploit them even more ruthlessly than workers in the city.

In places which the Soviet army occupies for the first time, the agricultural laborers and small landowners are ignorant of the fraud and yield to the temptation. But since this was the second time Soviet forces had overrun Lithuania, a great many people already knew what was in store for them. The Soviets regarded the nationalization imposed in 1940 as still valid; it was necessary only to distribute the land anew because nothing remained of the 1940 reform. The Soviets left to medium-scale farmers thirty hectares each for temporary management, and all other land went to a fund which had to be distributed among the landless. To farmers who, during the German occupation, had discharged all obligations in kind, only five hectares per capita were left. In this manner a land fund of a million hectares was formed.

Concurrently with the land, live stock and agricultural

94 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

implements were expropriated. At the same time, farm buildings were also confiscated. And no compensation whatever was paid by the Soviets to anybody for land, buildings, cattle, agricultural machinery or tools.

From part of the confiscated land, State farms of up to 400 hectares were formed; and from 44,500 hectares various auxiliary farms were created for sundry institutions. Other land taken from the so-called *kulaks* was distributed among the proletariat —the landless and field laborers with small holdings. Some 78,000 landless each received several hectares. They were the first candidates for the *kolkhozes* or collective farms to be recruited. Despite their material gains, some among them wished to be independent farmers.

The partisans saw what injustice was being done to the medium-scale farmers by depriving their families of the land they had tilled for so long. They foresaw the fate of the newly created farmers, but on the whole, they did not oppose agrarian reform, realizing that no good purpose would be served in doing so. However, they tried as far as possible to mitigate injustices and to slow down the process of agricultural collectivization. For instance, they issued a decree forbidding those eligible to receive either land or livestock confiscated from farmers whose previous holdings had not exceeded 40 hectares.

Owing to this partisan warning and decree, the number of landless accepting land grants was very small compared with the acreage available. Vast plots of it were left without owners and untilled because the former landlords were forbidden to work them and not enough new owners could be found. Often landless field laborers were forcibly offered land. They were threatened with severe penalties and accused of being saboteurs who took orders from the “Fascist Bandits.” But neither threats nor promises could induce any significant number of them to accept and, as late as 1946, the Communists complained that of the fund created, some 180,000 hectares of land still remained undistributed. But this figure was largely fictitious. There were considerably more unaccepted lots, and distributed lots were in many places unworked, because the new owners had not ventured to set foot on them.

The position of farmers who continued to work their own land was very difficult and worsened every day. Often the partisans coming in contact with the farmers realized this and

Tragedy of Agrarian Reform 95

tried in every way to help them. If the farmers were destroyed, it would mean the destruction or enslavement of more than half of the Lithuanian people. How hard the farmer's life had become I very clearly realized after talking to a man who had been allowed to retain his sixteen-hectare farm.

During the course of a long journey, two friends and I stopped off at the village of T. and knocked at the door of an unknown farmer. We had to wait a long time in the cold before we were admitted. When we asked him for food, the farmer did not even reply. Nor did he wish to put us for the night. We understood that he took us for *stribas* or provocateurs. But after a considerable interval, with the help of a partisan known to him, we cleared up the misunderstanding. He became very warm; he entertained us well and agreed to our spending the night. When he learned that we were functionaries of the partisan staff he grew outspoken and told us his past and present troubles.

When he was twenty years of age, he had migrated to the United States. But he became homesick for his own country. After earning some money, he returned to Lithuania, bought sixteen hectares of land, married, and started a family. While Lithuania remained independent, he managed fairly well. Although the work was hard and the prices of farm produce low, he earned enough to eat, to repair his houses and tools, and to pay the expenses of growing children.

The Soviet occupation wholly upset his economic equilibrium. The exactions in kind imposed by the Communists together with excessive volunteer duties, were as follows: 1,700 kilograms of grain; 1,900 kilograms of potatoes; 320 kilograms of meat; also hay, flax, wool, eggs, and milk. Sixty percent of the grain exactions was in the form of bread. During the first Soviet occupation, like all other farmers, he received no remuneration for these products. This year something laughable was paid. For one centneris (50 kilograms) of rye he received five rubles, a sum for which one could buy next to nothing. For all the exactions in kind he received only about 400 rubles—the approximate cost of a single boot on the black market because at that time in Lithuania it was not possible to obtain such things elsewhere.

On the other hand, land taxes together with insurance, war loans and other levies totalled about five thousand rubles, *i.e.*, over eleven times more than the receipts from exactions in

96 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

kind. In order somehow to pay taxes and make a living he, like other neighbors, had to send cattle to the black market. Formerly he used to keep six cows, but now he was hard put to keep two. Already more than one neighbor, unable to pay taxes or deliver tribute in kind, had been sent to prison.

In terms of what this farmer used to be able to produce in the days of independent Lithuania, the present exactions would not have been great. But now the agricultural output, agricultural machinery was lacking; natural and mineral fertilizers were lacking; the land was insufficiently tilled because labor was scarce. The State made the farmers "volunteer" so much time for its projects that they scarcely had enough left for cultivating their lands. Our host worked three months out of the year cutting and hauling State timber with his own horses. Moreover, the forest to which he had been assigned was some twelve miles from his home in Priensile. And for this compulsory work the State paid him nothing.

In these circumstances, my host said, he was not even thinking about any rise in the productivity of the farm. Not having money for either repairs or the acquisition of new agricultural implements, there would soon be for him no other alternative than to join a collective farm, hand over his land, livestock and implements to common management and with his family live in misery as a semi-serf—like the people who had slaved for the big landlords, counts and barons in Feudal times.

The indifference with which Communist authorities handled the country's agricultural resources was incomprehensible to my host and other Lithuanian farmers. In the autumn corn brought by them was strewn in the open air or in hastily improvised storehouses. When it rained, enormous quantities of grain sprouted or grew mouldy and unfit for food. Stores of potatoes were left to rot. Meanwhile, agents to whom the collections of exactions in kind were entrusted, compelled the farmers, even before the prescribed term, to deliver all their dues. All the agents in the communes were without exception Russians. They called upon the neighboring communes and districts to engage in competition for the delivery of grain. Actually, however, these supposed contests were merely a ruse aimed at speedily and thoroughly fleecing the farmers of their resources for the "great Fatherland," the Soviet Union. The farmers were urged to turn over even more than the prescribed

Tragedy of Agrarian Reform 97

quota of grain because they were supposedly competing with Asiatic Soviet republics—although the farmers did not even know the names of those republics. During these competitions the agents strove to extort by force any reserves the farmers might have saved either by working harder or in some way or other raising the farm's productivity. The communal agents were the most malignant enemies of the farmers. For that reason, the partisans frequently found it necessary to come to their aid with arms.

For instance, on Christmas eve Day in 1945, I happened to call on an acquaintance and his wife at their farm. While we were talking, the barking of a dog aroused my curiosity, and I glanced through the window. Seeing Russians in the yard, I immediately cast around for a place to hide. But my friend Povilas told me to relax.

"I'll go out and see what they want. And you just keep your eyes open. If they start heading for the house, creep into those wood shavings in the corner. They'll never think of looking for you there."

Anyway, my anxiety turned out to be premature because I heard the NKVD men ordering my host to harness his horses on the double and start driving them to a destination which they said they would indicate later on. One of the *enkavedisti* had a bloody nose and was walking only by dint of the support of his comrades.

"That blasted agent from Prienai and his NKVD men are terrorizing farmers who haven't been able to meet their quotas," said Povilas as he came back to put on his overcoat. Then he added: "They're as drunk as swine—all of them—and do they stink!"

As for the "wounded" *enkavedist* who had aroused my curiosity—he had apparently fallen down dead drunk and cracked his forehead on the frozen ground.

Since the distance wasn't very great, we expected that Povilas would come back quite soon. But he didn't. To make matters worse, the evening silence was suddenly shattered by bursts of gunfire from the direction of Prienai. A brief lull ensued, followed by the retorts of machine guns. These continued for several minutes and then gave way to short volleys of automatic gunfire punctuated by the sound of exploding grenades.

Povilas's wife looked worried.

98 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

speaking, Povilas gazed sadly at the bloodstained harness, obviously sorry to have lost a good horse.

“Don’t be frightened,” I said. “Povilas will turn up, all right. He won’t get hurt.” But to tell the truth, I did not believe my own words. His continued absence, coupled with the shots we had just heard made me feel very ill at ease. Anything could happen when one was traveling with drunken NKVD men. There might even have been an encounter with partisans.

I went outside to listen for sounds of his return, but I heard nothing. Povilas did get back, although it wasn’t until a good hour later. Leaving the horses still hitched to the cart, he dragged himself into the room and collapsed at the table. “Be thankful that I’m still alive!” he gasped. Then, after catching his breath, he proceeded to tell us the rest of the story.

It seemed that the Russians had decided not to go back to Prienai right away. Instead, they made Povilas drive them to Farmer P.’s place, where they held “court” for several of the neighboring farmers who had not yet fulfilled their quotas of mandatory contributions in kind. The agent not only threatened to arrest every one of these men, but also beat several of them soundly with his fists. By the time they left P.’s farm and headed toward Prienai, it had already begun to grow dark. All the officials were now quite drunk and were singing and bellowing at the top of their voices. Then, just as they were driving past Nuotakai Hill, a band of partisans suddenly opened fire. The more sober of the NKVD men leaped from the cart and began to run for cover. Povilas jumped into a ditch. Luckily it wasn’t pitch dark, so the partisans were able to tell him apart from the uniformed Russians. But one of his horses was killed. When the shooting was over, the surviving NKVD men were herded to a nearby brickyard and executed. After that, the partisans collected the weapons which the Russians had left scattered on the ground. They also took the agent’s portfolio, which contained not only a record of the farmers’ grain “contribution” quotas, but also a list of those farmers who hadn’t been able to fulfill them.

Povilas went on to tell us that the most vile of the *enkavedisti* had fallen during the partisans’ first volley. He did so with evident delight, for it seemed that he and many other farmers in the neighborhood had suffered a great deal on this individual’s account. Even during this journey, he had become

Tragedy of Agrarian Reform 99

enraged because he felt that Povilas was driving too slow, and had beaten him soundly with his automatic. When he finished

“Just thank God that you’re alive!” exclaimed his wife.
“We’ll get over the loss of the horse somehow.”

The farmers of the district were very pleased to learn that the agent’s documents had fallen into partisan hands. Now, the Soviet authorities would have no way of knowing which of them still owed the government “contributions”. They would have to take the word of the farmers themselves.

100 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

CHAPTER XVI

A PARTISAN'S CHRISTMAS

On Christmas Eve, I had a chance to see for myself some of the results of our recent efforts to regularize and co-ordinate the various aspects of the armed resistance movement. I was pleased to discover that even the appearance of its members had been altered for the better. I had been invited to spend the evening at a certain homestead along with three other partisans of my acquaintance, and I could not help noticing the change the moment they arrived. All of them were uniformly attired, after a semi-military fashion, in regulation army riding breeches and boots. Their hands were protected by warm, woolen gloves and their heads by identical looking fur caps. They wore standard army greatcoats and shoulder-strap belts complete with cartridge wallets and holster for storing pistols and grenades. Each man also carried a pair of field glasses, as well as an automatic rifle which had been confiscated from the Russians. Upon closer inspection, I noticed yet another welcome innovation: all three had taken the trouble to affix religious emblems to their greatcoat lapels. These were actually scapulars which depicted the *Mater Dolorosa* on one side and the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the reverse. They had been carefully enclosed in cellophane paper and embellished around the edges with a decorative design in the Lithuanian national colors of red, green, and yellow.

The mood of the people gathered around the Christmas Eve table was not only serious but sad as they recalled how the Lithuanian people had been subjected to extermination at the hands of alternating occupation forces for nearly seven years. This festival of peace and tranquillity was even more painful for the partisans. We were participating in it as hunted outlaws, and felt ourselves in greater need of God's help at this time than ever before. We were being persecuted more

ruthlessly than wild animals merely because we refused to bow down to an occupying force which was determined to deprive the Lithuanian people of their most fundamental and sacred rights.

The Russians were familiar with the Lithuanian Catholic custom for all members of the family to gather together on Christmas Eve and partake of the traditional Christmas Eve meal. Consequently they kept close watch on the homesteads, hoping to spot whatever partisans might be emerging from hiding in order to be with their kin. In this way, they were able to identify the partisans' families, a procedure which boded the latter no good. For that reason the partisan command issued an order which forbade its members to visit their families during the Christmas season. But not all the partisans obeyed this order. Longing for the family hearth was sometimes so strong that many of them risked their lives and the safety of their loved ones to satisfy it.

The Christmas of 1945 proved that this order was wise. Viesulas and two of his men set out during the night of the first day of Christmas to make inquiries. In accordance with Lithuanian custom the farmer invited the partisans to be seated at the Christmas table. Fortunately they did not stay long, but after being entertained for some twenty minutes, put on their greatcoats and prepared to leave. At that moment, someone began banging on the door from the outside. When the host inquired who was knocking he received no reply — only orders to open the door at once. The language was Lithuanian, but because the voice was unfamiliar, the partisans got their weapons in readiness. Two of them were armed with only pistols, but the cautious Tigras was equipped with a German MG-36 machine gun. He was the real hope and strength of the trio.

Telling the host to get back into the room, Tigras and his machine gun took up a position near the door. A few yards away he spotted armed Communists and promptly greeted them with a burst from his "sweetheart." A volley of gunfire replied from outside, but the bullets grazed his greatcoat without touching the flesh. Tigras acknowledged the Russian shots with a fresh machine gun burst, spreading the range of fire. The thick hail of the bullets tore a gap in the door large enough for a dog to creep through. Near the door, one Russian had already collapsed on the ground. He later proved to be

102 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

interrogator Kruglov of the Prienai NKGB. One cartridge belt was replaced by another. Now Gaidys weighted in with flaming bullets. Opening the door, Tigras discharged one more round into the darkness of the yard. Not a single shot was heard in reply — only the muffled curses of the wounded Russian.

Then all three men sallied forth into the yard, and Gaidys demanded to know who had fired. Yet again there was no answer. Gaidys ran to his sleigh and gathered up the reserve cartridges left there. Suddenly, the Russians opened fire from a haystack and grazed Tigras's thigh. Enraged, he directed a machine gun burst into the haystack. The Russians were again silent. This time Gaidys helped Tigras to remove Kruglov's automatic.

After the shooting the partisans left the sleigh and set off on foot. As was later made clear, the Russians kept quiet and allowed the partisans to get away because Tigras with his first shots had put out of action three leaders of the NKGB detachment: Captain Kruglov, Lieutenant Marcinkevich, and one more Russian officer. After losing their leaders, the surviving NKGB or *enkagebisiti*, as they were colloquially called, were no longer equal to continuing the attack without orders.

I welcomed the 1946 New Year with the partisans. Among us was the Tauras district commander himself. After his speech — one suited to the moment—all of us lapsed for some time into pensive silence. Then the lull was suddenly broken by the woman partisan Laimutė. She began her song alone, but soon male voices joined her. She sang in a soft soprano:

*Dabar ilgu žaliajam sodžiui
Toli išklydusių vaikų.
Ir vakarai čia taip nuobodūs,
Be jokio džiaugsmo, be dainų.
Bet lauk, motule, aš sugrįšiu,
Sugrįšiu tave išbučiuoti.*

A Partisan's Christmas 103

(The orchard green is now filled with longing
For children who have wandered afar.
And the evenings here are now very lonely
Without any joy, without any songs.
But wait, dear mother, for I'll be returning,
Returning to greet you with many a kiss)

A deep sorrow vibrated in Laimutė's voice, and her eyes glistened with tears. This New Year's eve Laimutė seemed sadder than usual. Perhaps it was caused, in part, by the solemn mood of the festival and by her longing for her scattered family. And even more, perhaps, by the fate of her battle comrade Audronė, who had been arrested several days before and tortured during the customary inquisition. Throughout this dreadful ordeal, as we later learned, she made no betrayal, no admissions whatsoever, although to "loosen her tongue" there were used against her the numerous methods known only to the Soviet security police. For such unfaltering courage the Marijampolė district NKGB had dubbed this former teacher a "great figure."

After Laimutė's song followed another partisan chant — which Skirmuntas led with resonant voice assisted his comrades.

CHAPTER XVII

ELECTION PREPARATIONS

We held an important partisan gathering to discuss certain problems that had arisen in connection with the approaching “elections” for the Soviet Union Supreme Council. It was necessary to oppose the wave of moral terror which swelled at a heightened tempo before the elections. It was essential to demonstrate that the Lithuanians had no wish to hide the truth of the enemy’s cruel opposition under the cloak of justice. Therefore the resistance movement had, first of all, to establish a prolific press which could, at least in part, serve as a counterpoise to the colossal Soviet propaganda machine. True, we knew beforehand that Communist statistics would give candidates of the sole-running dictatorship party no less than 90 percent of the popular vote. But we felt ourselves powerless to alter this official lie. Instead, we concentrated on trying to keep the Russian soldiers and political police from applying their accustomed pressure tactics to the citizens in order to force them to vote. We were anxious to create conditions whereby the inhabitants could, by means of abstention, say “No” to Russian violence—and do so without fear of being persecuted by the Russians later on.

In order to carry on a successful pre-election struggle, the armed resistance movement had to fix general directives of action. Therefore it was resolved to link up with Ažuolas, commander of “A” district. Our district commander, Mykolas-Jonas, delegated Kardas, Uosis, and myself for the task.

In the meantime, it was my duty to revitalize the partisan press which, because of recent arrests, had become almost completely paralyzed. I had to organize a new cadre of press workers — and do it quickly — so that we could get out a pre-election issue of *Laisvės Žvalgas*, along with handbills of

petition and cartoons satirizing the Soviet "democratic" vote.

It was a difficult task. Uosis and I had to write off all the copies for the newsletter and handbills of petition and cut the dye blocks for the cartoons. Exceptional patience and concentration were required for the latter operation since we had no engraving tools and had to make the cuts with a sharpened bullet. And all this we did in a dark bunker in the forest, our hands numb from the cold. The typing, drawing, engraving and printing took three days and yielded us 900 copies of *Laisvės Žvalgas*, and about 1,400 handbills of cartoons and petitions.

Instructions called for this printed material to be disseminated in two ways. One way was to have the partisans themselves put up the handbills and caricatures in public places under cover of night. The other way involved making use of the Communist administrative apparatus. In the provinces, especially in the villages, the so-called district chairmen were "invited" to assist. Most of them did so by affixing official Soviet seals to the partisan publications and then ordering subordinates to disseminate the contents by word of mouth. However, certain district chairmen, who were known to be Communist sympathizers, were forced by the partisans to personally carry these publications throughout their districts and to read the contents to all inhabitants therein.

Many of the caricatures and appeals, which were displayed at every main crossroad, cost more than one Communist his life. Some ten days before the elections, a truck crowded with agitators was proceeding to Pakiauliškis under an escort of armed political police. At the last crossroad, the escort noticed a tree on which were pasted resistance appeals and caricatures. The tree was surrounded by a barbed wire fence on which hung a notice in Russian and Lithuanian reading "Forbidden to touch!" Several Communists jumped down from the truck and at once began to tear the caricatures and appeals from the tree. One large caricature was attached to cardboard and connected with a detonator to explode a mine. As the Communists were tearing the caricature, the mine exploded and killed three of them. The tree felled by the mine injured two others. In this manner the caricatures defended the freedom of the press which the Soviets had trampled underfoot.

106 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

After a few such incidents, none of the rank-and-file Communists would dare to tear down the Lithuanian partisan appeals, and so they would be left intact until a regular detachment of Russian troops could come to remove them.

Having completed one part of our assignment, we set out to reach the district "A" commander and there coordinate election activity. Our journey was long and arduous. We were obliged to travel at night and in the daytime we could not always properly rest. Moreover, liaison individual partisan units did not always operate perfectly, especially after we reached the outskirts of "A" district operations. On one occasion the liaison officers did not arrive in time to meet us; on another, the liaison officers could not locate a guide right away. Things became very difficult when we reached the Balbieriškis forest. Our guide Tabokas started out following what he said were direct trails and paths. But the forest was so thick and dark that it wasn't long before we lost them completely and had to proceed blindly, groping our way. Twisted undergrowth scratched our faces and got entangled with our weapons. Branches kept snapping and getting in our way. Nor could we make use of a map because we had no point from which to take our bearings. We therefore had to rely upon the guide's intuition which — luckily for us — did not fail him.

An exceptionally splendid guide was the woman liaison officer of the Vaidotas group, the bright-faced Astra. She was a very fine, tall, well built girl. Her features, it is true, seemed masculine, but her eyes were sky-blue and her hair was blonde. Owing to her daring the partisans jokingly dubbed her the commandant of the Vaidotas group. When we made contact with her, she offered to keep watch so that we might snatch some sleep before going on. We resumed the journey before dawn. Newly fallen snow made our advance harder because we had to hide our tracks.

One after another, we crept through the dense forest. Astra and Pjūklas led the way. The rest of us — four in all — were right on their heels. At one point, we turned onto a road and followed it for a while, walking in the ruts made by sleighs to conceal our tracks. When it began to grow light, Astra held up her hand — meaning that it was time to turn off the road. To make sure we left no tracks, Astra broke off some fir branches and spread them over the roadside. Then she stepped on them and took a long leap into some nearby bushes.

We followed suit — the last one to jump scattered the branches to give the impression that they had fallen off some passing sleigh. Since it was necessary to cover our tracks for another hundred yards or so, we kept to the bushes, where there was as yet no snow.

Not long afterwards, we encountered the first sentries. We exchanged passwords and continued on our way. At last, the tents of the partisan camp came into view. They were simple — like the tents shepherds pitch against the rain. They were covered with fir branches and now blanketed with snow. In this way they were camouflaged and merged with their surroundings. Inside the tents the ground was covered with a layer of pine cones which had previously been well dried. They protected one from the cold and provided a comfortable couch. In front of the tents were stacks of oak logs. These concealed the entrance ways and made for good fuel, since they emitted no smoke to betray the presence of a fire.

Sprawled inside the tents were men who had recently returned from nocturnal missions. They slept fully clothed, with their weapons beside them, so that they might be ready at a moment's notice in the event of an attack. We were greeted by the camp commandant, Raginis, who made room for us in one of the tents. After asking him for the password of the day, we lay down and fell asleep. We awoke at two o'clock in the afternoon to the sound of sizzling bacon. Soon a delicious aroma permeated the tent, and we knew it was dinner time. The duties of hostess were being discharged by Astra, who was bustling about the fireplace. It appeared that Astra was not only a first-class guide, but an equally excellent cook. The meal she prepared was both nourishing and tasty and satisfied our wolfish appetites.

Refreshed and rested, we resumed our journey shortly before dusk. When it grew dark we made inquiries of a farmer in the neighborhood about our exact location. Almost everywhere, preparations for the election were in full swing although generally the night was quiet. *En route* our group added new guides. We also obtained horses. Feeling bolder we rode through the hamlet of Uta at a good trot instead of bypassing it. We established contact with the "A" district commander at midnight, and began discussions at once.

His way of dealing with the Soviet elections was very much like our own — an active boycott and increased

108 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

dissemination of information through the press. To protect the inhabitants from coercion it was agreed to use the following methods:

1. To collect passports from all citizens several days before the election. Since nobody was admitted to the polls without a passport, it would give the people a valid excuse for not casting their votes. Moreover, since their passports were missing, it would be impossible for Soviet official to tell whether or not the passports had contained the mark indicating "voted" when the people applied for new ones later on.

2. On the eve of the election (February 9th) — to damage or blow up important local bridges, cut telephone lines, and shoot up the polling stations. Such measures would make it impossible for the local Communists to contact central installations. They would also prevent any additional guards from reaching the polling stations, and discourage the local NKVD from venturing out and dragging people to the polls.

3. On election day (February 10) to patrol all surrounding areas to prevent the Russians from rounding up voters by force. Any Communists caught bringing citizens to the polls at gunpoint, these patrols would exterminate on the spot.

Having settled all pertinent questions, we shook hands and went our respective ways.

On the following night we reached Žižmaras's group. These men had recently stepped up their struggle against the systematic destruction of the Lithuanian forests by the Russians. I have already mentioned how farmers were being forcibly recruited to strip the timber of all forested regions of Lithuania. When such activity was begun in Žižmaras's district, he and his men surrounded the forest and herded all the wood cutters together. Then he ordered the overseers and other Society functionaries to be flogged before their eyes, and ordered them to leave the forest at once and never to show themselves there again. The farmers — most of whom had been dragged in from great distances — were more than happy to comply. They silently rejoiced that the intolerable burden had been lifted and returned to their own districts, where they "complained" that partisan activity had made fulfilling of their obligations impossible.

As a result of this, swarms of NKVD men were scouring

A Partisan's Christmas 109

the forest for Žižmaras, even as he was entertaining us less than a mile away. After giving the Communist work in the forest, he thought that on the outskirts he might feel quite safe. We had our doubts but it seemed that he was right. The Russians tramped all day through the woods while we laughed over their abortive efforts.

On the way back to our headquarters, we had to advance much more cautiously. In every electoral district from twenty to thirty Russians had already been posted. They tried at night to prepare ambushes for the partisans. But in Raginis's region it was the Russians who suffered: two of them were killed during a clash with our men. When the Kunigiški electoral district security police, who were in Tabokius's region, heard about this, they set to work strengthening their position and piled up a layer of sand nearly six feet thick outside their ground-floor room.

Everywhere along the roadsides gleamed the white handbills of the partisans petitioning people to boycott the elections.

110 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

CHAPTER XVIII

THE "MOST DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN THE WORLD"

The inhabitants within the boundaries of our area unit's activity were informed not only through the partisan press but by word of mouth that the elections should be boycotted. The partisans were ordered to get out among the people, to tell them about the fraud practiced by the occupying forces and to advise them against going to the polls. Several days before the elections, the drive for collection of passports was begun. It went smoothly, as I saw for myself when I visited Viesulas's company headquarters. Around midnight, the men delegated for this task started filtering back. They came in two's and three's, lugging baskets full of documents. So that the Communist habit of carrying out everything with pomp and ceremony should be derided, the men had adorned their baskets with red-colored paper flowers and slogans. There was much talk about competition for the collection of documents; the "fraternal" republics were invited to break all collection records. Many thousands of passports found their way into the partisans' archives. At first, the district officials tried to issue temporary papers to those deprived of their passports, but soon there were such masses of people swarming around the district offices that the Communists lost all patience and ordered everyone to go home.

On the evening of February 9th, the attacks on the polling stations were scheduled to begin.

The purpose was, first, to tie the Russian garrisons to the spot so that they would not be able to prepare traps for the armed resistance movement or interfere with the destruction of telephone lines and important local bridges.

Secondly, the shootings were expected to compel the Russians to keep watch all night without sleep, so that on

election day they would be too tired to recruit prospective voters by terrorizing the people in the neighborhood.

Finally, these incidents were to provide the nonvoting inhabitants with a valid excuse: fearing danger to life, they dared not go to the polls.

Each company in our partisan unit was responsible for "handling" one polling station. Kardas, Uosis, and I undertook to deal with the Šilavotas "fortress." Stationed there, was a reserve garrison of some two hundred NKVD men, awaiting assignment to the polling stations in our district. We had to begin operations in 24 hours. On hearing our shots, the other companies were to follow suit.

After having examined and cleaned our weapons and replenished our supplies of ammunition, we set out. Deathlike silence reigned outside. Although it was the month of February, drizzling rain was falling: a rare occurrence at that time of the year. Deep mud impeded our progress, and before long all of us were soaked to the skin.

When we finally reached Šilavotas, we entrenched ourselves in a ditch several hundred yards away from the quarters of the NKVD troops and awaited the order to shoot. We had decided to discharge fifty rounds, and the moment we heard the word "Fire!" our semi-automatics responded first. The Russian "Maxim" machine guns joined in immediately afterwards. The machine gun bursts and tracer bullets flew some five yards above our heads and spent themselves somewhere in the pine grove behind us. After discharging our allotment of cartridges, we heard Kardas squeaking like a mouse. This was our signal to withdraw. At that moment, Uosis let fly a couple of grenades for good measure. The Russians intensified their fire. But we only laughed and took off through the slushy fields. We were not ready to abandon Šilavotas so soon, however. We proposed to give the NKVD men more of our fire from the other side of their stronghold.

Ploughing our way through sticky mud, we started to back-track. The going was very rough. The terrain had become a quagmire, and the warmth of the air — not to mention the weight of the ammunition we carried — soon had us dripping with sweat. Somehow or other, we made our way to a hillock and stopped there a moment to rest. At last, we had a chance to see what was happening. The whole district appeared to have been transformed into a battleground. Emergency flares

112 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

streaked skywards from the polling stations. Automatic weapons clattered away, and grenades exploded at regular intervals. We rejoiced that our comrades were doing so well and resumed our trek back to Šilavotas.

Once again we found ourselves outside the NKVD stronghold, but this time the darkness prevented us from finding good vantage points. We finally settled for the slopes of a slippery bluff and reopened fire. The Russians replied more promptly and accurately than before. Their bullets came whizzing past our ears and forced us to stick close to the boggy ground. Moreover, during all this time, a searchlight in the church tower swept back and forth over the area, trying to ferret us out.

After midnight the scene grew even more animated. When the telephone lines were destroyed, the Communists became terrified and started sending up flares of every description. They lit up the sky for miles around and helped us find our bearings during the march. We stopped to snatch a little sleep. Then, towards dawn, we were off again. We had already mined the route over which the Russians might attempt to send reinforcements to Šilavotas. Now we planted anti-tank mines at pre-designated spots on the Prienai road. As soon as this operation was finished, we took cover in nearby trenches and waited there to pick off whatever enemy troops might escape the mines. The vigil proved most unpleasant. Snow had begun to fall towards morning, and the weather had turned freezing. We were still soaked with the previous night's rain and sweat. Our limbs began to grow numb and our teeth chattered. We waited one hour, two hours, three — but the Russians did not show up. We could not endure waiting longer than noon. We finished mining the road and started walking.

Emerging into a path near the edge of the woods, we took out our fieldglasses and carefully scanned the surrounding area. Nothing was moving; everywhere there reigned the wonderful stillness of a winter Sunday. We decided to abandon the forest and look in on a nearby farmstead.

Shaking the snow from our feet, we entered the house. At the table a family of five sat dining: the parents and three children under ten. They glanced up at us timidly. Pretending to be Communist officials, we asked them whether they had been to the polling station to cast their vote. The farmer began humbly to make excuses. He had had no time to attend

meetings, and the village elder had not informed him where the voting would take place. The women had certainly gone to the meeting, but had forgotten when they should vote because they were all the time worrying about having left the house unattended and wondering if anybody would steal anything while they were out. Besides, he — the farmer — had just now come back from cutting lumber for the authorities.

When my comrade Kardas pointed out to him that there was still time to vote today, the farmer bent further over his bowl and mumbled:

"Are our votes really so important to you? They'll elect without us. And we are not acquainted with the people to be elected. We don't know who they are."

During the time the farmer was talking, I had been poking my nose into every nook and cranny of the house. All of a sudden I spotted an old woman — the farmer's mother — crouched inside a huge barrel in one of the rooms. Having seen armed men entering the yard, she had been convinced they were coming to drag her to the polls and had concealed herself in this absurd and quite uncomfortable hiding place. It was all I could do to keep from laughing. When we finally opened our greatcoats and displayed the partisan emblem, the old woman was beside herself with joy. First, she kissed my comrade Uosis. Then she called her husband — who, it turned out — had been hiding in an even more unlikely place than she. The rest of the family was equally happy to learn our true identity. The farmer at once asked us to be seated and brought a bottle of vodka to warm us. He had been delighted with the nocturnal disturbance we had caused, although he and his wife hadn't been able to fall asleep until 3 A.M. on account of our little spree. Today, he assured us, they wouldn't be lured to the polling station at any price.

While refreshing ourselves we made inquiries about the attitude of other people. We were told that, so far, not a single person from the village had voted. Although it was Sunday, nobody had gone to church. Even the most confirmed churchgoers had decided to stay away. All were afraid that the Communists would collar them and force them to go to the poll booths. And then they would have no choice left but to drop the slip into the ballot box.

After thanking our host for his hospitality and his determination not to vote, we again sallied forth to the forest

114 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

edge to observe the surroundings. For a while, everything was quiet. The inhabitants stayed at home and waited. About three o'clock movement began. Tired of waiting for voters the Communists started descending on the villages nearest at hand. Because the telephone lines had been cut, they had not been able to receive instructions from headquarters and were acting on their own. Some of them had even brought the ballot boxes with them. They didn't get many votes or voters, however. Most of the villagers took to the woods when they saw them approaching and left only the old and sick indoors.

Towards evening we noticed three Communists driving along the road. In the vehicle with them was a bright red ballot box. We decided to verify the voting procedure and hurriedly called on farmer S., towards whose farmstead these electioneers were headed. Kardas took cover outside behind a pile of firewood, and Uosis and I hid inside the house. We had resolved to liquidate the Russians and their box if they tried to force the family to vote.

Hardly had we settled ourselves, when into the yard came clattering the election car with its three passengers. We requested the farmer to go outside into the yard to discuss the voting. An NKVD lieutenant leaped from the car and at once addressed S. in Russian:

“Well, farmer, what about voting?”

The farmer explained in Lithuanian that he was just getting ready to go to the polling station to cast his vote. The Russian at first did not understand what he was talking about. The farmer had to repeat what he had said and explain it with gestures. But once the Russian understood, he proved to be polite and was satisfied with the reply. Without more delay, he jumped into his car and dashed off to call on others. At the same time Kardas rushed to the window and shouted:

“Men, the ballot box is empty! It wouldn't pay to touch it. If we destroyed it now, the Russians would claim it was full and that many votes were tallied.”

Having so decided, we considered our mission carried out, and sat down for a friendly chat with our host while waiting for the evening. As it grew darker, people started coming back to their homes, thinking that they stood less chance of being dragged to the polls at night. From farmer S. we learned that the Russians usually saved their most effective methods of coercion for people who lived farther away from the woods.

Here, on the outskirts of the forest, they were by no means so insistent. Fearing the partisans, they were content to make perfunctory inquiries and to leave it at that. As a result, the only Lithuanians who found themselves voting in such areas were the men hired to drive the Russians around the villages and then back to the polls. For them there was no escape. The only ones eager to vote were the Russian garrisons stationed in the vicinity of the polls.

Polling ceased at midnight, and the votes were counted. Soon we had the election figures which we obtained from the members of the electoral commissions themselves. The figures were favorable to us. Our resistance operators had borne good fruit. Within the confines of our detachment's activity, only two and a half percent of the eligible voters had turned out, while the number of people voting in all of the localities where detachments belonging to the Tauras unit had been active, represented only seventeen percent of those eligible to vote. But the Tauras district was beaten by the Dzūkai, in whose district only 12 percent of those eligible had cast their votes. In other parts of Lithuania the percentage was higher. This was particularly the case in those rural areas where Russian garrisons were stationed and in large cities like Vilnius or Kaunas, where the political machinery was highly organized. On election day, the city wards were canvassed by a brigade of "persuaders" who went around in groups of two or three to the homes of whatever people were on their lists. They began by calling on these people early in the morning. A little later in the day, they called again. Then, sometime during the afternoon, they came around with ballot boxes — to make doubly sure that no one would forget his obligation. Needless to say, many city dwellers were coerced into voting. In fact, the cities accounted for the majority of the votes cast.

Even so, according to the partisans' calculations, the percentage was actually less than half of that, because the cities — from which the votes had come — harbored only 40% of the total population. And even this 40 percent vote had been obtained under duress, leaving the votes of the Russian garrisons as the only ones that were cast voluntarily.

CHAPTER XIX

WE CANNOT WAIT WITH
FOLDED ARMS

When the elections were over we had to visit Ainis's company. But when we reached Ainis's region we found a real battle in progress. NKVD detachments, which were here guarding the polling stations and forcing people to vote, had now merged into larger units (up to 200 men) and were searching for partisans who had given them so much trouble during the elections. We had to wait until the enemy had withdrawn. Moreover, Ainis's company, numbering about 150 men, had now been split up for safety reasons into groups of a few.

One such small detachment of five armed resistance men was surrounded on the P. farm by thirty Russians. Our men had only two machine guns. While defending themselves, they put out of action about twenty Russians, but then they ran out of ammunition, and fresh forces arrived to help the Russians. Our men began to force their way out of the farm. However, only one of them succeeded. Badly wounded, he managed to reach the woods where he remained hidden in an old shelter until trained dogs led the Russians to the spot. There were cartridges in the shelter, but Apinys could not defend himself because he was too weak. The Russians dragged him from the shelter and stabbed him with bayonets.

After four days waiting, when the Russians had withdrawn, we met the men of the company. It appeared that their number was too great. This fact complicated the task of their holding out during the winter, but it wasn't easy to reduce their strength because more and more victims of the Communist terror were applying for admission to the partisan ranks. The influx of university students and pupils from secondary schools into Ainis's company had increased

tremendously. Among them was the entire junior class from N. secondary school. When we reproached the company commander on this score and asked him how he could admit so many inexperienced youths, he said that he did not know their exact number. The class had arranged things with a certain private in his company. Then, after killing the only *komsomol* or member of the Young Communist League in the class, they got hold of a few weapons and took off for the region of Ainis's company. When the private was taxed on this account, he excused himself with the plea that he had not supposed that the students were speaking seriously to him. He himself had been joking. He and the company commander tried to induce these young Lithuanians to go back to school and continue their education. But it was difficult to persuade them. They explained: "Every day the *enkavedisti* remove a friend or two from our midst. These are candidates for Siberia. We can no longer await our turn with folded arms."

I ascertained from the company commander that these young fellows were disciplined, orderly, conscientious, and daring like seasoned partisans. Although they were given such a good testimonial, we still tried to persuade them to leave, but only three allowed themselves to be talked into going back.

After disposing of a number of other organizational matters, we returned to our headquarters. On the way, we stopped at a number of liaison points. Everyone we met was already talking about the success of the operations against "the most democratic elections in the world." It appeared that the various company commanders hadn't wasted any time in submitting reports of their activities. Some of them turned out to be quite interesting. Take, for example, the way in which Dešinys had gone about "clearing" the road in the Prienai-Šilavotas sector. Several days before the elections, taking along four machine guns and a number of men, he chose a convenient spot in the Prienai pine forest and began to put out of commission all vehicles being used for "electioneering." In this connection, two partisans in Russian uniforms were stationed on the road and, through field glasses, scanned the terrain for any red cars with election placards. Whenever one approached, the partisans would dash out from the bushes, hold it up, disarm the passengers, then shunt the car from the road and hide it in the forest. Within the space of four hours, seven cars on election business were stopped and the men in

118 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

them were disarmed without a shot being fired. Only one Red major was loath to surrender cheaply. When dragged from the truck, he tried nimbly to dodge underneath it, but one of the partisans promptly dealt him a heavy blow on the head with the barrel of his machine gun, so that he collapsed alongside the wheel with time only to give vent to a muffled oath. Then the other partisan pounced on him and removed his belt and pistol. The pallid major began to implore his captors to restore at least his belt. At this juncture, a disarmed rank-and-file *enkavedisti* was heard to comment:

“Now Comrade Major will have ten years in. . .” (the missing word is “Siberia.”)

The inferior confiscated weapons were burned, and the partisans appropriated the good ones. Then the Communists were separated from the arrested Russians and lined up to be shot. The job of executioner was given to whatever rank-and-file Russian prisoner happened to be handy. This procedure—to inflict the death penalty upon the Communist aristocracy at the hands of the Communists themselves—pleased the non-party members, among the Russians. These were treated leniently. They were allowed to board three trucks and were then told to continue their journey, but of course without the election placards which were destroyed. The remaining four American machines, three Studebakers and one Ford, were drenched in gasoline and burned. It was impossible to hide them from the enemy.

For the rest, the reports contained particulars about methods of distributing the resistance press, about verbal information for the people, about means of liaison, *etc.*

CHAPTER XX

DEPORTATION

We remained at base headquarters for some time, working on various projects. One of these involved the publication of another newsletter. We had turned over *Laisvès Žvalgas* to the staff of a neighboring area unit shortly before we left, but had yet to see the appearance of a new issue. To fill the gap, we put out another newsletter, which we named *Kovos Kelias* (“Road of Battle”). To mislead the enemy, we indicated LAF as the publisher.

After delivering our newspaper to the distribution points, we were engaged, on February 17, 1946, in collating the data of the electoral precincts. Suddenly Rūta ran into the room and informed us that there were Russians in the yard. We hurriedly gathered up what papers and weapons were on the table and made for the root cellar. Even as we were climbing down, we heard the farmer talking loudly in the doorway in an attempt to delay the enemy. Hardly had we managed to adjust the trap door, when the footsteps of the Russians and the farmer were heard in the kitchen. We were considering whether we could succeed in sneaking through the emergency opening if the uninvited guests should take it into their heads to institute an exhaustive house search. However, we heard the Russians inquiring the name of the locality. From their talk we also understood that they were not going to make a search because they behaved quite politely. But for safety’s sake the farmer led them to the other end of the house. Rūta took advantage of the opportunity and reported to us: “Nothing very terrible. Only the bosses have come. Most likely they took father for one of themselves. Perhaps they’re hunting somebody in the neighborhood. They’ve even brought a radio transmitter. They’ve opened up a map. It looks as though all the staff officers have descended on us: one major, two captains, five

lieutenants and one shaggy non-commissioned radio operator. You needn't get in each other's way. Some of you settle downstairs and the rest stay upstairs. At night you can slip out and make for your headquarters."

"That's luck for you. The devil! Bosses on top of bosses!" remarked Uosis with an oath, and added laughingly, "It's a damned sight better that way; the bosses rarely fall out among themselves."

Although we didn't fear a search, we kept as quiet as possible under the floor until evening. You could never tell; they might take it into their heads to steal something and ransack the cellar hoping to find loot. And in that case the bosses might come to loggerheads among themselves. However, this did not happen. Having ascertained their whereabouts, the NKVD men ordered the farmer to give them a meal and vodka to drink, after which they left to call on farmer S.

While the Russians were turning over their papers, the farmer had noticed among them lists of names prepared by the NKGB section. They were dated January 30. Neither the farmer nor we understood the importance of these lists. Their malevolent purpose was revealed only on the next day, when the mass deportation of Lithuanians to Siberia and other places in Asia began. It appeared that these lists of people the Russians planned without any interrogation or trial to exile to Siberia — were drafted at the end of January. But for tactical considerations — in order not to scare the people from participating in the elections and thereby reduce the number of voters — they decided to postpone the deportations until after the elections. Such a postponement had yet another advantage: the people might regard the deportations as punishment for the boycotted elections and pledge themselves in future to put up with any kind of fraud. In the lists of deportees figured mostly the families of those who had joined the armed resistance movement, of persons in Soviet prisons, and those who had managed to escape to the West. The lists of deportees also included families which, during one and a half years of Russian occupation, had not yet become wholly impoverished. These mass deportations would have begun in 1945, had transport been available. But then it was being used by the armed forces and for carting away the various articles of loot from the Russian-occupied areas of Germany. In 1946, the

Deportation 121

means of transport were somewhat more available and it was therefore possible to carry out the mass deportations.

They were effected in much the same way as those in 1941. Trucks filled with armed NKVD and NKGB soldiers would drive up to a house or farm. They would surround the house, burst in, make a house search, and order residents to get ready to leave. For such preparation very little time would be given — a few minutes or half-an-hour at most. Trembling with fear and anxiety, the people would hardly know what to take with them. All members of the family would have to go — the old and the sick, pregnant women and infants. No regard whatever was paid to the fact that the season was winter and that the people were being exiled to an even colder climate. Many of the old women and the more sensitive young ones were so overcome that they lacked the strength to climb into the trucks and not infrequently would collapse on the snow. The old folks would implore the *enkavedisti* to kill them on the soil where for years they had worked and suffered, rather than convey them to a lingering death in the Russian hinterlands. They were shoved unceremoniously into trucks which were already overcrowded, and which resounded with the screams of terrified children and the wails of mothers unable to help them. These unfortunates were then transported to the nearest railroad station and — more often than not — stripped of their belongings before being herded into cattle cars.

Trying to escape deportation, people began to abandon their homes. Entire families fled into the forest. Only the very young, the very old, and the infirm remained behind.

In view of what had occurred during the 1941 deportations, there was no sense in jeopardizing the lives of the healthy and strong members of the family just for the sake of keeping the family together. Bitter experience had demonstrated that family units remained intact only as far as the train — after that, they were deliberately scattered — only infants in arms being allowed to remain with their mothers. The 1941 deportations had lasted three days. But, in 1946, they lasted much longer. The people suffered terribly. Even those who were not deported suffered. Many who had gone into hiding soon proved unable to endure the hardships of fugitive life. Exhausted by cold, hunger, and lack of sleep, they began to drift back to their homes. Of these people, only the ones whose names had not been on the proscribed list in the first

122 *Deportation*

place escaped deportation. The rest were rounded up and deported almost at once. The mass deportations were among the cruellest episodes in the annals of the Soviet Union's undeclared war against Lithuania. At the same time, they constituted some of the vilest crimes against humanity. In little less than ten days over twenty thousand Lithuanian men, women; and children had been packed into cattle cars and shipped to unknown destinations in Siberia.

And even as these atrocities were being perpetrated, representatives of the Soviet Union at the Nuremberg trials were demanding the death penalty for Nazis who had been accused of exactly the same crimes.

Yet the free world made no protest on that account, and — except for the partisan press — no newspaper so much as mentioned the plight of the Lithuanian people.

The partisans could do very little to stop the deportations. Although their hearts went out to the exiles, their minds counselled prudence. For one thing, the number of Soviet troops was simply too great. And, for another, any partisan attack would have cost the lives of many innocent people, because the Russians would have retaliated by shooting all those who were slated for deportation on the spot.

As a result of the deportations and continued arrests for other reasons, many farms in Lithuania were left deserted, derelict, and without supervision. The Communists set about destroying the farms. Some buildings were demolished and the materials used for fuel; others were transported to the towns for the construction of jails, storehouses, and other buildings. Similarly, the Russians appropriated whatever property remained on the farms. Sometimes the neighbors of deported individuals did the appropriating. On the other hand, there were also those who availed themselves of the opportunity to benefit easily from petty thievery. Against this lawlessness the armed resistance command took steps to protect the abandoned farms in their districts. No property of any kind was to be appropriated by anyone without the knowledge of its owner or his relatives and instructed the partisans to protect the abandoned farms in their sectors. Livestock and other property which required tending were turned over to the owner's relatives, and the farms themselves were frequently mined in order to ward off vandals. There were also notices posted in the vicinity, to the effect that trespassing,

vandalism, and looting were strictly prohibited. Anyone who ignored such notices to the effect that to trespass on the farms, to wreck buildings and to appropriate any would suffer.

Partisan Jungas, who belonged to the Dešinys company of the Iron Wolf unit, noticed that his father's farm was being vandalized. To prevent further plundering, he mined the stables, barn, house, and harness room. A few days later, several Russians pulled up in a cart with the apparent intention of knocking down the farm houses for fuel. However, just as they started to go through the gates, two anti-tank mines exploded. Explosion killed the horses, and one of the Russians, and wounded two more. The survivors did not venture to break into the farm from another point — preferring, instead, to obtain their firewood from the Prienai pine forest. Only a few weeks later, another group of Russians showed up. They must have forgotten the fate which had overtaken their comrades because they headed straight for the harness room, robbing the harness room and selling its contents. But they had barely enough time to move a shaft before a concealed mine exploded and cost them two lives.

In this manner, farms whose owners had been deported to Siberia were protected from plundering.

CHAPTER XXI

GRAVES ARE ALSO DEFENDED

The object of the armed resistance movement was not only to defend ourselves, but also to protect the dignity of our people and of our country. It was the aim of our publications, which we issued with such difficulty, to assist in this positive defense. And I, as the one in charge of our area unit's press division, had to make sure it did so. When *Laisvės Žvalgas* did not reach us, we brought out the newsheet *Kovos Kelias*. Except for a few comrades, nobody knew where it was issued or how, during the night, almost a thousand copies reached the liaison points. But for this purpose we had to have a great deal of printing material such as paper and matrices. We also needed reserve rotary machines and a radio receiver for news. And for some of these things, our comrades had to pay with their lives. Such was the case with Miškinis, who had been delegated to find two pieces of radio apparatus and several rotary printing machines which had been left with some people in the vicinity during the days of the German occupation. It was while trying to track down their whereabouts that Miškinis and his companions happened to stop at the house of citizen R., where a celebration was under way. Although they had intended to stay only long enough to make inquiries, R. wouldn't hear of any such thing. Instead, he quickly made room for them at the table and kept insisting that the partisans stay and enjoy themselves until they agreed. Unfortunately, they soon became so caught up in the festivities that they failed to notice the NKVD men who were creeping up on the house until the latter had surrounded it and opened fire. The partisans with Miškinis just barely escaped with their lives. Miškinis, himself, was far less fortunate. However, the fact of his death could not be immediately established because the entire house had burned to the ground

Graves Are Also Defended 125

during the ambush. It was not until a week later that some charred bones, a metal crucifix, and bits of a rifle were found among the ashes. His sister recognized the crucifix as having belonged to Miškinis as soon as she saw it, because it had been part of a rosary which she remembered giving him not very long ago.

Although the death of Miškinis came as a great blow to us, there was some consolation in the knowledge that his body had not been subjected to any further indignities. It might easily have been otherwise, because NKVD had recently begun to desecrate partisans' bodies in an attempt to discourage the continued growth of the armed resistance ranks. The policy had been adopted on February 15th, 1946. Henceforth, the bodies of all partisans were to be seized and conveyed to the nearest public square, where they would remain exposed in full view of everyone.

One of the first incidents of this kind involved seven members of Viesulas' company, who had been killed during the course of an NKVD ambush. Their bodies were promptly taken to the village of Garliava, where they were first of all dumped in the public square to be abused, cursed, pummelled and spat upon by the *enkavedisti*. Afterwards, the corpse of the group commander was propped up in an upright standing position and made to look as though he were addressing the others. After the finishing touch had been added by stuffing a faucet into the corpse's mouth, the tableau was considered ready for the eyes of the town's people.

As it happened, the building in which the NKGB had established its headquarters stood so close to the market square that NKGB men had no trouble making out the expressions on the faces of the spectators when they came filing past. Because they were eager to find out the identities of these dead partisans, they posted a watch and picked up for interrogation any individuals who looked like they were moved or upset by the sight. But none of the people they questioned had the slightest idea who the dead partisans were: because they didn't recognize them. Their sorrow had not been caused by any personal loss. They had been lamenting the sad fate of their fellow countrymen.

Later on that spring, partisan burial sites began to be desecrated. It rankled the Russians to see them well taken care of and beautifully decorated with flowers by the hands of

126 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

Lithuanian girls. And so they tore down the fences which the people had built around the graves, demolished the carved wooden crosses, and ground the garlands of blossoms into the dirt with their heels. But the people only restored them and took measures to make sure that they came to no further harm.

The leader of a local partisan detachment and his men, who were helping passive resisters, observed this incident and put the desecrated graves in order. The emblems and the crosses were restored, and the graves enclosed with a fence. To prevent the same thing from happening again, the area was mined, and a warning to keep away was posted on the newly constructed fence. The warning was worded in Lithuanian and in Russian, and ought to have kept all but the blindest fanatics away. Nevertheless, it didn't. Only a few weeks later, another gang of Russians pulled up and fell to work. While they were tearing down the fence, a mine went off and wounded three of their number, sending the others running for cover. But still they persisted. Having entrenched themselves in a nearby ditch, they tried to complete the job of desecration by throwing grenades.

During the time that the war was in progress, they had been content to labor ten hours a day, for a monthly wage of 170 rubles — or the going price of a kilogram and a half of butter. They had managed to survive only with the help of food parcels from their families and the belief that things would get better after the war. But, by 1946, the war had been over for more than a year, and their situation still showed no signs of improvement. Tired of starving, many of them threw up their hands and went back to their villages, where they would, at least, be able to cultivate their own plots. Unfortunately, they had forgotten that they were no longer living in a Free Lithuania. If the Soviet Union protected the rights of the working man, it did so only in theory. In practice, the story was a bit different. The NKVD decided that these returning factory workers were saboteurs and started rounding them up. Scores of them were arrested and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment in concentration camps. The rest took to the woods and joined up with the partisans. And the agricultural industry of Lithuania continued to suffer from a shortage of manpower even in this "springtime of peace."

Around this same period, the Iron Wolf high command issued orders prohibiting the Lithuanian farmers living in its

jurisdiction from manufacturing vodka in their homes. Although such a prohibition may appear strange on the surface, there were excellent reasons for it.

The farmers had started keeping vodka on hand at all times because it was the first thing the Russians would ask for when they dropped in to search or inspect the premises. Moreover, after nearly two years of Russian occupation, they had learned to distill it themselves. Unfortunately, they had also picked up the habit of drinking it — often to the point of intoxication. And herein lay the danger. More than one farmer whose lips were loosened by alcohol had bought himself a ticket to Siberia by venting his hatred of the Soviet Union in front of the wrong people, or by making fun of the NKVD in the presence of one of its spies. The partisans were also endangered by the ready availability of vodka, but in a different way. Here, the generosity of the Lithuanian farmers was at fault. The moment they saw partisans coming into their houses, they would bring out the vodka and urge them to drink up. The result of such hospitality was that the partisans frequently found themselves drinking too much — a real danger for men who needed to keep their wits about them because it not only slowed down their reflexes, but also made them want to take chances they would not normally take.

Even the non-drinkers were being harmed by the manufacture of vodka, since the grain from which it was made would otherwise have been processed into bread.

At first, the partisan leaders attempted to discourage the manufacture and excessive consumption of vodka by means of persuasion. Several articles in our *Kovos Kelias*, for instance, had been devoted to exposing the dangers of alcohol. But they had little or no effect. Therefore, the commander of the Iron Wolf unit was forced to issue two orders, effective as of April 15th, 1946. One of them made it a crime for farmers to either manufacture vodka or drink it to excess. The other prohibited partisans from accepting liquor from any farmer. The penalty for violating these prohibitions was to be a fine of one thousand rubles or its equivalent.

On the day the orders were put into effect, I happened to witness the destruction of a still which had not yet been closed down. This time the culprits were let off lightly, but the full penalty had to be paid by those caught later on. As a matter of fact, the Iron Wolf was to wage so successful a battle against

128 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

this particular abuse that all partisan units in the Tauras district — and some outside of it — soon followed its example.

CHAPTER XXII

HUNTED ANIMALS BITE

Our district commander, Mykolas-Jonas, made it a point to visit the various partisan units and companies in his district as frequently as he could. This enabled him to obtain first-hand information about their activities and helped him to formulate statutes which would further cement the unity of the district. As a result of his conscientiousness, our organization had become a model for partisans in other sections of Lithuania.

The partisans who operated in Žemaitija (Southern Lithuania) had already joined up with our district; and, during his most recent visit, Mykolas-Jonas had proposed that we institute negotiations with the partisan groups in Aukštaitija (Northern Lithuania), so that all Lithuanian partisans might eventually be united under a common command.

While we were thus engaged, the month of May stole in almost unnoticed and brought the countryside back to life. The meadows were redolent with the scent of new grass and flowers, and the forest trilled with the songs of the birds. But we had little reason to rejoice. The season which brought such beauty to nature also brought with it short nights and long days. And these boded the partisans no good. That summer we could not even bury the bodies of our fallen comrades, which the Russians had left to rot on dunghills and in ditches. We had only enough time to make a note of such places, record the pseudonyms of the dead, and report about them to their next-of-kin. And to add to our difficulties, new methods of harassing the people were always being devised by the Soviet Union.

The Soviet government had recently instituted a system of popular subscriptions to a state fund intended to finance one of its five-year plans. This placed a heavy burden on the Lithuanians. Although it was announced that all segments of

130 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

the population were enthusiastically volunteering subscriptions, it was a barefaced lie. Whoever received a more or less fixed wage knew well beforehand what amount he would have to "volunteer." Every month, the same fixed sum was to be deducted from his wages. This procedure was nothing more than another method of collecting taxes. It was particularly oppressive to the farmers, who did not receive any wages, but were nonetheless compelled to contribute whatever amount the official collectors decided they should.

At first, rank-and-file civilians were recruited to act as collection agents among the farmers. It was not difficult for the partisans to deal with them. They would simply take away in the evening, whatever money the collection agents had gathered during the day and return it to the farmers. At the same time, they would destroy all records of the farmers' obligations. However, once the Russians became aware of such tactics, they turned the job over to members of the NKVD and NKGB. These would descend on the farmsteads and villages in carloads often making it impossible for us to protect our fellow countrymen by any means other than armed warfare. The Dešinys company, for instance, resorted to just that, when the Russian collection agents of the Prienai district became too zealous and started to fleece the villagers and farmers. Partisan Jungas and six others were selected to make an example of them. Armed with three machine guns and various other automatic weapons, our men opened fire when the collectors were within approximately fifty yards from Maciūnai hill. After a few seconds, only one *enkavedisti* remained alive. On that occasion the partisans not only carried out their mission successfully, but also acquired eight automatic weapons, together with a long list of obligation records and a considerable sum of money.

Some of our men were not so successful, however. That summer many of them were hunted like wild beasts and, at best, managed only to snap at their foes. We were especially unfortunate on the day that two Lithuanians from abroad were expected to arrive in our locality. It was a beautiful day — Ascension Thursday, May 26th. After attending the traditional religious services, we ate lunch; then we gathered together in groups to rest and relax in the spring sunshine. Our guests would not be here until sometime during the night. About two in the afternoon one of our look-outs reported

seeing NKGB detachments near the outskirts of the forest. Hearing this, our district commander ordered us to evacuate the camp at once. We quickly concealed our typewriters, papers, matrices, and rotary machines. Then, covering our tracks, we withdrew several hundred yards away from the camp and took cover.

A few minutes later, we saw a rabbit come charging out of the bushes from the direction of the camp. Our expert in animal habits, Dédè, explained that a rabbit would not leave its burrow during the day unless it had been alarmed by somebody or something. This suggestion that there were people in the vicinity of our camp, Dede went off to reconnoiter. Only a few minutes later, we saw him come creeping back, worming his way through the undergrowth. Sure enough, our camp was already occupied by *enkugebisti*. Suddenly, I spotted a weather-beaten Russian standing no more than thirty yards away, his automatic rifle all ready to fire. I drew a bead on him, placed my finger on the trigger of my automatic, and waited for the go-ahead from Mykolas-Jonas. Then I released the safety catch and gave my automatic its head. The Russian dropped his gun and fell flat on his back. Tigras followed my example, and other partisans chimed in. The Russians answered with coordinated fire from three machine guns and three automatic rifles. Retorting with our well-sustained volleys, we began to fall back. But, having tasted our bullets, the Russians did not choose to pursue. Instead, they gathered up their dead and returned to the outskirts of the forest. On our side, we lost not a single man. As for material, it amounted to no more than a couple of rucksacks containing a few hundred sheets of writing paper, and 3,500 rubles which we had collected for printing purposes. The Russians failed to find the articles we had hidden, even though they turned the camp upside down in the attempt. The very moss on the ground had been uprooted, and the tree stumps pulled up.

We finally met our guests from abroad on the morning of May 27th, in the area patrolled by the Skirmuntas company. The arrival of these two Lithuanians, Daunoras and Lokys, had been eagerly awaited because through them, the partisans hoped to achieve contact with foreign countries, something which they had been attempting to do for two years. During the discussions that followed, Daunoras and Lokys gave us the

132 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

first direct' information we had ever received from the West. Unfortunately, their reports were pessimistic. Either the people of the Western World knew absolutely nothing about Communism, or else their leaders were simply not concerned with the welfare of Russian-enslaved states. We learned that we had been abandoned to die alone, while our foe, with all his strength and resources intact, was getting ready to conquer even more free nations. We were loath to believe this painful reality.

Towards evening, our district leader went off to attend an important meeting of armed resistance commanders, leaving our guests in protection of Uosis and myself. We armed them with pistols and promised to defend them with machine guns if the Russians attacked. The danger was great. Several days ago, a troop of Russians had been observed in the vicinity of the Skirmuntas group. Larger forces might appear at any moment.

The night passed more or less peacefully; but, towards daybreak, partisans returning from their assignments reported that the woods swarmed with Russians.

At daybreak, Skirmuntas took thirty of his men and several Iron Wolf staff officers, and headed for the outskirts of the forest to see if he could break through to a safer area. Our guests declined to go along. Therefore, Uosis and I accompanied them to a very dense thicket, where all of us scrambled for cover. The weapons at our disposal made it necessary for us to resort to evasive tactics. Since we could not be spotted by enemy troops unless they came very close to us, we decided to hold our fire until they were just a few yards away. Then we planned to mow down the ones who were the closest and try to make a run for it.

The thicket was filled with tree stumps. Using these supports we sat down facing in four different directions and tried to keep a look-out for the enemy. But my comrades couldn't stand this inactivity for very long; soon, they were fast asleep. The men from abroad still felt tired from their journey, while my friend Uosis hadn't closed his eyes for a day and a half. Sleep lured me, too; but responsibility for our lives compelled me to fight fatigue. Everything around me was unusually still. I could hear every awakening bird preening its wings for the day. I shared my loneliness with a field mouse which emerged from a hole next to Lokys' feet. With tiny

leaps, it moved swiftly from one tuft of grass to another, having been startled by the loud snores of my comrades.

Suddenly, my reverie was shattered by machine gun fire coming from the direction taken by Skirmuntas and his men. The mouse vanished and my sluggish comrades awoke with a start. We listened intently. It sounded like our fellows had begun the conversation, to which the Russians had replied at once. After the initial volleys, we heard individual shots, which were succeeded by intermittent burst from grenades. In a little while, the shooting ceased altogether. Although we heard some more shots later on, they seemed to be coming from a different direction. We hoped that Skirmuntas and his partisans had managed to break through.

Around eleven o'clock, we felt hungry and ate a little of the tinned food brought by our guests. They wanted to go back to the abandoned camp because, the day before, they had arranged to meet some of the local residents there. Although both Uosis and I were fully aware that, after today's engagement, no civilian would dare set foot into the forest, we decided to humor our guests. We set out, walking Indian file. The closer we got to the camp, the more cautious we became. We were even afraid to stir the leaves of the bushes.

About a mile from the camp, we encountered four partisans who had been away on assignments at the time that Skirmuntas left. One of them still carried the automatic rifle he had borrowed from Uosis the evening before. The eight of us formed a fairly respectable group. We rested a while in a nearby glade and, from there, picked up the path which led to the camp.

Around three o'clock in the afternoon, bursts from Russian automatics and grenades shattered the air. There were enemy troops some two hundred yards ahead of us. We fell back about a hundred and fifty yards, and debated what to do next. Uosis thought that the Russians were shooting to see if their fire would bring any hidden partisans into the open. Plechavičius speculated that they were firing at a small underground shelter occupied by two of our men. In any case, we all agreed that it wouldn't be very wise to remain in the area for long.

We walked along without incident until we came to a forest clearing. We scrutinized it through our field glasses, but noticed nothing unusual. We decided it was safe to go across. I

134 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

sprinted to the other side of the clearing in two bounds. Uosis followed directly behind me. However, just as Lokys was stepping into the clearing we heard shots coming somewhere to our left. A Russian look-out signalling his comrades about the direction in which we were traveling. It became necessary to hide our tracks, but every where — as if on purpose — the grass was brittle and knee-high. By the time we found a spot that seemed well-camouflaged and sat down to rest, the perspiration was rolling from us in huge drops.

Scarcely twenty minutes had elapsed when we noticed that some Russians were trailing us. Since we no longer had any place to retreat to, we had to take a chance and creep past their very noses. Luckily, the NKVD soldiers were exhausted and, therefore, not very observant. As soon as they were out of sight, we took off. We headed in another direction, but found too many footprints there for comfort. Concealing our own tracks, we tried our luck in yet another direction, crawling on our stomachs so that Russians wouldn't spot us. Here, again, we found too many footprints. The Russians were apparently scouring the whole forest. At last we reached what looked like a safe spot, and decided to stay there until after sunset. In the meantime, we carefully scanned the surrounding area and waited.

It was just beginning to get dark when we arrived at the edge of the forest. Here, we succeeded in making contact with a liaison officer who told us what Plechavicius had already guessed — the Russian volleys we had heard and wondered about had, indeed, been directed at an underground partisan shelter. We also learned that partisan Ažuolas, who was wounded during this attack, had blown himself to bits with a grenade. He had killed himself because he did not want the *enkavedisti* to take him alive, and he used a grenade to make sure that nobody could identify his body and thereby track down his family and friends. We asked the liaison officer if he had any news about Skirmuntas. He did. Skirmuntas had not succeeded in breaking out of the forest. Like ourselves, he had spent the whole day trying to get away from the Russians. Only now did it become clear what grave danger we had been in. It turned out that a whole Russian division had invaded the forest—about a hundred Russians for one partisan. Rumor even had it that a Russian general was seen at the head of the column which attacked Šilavotas.

Hunted Animals Bite 135

There was little time to waste. We had to get moving as quickly as possible. Without waiting for darkness to fall, we crawled out of the woods and into the fields, expecting, at any moment, to be surrounded by Russians. We could expect it all the more because thirteen NKGB men had been killed during the clash with Skirmuntas, and the Russians were out for blood. (Skirmuntas, by the way, had not lost a single man.)

After three days we found ourselves back in our permanent headquarters. We learned that District Commander Mykolas-Jonas had not yet returned from the forest, and we held out slim hopes of ever seeing him again.

CHAPTER XXIII

A STORM CANNOT TOPPLE ALL OF THE TREES

We and our guests had — thank God — succeeded in getting clear of the Russians. For a while, things didn't go badly for Skirmuntas and his men, either. They had joined forces with the group headed by Kardas and were making their way towards headquarters by slipping past the lines of the Soviet detachments. But having to be constantly on the alert had greatly exhausted them. Not only were they unable to rest in the daytime, but they also had to stay awake for the greater part of the night to contend with any possible emergencies.

On June 3rd, Skirmuntas, Kardas, Laimutė, and nine other partisans arrived at the Pagražis forest. As luck would have it, the night was rainy and the men were so tired that they did not effectively cover their tracks. These were spotted early the next morning by some Russians who were driving to Šilavotas and reported by them to the NKGB garrison there. The *enkagebisti* brought trained dogs to the spot where the footprints had been observed, and started in pursuit of the partisans. They found the latter asleep, including the sentries. The *enkagebisti* surrounded them, moved in at close range, and opened fire. Skirmuntas's best machine gunners fell before they could discharge more than a few shots. Skirmuntas himself and Sagūnas managed to get away somehow. As for the others — all but two of them — who had gone off to round up supplies for breakfast — were killed on the spot.

The NKGB conveyed the bodies to Šilavotas and dumped them in the market square. Even though there were several hundred Russian soldiers stationed in that town, their presence could not prevent the women there from honoring their dead countrymen. During the night, a group of them stole into the square and covered the bodies with wreaths and bouquets of flowers. On the following day, the NKGB took the

A Storm Cannot Topple All The Trees 137

corpses of Vètra, Laimutė, and Kardas to the city of Marijampole where they tried to get people to identify them. They even removed Kardas's wife from her prison cell and showed her the body of her husband. But she insisted that she did not recognize any of the bodies, including his. They beat her brutally, but when they saw that she could not be broken, they piled the bodies into a truck and carted them to Prienai, where some terrified secondary school teachers were forced into revealing the partisans' real names. By this time, all the bodies had been stripped and some were completely naked. Moreover, the body of the woman partisan, Laimutė, had been abused in an obscene manner by the NKGB men. It was painful to see the mortal remains of this sister-of-mercy who had sung beautifully and sadly for us on New Year's evening.

On June 6th, another painful misfortune befell the Tauras district. On that day, the Russians started searching the forests in the northern part of our district area, where the Žalgiris unit was operating. Two divisions of NKGB soldiers, supported by armoured cars enveloped the Kaziu Rūda forest exactly the time that our district commander Mykolas-Jonas happened to be there, and surrounded him, along with partisans from the Sakalas unit. Since the Russians could reinforce their troops at a moment's notice, the little band of partisans was threatened with complete annihilation. The district commander, therefore, ordered them to refrain from trying to take on all comers and to concentrate on breaking through the Russian lines with a single, coordinated maneuver.

The Sakalas partisans were fully experienced in this kind of warfare, and the break-through succeeded. Thirty-six *enkagebisti* were killed, along with five of our men.

On the following day, the Russians seemed to have quieted down, and district commander Mykolas-Jonas made preparations for returning to the headquarters. Towards evening, accompanied by six volunteers who had agreed to go with him as far as Žemaitija, he left the camp and headed for the edge of the forest. But when he and his companions stopped for a rest, they were ambushed by a detachment of Russians who had been hiding in the forest. A fierce though unequal battle ensued. Two partisans were killed immediately, and after half an hour, the rest were driven from the forest into the open fields. Another partisan was killed outright, and Mykolas-Jonas was so badly wounded that he took his own life

138 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

with a grenade. Only two partisans of the seven had managed to survive. However, the Russians paid for these five Lithuanian lives with thirteen of their own.

The dead partisans were taken to Kazlų Rūda. Here they were subjected to those hideous forms of desecration of which the Communists were masters. Some of them were “bridled” with rosary beads found on their persons; prayer books were stuffed into the mouths of others; and the Lithuanian insignia, the “Pillars of Gediminas,” was carved into the flesh of them all.

The Russians kept up these mass raids on the partisans until the middle of June. Although many gallant men died, our organization did not collapse. Instead, we began to take steps — something we had decided to do during our discussion with the visitors from the West. Even so, there wasn’t much we could do to prevent further sacrifices of partisans’ lives.

Because some detachments had been scattered or paralyzed by the onslaught of the NKGB, a number of partisans found themselves with a certain amount of free time. This was precisely the case with the partisans Vabalas and Gegužis; so they requested a two-week leave of absence in order to visit their relatives at home. The leave was granted, and the two men set out. A few days later, Vabalas was notified that his sister had just returned from Siberia, where she had been exiled some time ago. Overjoyed by the news, he decided to call on her right away — even though the NKGB was still very active in the area. He also invited Gegužis to come along.

It was a beautiful summer afternoon. Vabalas and Gegužis had emerged from their shelter, and were just getting under way. They carried only short-range weapons for protection. But at that very moment, a band of Russians came running out of the rye fields and descended on the two partisans. The latter turned back and raced toward their shelter, but it was too late. Gegužis was wounded before he could get there and ended up by killing himself with a grenade. Vabalas did reach the shelter, but even with the aid of long-range weapons, he was unable to hold out against so many Russians all alone. Therefore, he also placed a grenade to his head and blew it off.

Afterwards, the *enkagebisti* dragged Gegužis’s father and

A Storm Cannot Topple All The Trees 139

brother to the shelter, ordering them to remove the bodies, place them in a cart, and drive them to the market square. They also interrogated them both. But the father and brother insisted that the existence of the shelter had been unknown to them — and did it so convincingly that the NKGB believed them. There was absolutely no way that anyone could have identified Gegužis's body, because the face had been so dreadfully mutilated by the exploding grenade. His father had undoubtedly recognized him by his clothing, but he was compelled to conceal the fact — along with all signs of his grief — in order to protect the rest of the family. Perhaps the worst part of his ordeal was the enforced task of conveying his beloved son's body to the town square, there to be horribly profaned by leering Russians. Nevertheless, with the endurance characteristic of the true Lithuanian, he did not, by so much as a tear, betray his feelings to the Russians who rode in the cart with him, even though these same men had been responsible for the death of his son. Meanwhile, Vabalas's sister had been counting the hours in eager anticipation of his arrival. All during her Siberian exile, she had looked forward to the moment when she would see him again. He was the only family she had left. But fate had decreed otherwise; what she saw was his mangled remains shamefully exposed in the square. Even there, she could only view him from a distance — surreptitiously — as she hurried by.

While Uosis, Daunoras, and I were concerning ourselves with matters of organization, and continuing to issue the newsletter, the Russians staged a partisan man-hunt in our immediate vicinity. It began during the first week of August and continued for a couple of weeks. Every farm was searched several times over. Houses, stables, barns, cellars, and all other places where partisans might conceivably be expected to be hiding were turned upside down.

To protect themselves during these searches, the Russians always forced some member of the family involved to walk ahead of them and act as a shield. There were a few times when we thought that our own headquarters were in danger of being discovered, but they never were. Nor did the Soviet search parties find any of the other partisan detachments.

Around this time, we raided the state-owned Išlaužas dairy and carried away an ample supply of butter. We also managed to get hold of the ledgers in which the dairy officials

140 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

kept a record of how much of their required quotas of milk the farmers in the area had "contributed" to date. We took them too, along with a batch of blank receipts. Each farmer who had failed to meet his quota received from us a forged receipt acknowledging delivery of the required quantity, as stated in his ledger. Since we destroyed the ledgers afterwards, the dairy officials had no way of telling the quota-completion receipts issued by us from the ones which had been issued by their agents. And the farmers received a welcome reprieve.

But the raid had been no more than a diversion. There was far more serious work to be done if we intended to achieve our aim of building a strong and unified armed resistance organization. In this connection I had been delegated to go to Vilnius where I was to participate in the formation of a partisan general staff. It was strange to think I would soon be walking about in the light of day and mingling with people in "legal" life. No less strange was the sensation I felt when I boarded a train out of Kaunas.

Over half of the passengers were Russian military personnel. There were *enkagebisti*, *enkavedisti*, and just plain, ordinary Red Army soldiers. Only a few days ago, I had been addressing them with guns—and now, here we were chatting together like gentlemen.

For my own protection, I decided to strike up a conversation with an NKVD major. I figured that since I had to talk to these hangmen anyway, I might as well settle for the biggest of the lot. In this way, when it came time to check the documents, the functionaries delegated to the task would assume that I was a friend of his and leave me pretty much alone. My plan worked. A few stations further on, more NKVD men boarded the train and started checking the papers of the civilian passengers. They also examined suspicious-looking suitcases and parcels, but they didn't even give me a second glance—so loath were they to disturb the major's conversation. I had been talking to him about various aspects of university life, and I was surprised to discover that he knew more than a little about the topic. He was even aware that the officials in Moscow had accorded the University of Kaunas top rank among the universities in the Soviet Union, placing it on an equal footing with the universities of Leningrad and Moscow. He agreed that the calibre of Lithuanian universities was very high.

A Storm Cannot Topple All The Trees 141

My duties in Vilnius kept me from returning to the Tauras district until the end of September, at which time I visited the partisans of the district's Vytautas area unit. Here, I had the opportunity to attend a celebration in honor of various members of the passive and active resistance who were being awarded orders of distinction for acts of bravery.

CHAPTER XXIV

DESPOILING THE EGYPTIANS

Heretofore, the members of the armed resistance movement had managed to provide themselves with food from two principal sources. Some of it had been forcibly extracted from those Lithuanians who were either known to be Communist sympathizers or who maintained friendly relations with them. Most of it, however, had been willingly donated by local farmers, especially by those who had benefited from partisan assistance in the past. Unfortunately, Lithuanian farmers had recently been so hard-pressed by the Soviet authorities (who wanted them to join collective farms as quickly as possible) that very few of them had anything left to contribute. The partisans were fully aware of their plight, and did not wish to impose on their generosity any further. In short, the time had come to look for another source of supply.

In the fall of 1946, the new Tauras district commander, Žvėrys, instructed the various units, detachments, and companies operating in his district to begin confiscating the food stores of the *sovkhozes* (State-operated farms) which the Soviet had established on some of the larger estates. These farms were being administered by members of the Russian armed forces and served — among other things — as storage depots for the grain which had been extracted from Lithuanian farmers.

The partisans were to confiscate enough provisions to feed themselves for a year — including grain, livestock, and other necessities. A small portion of the produce thus confiscated was to be sold in order to obtain funds for various military and organizational expenses.

To illustrate the efficiency with which these food-confiscation operations were conducted, I would like to describe how the partisans of the Šarūnas company raided the

sovkhos on what used to be the Pagermanis estate.

The night before the raid was scheduled to take place, the men of the Šarūnas company set up camp about a mile away from their objective. On the following day, the *sovkhos* and the area around it were thoroughly reconnoitered, and some thirty sturdy carts were rounded up and concealed until such time as their services would be required. Towards evening, heavily armed bands of partisans were sent out to patrol the main road.

One group of partisans surrounded the *sovkhos*, while another started to move the carts closer to its gates. The partisans had already learned that only the overseer and the political affairs director of the *sovkhos* were armed. Therefore, the first order of business was to get them out of the way. Partisan Tigras and two others undertook to carry out the task. Climbing into one of the carts, they proceeded to drive it up to the door of the administration building, all the while singing loudly in Russian. Then, still in Russian, they demanded to be let inside. But the wary Russians were hesitant about opening the door. Luckily, just then more partisans appeared, dragging with them the orderly who guarded the *sovkhos* horses at night and who was known to be the overseer's confidant. Tigras grabbed him and ordered him to tell the overseer that there were NKGB men outside the door, demanding a horse and wagon. Hearing this, the Russians finally opened up.

The *sovkhos* overseer was immediately knocked to the ground and relieved of his pistol. Afterwards, he was taken to his private quarters and ordered to surrender whatever other weapons he had there. His wife produced an ordinary rifle and some cartridges. But partisan Tigras wasn't satisfied with that. He proceeded to search every room for concealed weapons, and finally came up with an automatic which the overseer's wife had apparently "forgotten about." It belonged to the political activities director, who happened to be away from the *sovkhos* for the night.

Having in this manner subdued the *sovkhos* administration, the partisans drove the carts into the yard of the compound and fell to work. Grain was the first item on the agenda. Laborers from the *sovkhos* were quickly mobilized to do the sacking and carting, while the partisans supervised. The work went smoothly. One group of *sovkhosniks* poured the

144 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

grain into sacks, and a second group loaded the sacks into the carts. All of them seemed to be enjoying themselves immensely. The grain-sackers had even challenged the sack-loaders to engage in a “Soviet competition,” and both groups scurried about like ants, urging one another to hurry. Each cart was filled in a matter of minutes, and in less than three hours all of them were loaded to capacity — including four carts which belonged to *sovkhos*. These had been confiscated for “good measure,” along with the horses required to pull them. In this manner, the partisans obtained more than 250 centners of grain — most of it choice quality wheat.

Having relieved the *sovkhos* of most of its grain and all of its carts and horses, the partisans turned their attention to the livestock. Ten sleek, black-and-white spotted cows were removed from their stalls —one cow for every five partisans in the company. Bacon lovers helped themselves to several fine porkers from the “private reserves” of the overseer, the political affairs director and the aforementioned night orderly. This individual—an informer whose denunciations had cost several Lithuanians their lives—was denounced and shot in full view of the *sovkhozniks* at the conclusion of the raid. None of the *sovkhozniks* were harmed, nor was anything taken from them. They had performed their task willingly and well. Besides, most of them were just as poverty stricken as the partisans.

As soon as the carts had been moved out of the *sovkhos*, the bulk of the partisans withdrew. Only a few remained behind to maintain “discipline.” This they did by locking the overseer and his family in their rooms and telling the *sovkhozniks* to help themselves to whatever grain had been left over. Then followed a flurry of activity no less animated than before. Bags, aprons — even ordinary caps — were filled and re-filled with grain as the *sovkhozniks* vied with each other in building up “reserves” to supplement their meager rations. By dawn, all traces of grain had disappeared. And so had the partisans. A detachment of NKGB troops did their best to track them down, but their efforts proved unsuccessful.

During the months that followed, similar raids were staged by partisans throughout Lithuania. When the Russians tried to foil them by placing heavy guards around the State-owned farms and food depots at night, the partisans turned right around and conducted the raids in daylight. They

Despoiling the Egyptians 145

struck swiftly and efficiently, and vanished long before the Soviets had time to marshal their troops. In this manner, nearly all partisan detachments were able to provide themselves with a year's supply of food.

CHAPTER XXV

WHEN THE DEAD ARE RESURRECTED

Another problem facing the partisans in the autumn of 1946 was the recent restoration to Soviet favor of the so-called people's army, or *stribs*. Just as the Nazis had employed the services of French militiamen to combat the French underground, the Russians had decided to fight the Lithuanian resistance movement with the arms of Lithuanian collaborators.

It was therefore necessary for the partisans to devise tactics whereby the *stribs* could be demoralized and their organization disbanded once and for all. To that end, Commander Žvērys ordered every partisan unit in his district to select a point where *strib* garrisons were known to be concentrated and to obliterate it by means of an all-out attack. To effect total destruction, anti-tank rocket bazookas as well as anti-tank and phosphorus grenades were to be used. Furthermore, in order to spread fear among the *stribs* operating outside the areas of attack, handbills threatening terrible reprisals against all those who did not immediately throw down their arms and stop fighting their fellow countrymen were to be circulated throughout the district.

Shortly afterwards, the attacks commenced. Some of them were executed with no difficulty whatsoever. For instance, the entire *strib* garrison at Gižai was wiped out in broad daylight by scarcely more than a handful of partisans. Keeping the *stribs* at bay with machine gun fire, the partisans surrounded their headquarters and set it ablaze with phosphorus grenades. The *stribs* immediately took refuge in the basement, but there was no escaping the flames. After a half hour, most of them had suffocated and the rest were shot down the moment they set foot outside the basement door.

Somewhat more difficult was the attack on the garrison at

When The Dead Are Resurrected 147

Kačergynė because the *strib* headquarters there was spread out over several buildings. In this instance, the partisans struck at night, and employed a force of nearly one hundred men. Although some of them fell during the action, the rest achieved their objective, and the Kačergynė *strib*s were also totally annihilated.

Considering the deadly efficiency of these attacks, it was easy to understand why the *strib* units were soon thrown into a state of sheer panic. For one thing, they had no idea what kinds of weapons the partisans had used to inflict such devastation. And so, when the partisans deliberately circulated a rumor that they planned to attack with even more powerful weapons in the future, the *strib*s decided that it was high time to part company with the “people’s army,” and quickly mustered themselves out. Many of them went into hiding, some managed to resign officially or begged to be permitted to join the partisan ranks, and subsequently looked for work which would be more acceptable in the eyes of the resistance movement. Only those individuals who had carried the destruction and betrayal of their countrymen too far to be able to turn back remained in the people’s army. But the number of these was comparatively small —amounting to no more than a handful in any given community, with a slightly higher count in areas of heavy Russian troop concentration.

The victorious campaigns against the *strib*s and the very successful food-confiscation operations gave a much-needed boost to partisan morale, which had been lowered considerably by a summer spent dodging Russian snares. Yet no matter how optimistic we may have felt that autumn, our elation was tempered by the realization that every single day the lives of some of our fellow partisans were still being snuffed out. A recent case in point concerned five members of the Dešinys company who had been operating from an underground shelter deep inside the Mozūriškiai Forest. For six months they had managed to evade the Soviets even though the area was being very carefully watched.

Unfortunately, their luck didn’t last forever. One night, an NKGB patrol spotted two of the men as they were returning to the shelter after having visited a village close by. The ground along the outskirts of the forest happened to be very damp at that time of the year (it was October) and so the *enkagebisti* who came around to check out the report early the next

148 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

morning had no difficulty picking up the partisans' tracks. With the help of bloodhounds, they also managed to find the underground shelter, and immediately began to attack.

The five partisans were trapped. There was no way they could return the Russian fire except through the shelter ceiling—and what sense was there in shooting at empty air? Nor could they abandon the shelter because the *enkagebisti* had surrounded it two-men deep. The only thing they could do under such hopeless circumstances was to blow themselves to pieces with grenades. Four of the partisans perished in this manner. But the fifth one, Žvainys, was wounded by his comrades' grenades and lost consciousness before he could detonate his own and was only knocked unconscious. However, since he was drenched with blood when the Russians found him, they took it for granted that he was dead and dumped him along with the bodies of his comrades outside the rectory in Veiveriai.

After a few hours, Žvainys regained consciousness and sat up. Unfortunately, he was so very groggy that he didn't have sense enough to hide or even lie down again and play dead. On the contrary, he continued to sit there, looking around, until he attracted the attention of several NKGB men. Needless to say, they were quite intrigued at this apparently "miraculous resurrection" and hurried over to investigate. Žvainys grasped the situation as soon as he saw the *enkagebisti* coming towards him; but, by then, it was too late. Although he made an attempt to run, he was much too weak to be able to get very far. Gasping with pain and exhaustion, he was picked up and dragged unceremoniously to NKGB headquarters for interrogation. Here, he was beaten so viciously that the blows reopened his wounds. Nevertheless, he refused to divulge anything about himself or his comrades, even though the *enkagebisti* kept up the beatings for some time. Finally, even they seemed to have had enough — or else they simply became bored with the whole thing. At any rate, they stopped beating Žvainys and all except two of them left the interrogation room. Seeing his chance, Žvainys summoned every remaining ounce of strength and somehow managed to wrest a pistol from one of the men who had been left to guard him. More bad luck. He pulled the trigger, only to find that the gun wouldn't fire. But Žvainys didn't panic even then. He brought the weapon down, hard, on the head of the NKGB man who stood between him

and the window and hoisted himself upon the sill. Still more bad luck. He was just getting ready to jump when the second NKGB men grabbed hold of his legs, Žvainys tried desperately to kick himself free, but he didn't stand a chance. Alerted by the commotion, a horde of NKGV men came charging into the room and beat him insensible with the butt-ends of their rifles. Much later, when Žvainys came to again, the interrogation was resumed with a vengeance. But the partisan remained steadfast to the end, and no matter how much they tortured him, he refused to answer their questions, until there was no longer any sign of life left.

150 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

CHAPTER XXVI

JOURNEY BY TRAIN

The task of consolidating the various Lithuanian resistance groups, which we had begun in Vilnius some time ago was proceeding smoothly enough. There remained only a few minor procedure questions to be settled and some practical methods of communication between central partisan district leaders to be set up. Three men had been selected to go to Žemaitija. I was one of them.

By pulling some strings, we managed to procure three tickets entitling us to a compartment on a second-class sleeper which ran between Moscow and Kaliningrad (formerly Koenigsberg). Sharing the compartment with us were a Russian air force colonel, a correspondent for a Lithuanian-language Communist newspaper, and the managing director of a factory. I felt vaguely uneasy about being in the company of so many Soviet V.I.P.'s. Therefore, I went straight to bed leaving these erstwhile worthies to figure out what sort of V.I.P. I might turn out to be. At any rate, I would have had to be a pretty big one. Our compartment, unlike the typical compartments on Soviet trains, was neither shabby nor dirty. Quite the contrary.

We said goodbye to all this luxury at Radviliškis, where we had to change trains. After waiting nearly four hours for the new train to show, we considered ourselves lucky just to be able to board it, and we wound up completing our journey third class. The car was packed with Lithuanian conscripts on their way to East Prussia for military training. They were accompanied by Russian officers and NCO's who made perfect nuisances of themselves in the way they constantly kept checking their charges to make sure that nobody had gotten "lost." Most Lithuanians drafted into the Red Army were allowed to take their basic training in their own native

Journey By Train 151

districts, because experience had shown that they would desert if they were sent anywhere else. But, for some reason, the young men who hailed from regions close to the Prussian border were always trained in East Prussia. These poor fellows were in for a miserable time, and they knew it. No wonder they looked grim. Trained four days and spent the remaining three traveling to and from their homes to bring back food. Whereas the conscripts who remained in Lithuania trained only four days a week and were generally able to spend the remaining three at home where they could get food, the poor devils who trained in East Prussia received no time off, whatsoever. As a result, most of them were constantly hovering on the verge of starvation, and many of them eventually deserted: weapons and all.

After completing our assignment in Žemaitija, we returned by the same route. This time, however, the journey lasted much longer than before. At Radviliškis, we had to wait eighteen hours for a train. The depot was jam-packed with people. Most of the Lithuanians loaded down with bundles of food intended for friends or relatives in prisons and Red Army barracks. We also noticed quite a few students and the usual sprinkling of Russian soldiers on their way to be demobilized. There were countless numbers of seedy-looking Russians from every conceivable walk of life: there were tramps and beggars, and even small-time speculators from the Russian interior, who had come to Lithuania to purchase food for the black market at home. Many of these passengers lay stretched out on the floor of the depot with their assorted sacks and bundles tucked carefully underneath. We suspected that they hadn't been able to obtain tickets and had probably been waiting at the station for several days. When the train finally pulled in, the waiting crowd turned into a mob. There was so much pushing and shoving that the police had to be called to restore some semblance of order. From arriving passengers we learned that two men had been murdered on this very train. The victims, both civilians, had apparently bribed the conductor to let them ride in a car which was reserved for Red Army troopers because such cars were usually more comfortable and far less crowded than others. Much good did it do them! A band of demobilized soldiers ganged up on them, robbed them, and

then shoved their bodies unceremoniously through one of the windows.

My comrades and I jumped on just as the train gave a lurch and started to creak slowly along the tracks. Right behind us followed a weary-looking student with suitcase in hand. We had already been instructed to remain on the outer platform of the car, since this was the only place where we could hope to find any room to move around at all. Shortly before the train pulled out of the station proper, the student's suitcase was unexpectedly snatched. Two men, who had been running beside the train all this time, simply reached out and grabbed it. The student was heartbroken, and with good reason. The suitcase had been filled with food which he was conveying to Vilnius so that he wouldn't have to starve while he attended the University. We felt sorry for him, but there was nothing we could do: the thieves had already disappeared from sight inside the dimly-lit station.

Later that night, I very narrowly escaped being robbed, or perhaps even murdered. While the train was speeding along in the darkness, I happened to lean against a door which led to the interior of the car. I had just enough time to notice that some of the glass panes on the upper portion of the door were shattered, when suddenly a hand flashed through one of the defective panes and nearly managed to seize me by the collar. Instinctively, I ducked. And then I started slashing away with a pen-knife which I always carried with me for protection. For some reason — premonition maybe — I had been holding it in my hand that night. The mysterious hand was immediately pulled back, breaking most of the pane in the process, and my comrades and I hurried to the platform of the car ahead. There we immediately began to devise plans of the various strategies for defending ourselves in the event that another attack took place. Unfortunately, we never did get a chance to try them out because the sky started to turn light shortly afterwards.

Although I knew more than a little about the cavalier attitude of the Soviet regime, I never imagined it capable of bringing such chaos to our country that even passengers on a public train no longer felt safe. If anyone had told me something like this during the days of independent Lithuania,

I would have called him a liar to his face.

I arrived in Vilnius without further incident, only to learn that I would have to leave again at once. It was no longer possible to operate because the Russians were on us, because they had managed to learn about the existence of our Central Partisan Command. The information had been forcibly extracted from a woman liaison officer named Kregždė who had been arrested towards the end of December. She held out for a while, but when the NKGB interrogators began to crush her bones one by one, she simply could not endure the agony any longer and told them everything they wanted to know. Our position had become more precarious after an important member of the *Supreme Resistance Committee* was arrested. As a result, we were forced to transfer the Central Command Headquarters from Vilnius to somewhere deep in the provinces as quickly as possible. And to throw the Russians even further off the track, the location of the projected Congress of Partisan Commanders was shifted from Vilnius to the Tauras district, and the date moved backwards from January 8th to January 4th.

At this same congress, the delegate from the Kęstutis district voiced the opinions of the majority of partisans when he spoke out against a proposed resolution which would have prohibited the armed resistance groups from engaging in activities of a political nature and limiting their function to strictly military ones. After him, spoke the delegate from Žemaitija.

"Today we can rejoice at the results achieved by our efforts," he said. "The political and the patriotic awareness of our fellow Lithuanians has definitely been increased. Their belief in a free and independent future for our nation has given rise to an extraordinary spirit of unity and self-consciousness among them. And the conviction of their own strength is such that the likes of it have never been witnessed before.

Towards the end of his speech, the delegate emphasized once again the need for all Lithuanians to band together and fight as one man, and to continue the fight until their fatherland was free once more. He also pointed out that the partisans' struggle against the Soviet Union was many things if not just and commendable. We had armed ourselves in order to protect our fellow countrymen, the sanctity of our homes, and the dear soil which had been drenched with the blood of

154 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

our fathers and their fathers before them.

“We resolutely oppose the cynical trampling underfoot of inalienable rights and the forcible imposition on free men of the lowest and most degrading kind of serfdom. We cannot and we will not countenance deceit, fraud, nor any other forms of immorality which, by their very nature, are degrading to our people.

CHAPTER XXVII

TELL ME, ARE YOU ACQUAINTED WITH THE SUN?

On January 20, 1947, I had been commissioned to set up a new armed resistance unit in Kaunas: a unit which would eventually be consistent with the name of Birutė. But I had barely managed to lay the groundwork when I was pulled off the project, and given a new assignment. This one seemed pretty important. Accompanied by Partisan Rimvydas, I was ordered to break through the iron curtain so as to ascertain what progress our recently launched crusade was having among the Lithuanians who had now fled to the West. The two representatives they had sent some time earlier had not been heard from again since their return. Neither had we received a single message from Partisan Daukantas, who had gone along with them. But more of that later. As things turned out, we were forced to postpone the trip because Russian masters let it leak out that they were preparing to hold “national” elections to select delegates for the newly-created Lithuanian “Supreme Soviet.” Or, to be precise, the puppet Lithuanian Parliament. The elections were scheduled to take place on February 9th — a date which would have seemed innocuous if it hadn’t been for the fact that by some coincidence all the other so-called “independent” Soviet republics had held identical elections hit upon the same day for their Soviets.

Just as they had done a year earlier, the Russians embarked on massive propaganda campaigns months before the elections were scheduled to be held. In the cities, all civil servants and white collar workers were “recruited” for the task of electioneering, while the managers of business establishments and officers were instructed in advance to make sure that all of their employees voted when election time finally came around.

156 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

Since the greatest opposition to this forthcoming election was expected to come, as usual, from the rural population, the electioneering in these areas was being conducted by various members of the Soviet Military and Political forces stationed nearby. These included the MVD (formerly the NKVD), the secret police, and the Red Army. The Soviets must have been expecting strong opposition, indeed, because an additional 60,000 Red Army soldiers were brought in from Russia. (This force alone, was twice as large as the entire Lithuanian army had been during peace time!)

Detachments of Red Army troopers and the MVD were dispersed throughout the electoral districts in the ratio of 25 to 30 men for each precinct. These garrisons guarded the polling stations at night, made periodic tours of the villages, herded citizens to political rallies on the days appointed, and conducted house searches whenever they pleased.

One such house search, which took place on February third, made things decidedly uncomfortable for several partisans, including myself. Four of us happened to be visiting Partisan Skirgaila, who had set up temporary headquarters in a sympathetic farmer's house. Skirgaila and I were busy forging passports and other documents for the resistance people, while the others were trying to comprise lists of Lithuanians who had either been tortured and deported by the Soviets or whose farms the Soviets had totally destroyed.

We were so intent on our work that we were not even aware that Russians were approaching the farmstead until they were already inside the yard. Naturally, at this juncture it was much too late for us to reach our shelter outside. We had just enough time to conceal ourselves in the root cellar underneath the kitchen floor. Skirgaila and I swooped up documents — about a thousand in all — while the others hastily collected the lists and any other tokens which might possibly give us away. And these we carried into the farmer's kitchen and through the trap-door into the cellar. As soon as we were inside, the farmer's wife camouflaged the door by scattering wood shavings all around it. Then, to be on the safe side, she placed a bench directly over it, placed a basin of water on that, and made as if she were taking a sponge bath. She had already stripped off most of her clothing and splashed herself with water when the Russians walked in on her. And the moment they did, she let out such a terrible scream that they were

completely taken aback and completely forgot about searching the kitchen. Mumbling apologies, they took a few perfunctory swipes with their bayonets at the contents of a sauerkraut barrel and then went off to search the room in which we had been working. We learned later on that, in our haste, we had not managed to conceal everything. For instance, we had overlooked two rubber stamps and several pages from our list which had slipped to the floor underneath a bench. We had also left the cover of an American typewriter lying on top of the brick stove. Fortunately for us, the farmer's father had decided to remain in the room. Noticing these bits and pieces of incriminating evidence, he gathered them up and slipped them into his pockets. And by the time the Russians entered the room, he was already seated beside the stove, placidly smoking his pipe. He stayed there all during the search, puffing away on his pipe and carefully studying their movements as they went about their work.

When they grew tired of searching, the Russians summoned the farmer and ordered him to bring them something to eat. The latter hemmed and hawed, and tried to get out of it by complaining about the size of his family. But in the end he was forced to feed these unwelcome guests. He even had to promise them that he would attend the political rally scheduled for that day, just so he could get them to leave.

As soon as the Russians were well out of sight, we emerged from the cellar and made preparations to go on with our work. It was then that we noticed another one of our rubber stamps lying in full view on the floor. We must have dropped it there while we were running for cover, and the old man apparently hadn't spotted it when he was picking up after us. The amazing thing was that none of the Russians had noticed it, either. But then they might not have been looking for partisans as much as they were looking for something to filch. At any rate, when the farmer checked his belongings, he discovered that 300 rubles and his daughter's gold bracelet were missing.

This time, partisan opposition to the forthcoming elections manifested itself primarily through various underground publications which urged the people not to vote. We did not deem it necessary to employ more stringent measures because we suspected that people were as reluctant to vote as they had been the year before and would not be going to the polls unless they were dragged there. Moreover,

158 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

these elections were limited to Lithuania — so that even if considerable numbers of voters were pressured into casting their ballots, they would not, by so doing, be acknowledging political ties with the Soviet Union.

Subsequent events proved that we had estimated the Lithuanian people's attitude correctly. More Lithuanians stayed away from the polls than ever before, especially in the rural districts. According to reliable sources, the ratio of those who had voted of their own free will was something like two or three *individuals* for every fifty *families*.

Needless to say, the Russians resorted to the usual forms of coercion and intimidation on election day. At twelve o'clock noon (Moscow time), bands of armed troops were dispatched from each voting district with orders to canvass nearby villages and "step up" the voter turn-out. However, many of the villagers had been anticipating something of the sort and had either locked themselves in their houses or gone elsewhere for the day. The ones who hadn't taken such precautions were hauled away to police stations, where they were subjected to various forms of duress. But even among these unfortunates a significant number remained adamant and refused to cast their votes, no matter what.

The villages and farms which lay farther away from the polling districts were canvassed by troopers with portable ballot boxes. But they, too, seldom found anybody "at home." As a matter of fact, the individuals who had been drafted to drive them around reported that after a while most soldiers didn't even bother to get out of the carts. They simply checked off as many ballots as there were names of voters entered on their lists and stuffed them into the boxes. The same dodge was also used by soldiers who had been assigned to canvass villages which lay on the outskirts of forests. These didn't even leave town — because they were so terrified of being ambushed by partisans. The upshot of such underhanded practices was that the few persons who did go to the polls voluntarily were amazed to discover that, according to the records, they had already voted. It must be noted, however, that the Soviet officials showed great resourcefulness in such instances and made each of these voluntary voters cast his ballot in the name of somebody else.

Quite predictably the election results turned out to be overwhelmingly in favor of the Soviets. According to their

statistics 97.91 percent of the enfranchised were supposed to have voted this time — nearly all of them having cast their ballots for the Communist Party slate. An article in the February 11th, 1947, issue of the official Communist publication, *Tiesa* (Truth), hailed the election as “a splendid triumph for the Party.” But the Lithuanian people knew very well what sort of triumph it had been. They recalled only too vividly how relentlessly the followers of “father and teacher” Stalin had pressured and persecuted them. Not even the dead had been allowed to rest in peace. To cite just one example: the bodies of five partisans (including that of a woman, Aušrelė) had been left unburied for nearly two weeks. And why? So that they could be dragged through the streets of Veiveriai village on election day in an attempt to make the citizens think twice before boycotting the polls.

Needless to say, the Soviet authorities were furious at the stiff resistance to electioneering encountered among the inhabitants of the rural districts — which was undoubtedly why these areas were hit by massive waves of arrests shortly afterwards. The action had been undertaken partly as a reprisal, but primarily as a means of unmasking the partisans who, the Soviets insisted, were none other than the villagers and farmers themselves. Such spirited opposition as they had shown during the elections clearly indicated the influence of partisans. Then again, why were so very few partisans apprehended in rural areas? For the simple reason that these “bandits” posed as peaceful citizens during the day — and did it so convincingly that the authorities never even suspected what nefarious activities they engaged in during the night! The Soviets were completely wrong, of course; but it wasn't until after countless innocent Lithuanians had been subjected to persecution that they finally became aware of the fact.

Heavily armed MGB and MVD divisions descended on Lithuanian farms and villages, and promptly arrested everyone in sight. These people were first of all herded into huge open-air compounds and afterwards taken into interrogation rooms, one by one, where they were bombarded with questions about every conceivable aspect of partisan life. Where did the partisans obtain their weapons? No idea? Impossible! What did they know about underground publications, then? Or about the partisans' families? Or about their real and assumed names? And so on and so forth — right

160 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

down to the average partisan's preference in, of all things, women!

The baffled villagers didn't know what to make of such questions. And, as if these weren't bad enough, for the most part there were also frequent misunderstandings due to the fact that neither the Russian interrogators nor the Lithuanians being questioned had the faintest idea of what the other was talking about. Sometimes the proceedings became downright ludicrous, as in the case of the interrogator who was questioning a villager about a certain partisan Saulė. (It was common practice for partisans to name themselves after plants, animals, and various other natural phenomena.)

"Tell me," he demanded, "are you acquainted with Saulė?"

"Of course, Comrade Captain," replied the villager in a mixture of Lithuanian and Russian, "why shouldn't I know Saule?" The interrogator's face lit up. Could the villager tell him where Saule might be found? "Why certainly, Comrade Captain, I can even point him out to you right now."

Grasping the interrogator's sleeve, the villager made a gesture that they should step outside into the yard. Concluding that Saulė must be among the individuals who were still being detained in the compound, the interrogator accompanied the old man into the yard and waited eagerly for the identification to be made.

Imagine his surprise when the villager obligingly raised his hand and pointed a finger at the sun in the sky! ("Saulė" is the Lithuanian word for "sun.") But the captain was convinced that the old man was just trying to be funny and promptly pistol-whipped him for his pains and dragged him back to the interrogation room.

Things didn't get any better the second time around. When he demanded information about partisans Barsukas (*badger*), Kiaunė (*marten*), Naktis (*night*), Viesulas (*whirlwind*), and Papatris (*fern*), respectively, the villager could only answer along the same lines. Anyone who lived in the country couldn't help know about ferns and other things. And he couldn't figure out for the life of him why this Russian kept asking him about such common things. As for the interrogator, he had just about reached the limit of his patience. He pulled out an automatic, and would have undoubtedly shot the old man right then and there if some of

Tell Me, Are You Acquainted With The Sun? 16]

the Lithuanians who were being interrogated in the same room hadn't intervened. Some of them spoke Russian well enough to explain that the old man was crazy —had been so for a long time —and by so doing managed to save his life.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of misunderstandings were anything but humorous. As a matter of fact, many an innocent citizen found himself in jail for no other reason except that the language barrier between himself and the interrogator had prevented him from making himself understood.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A PARTISAN "ENGAGEMENT"

Ever since 1944, the partisans of the Vytautas Area Unit had been following the activities of the ruling cadre in the city of Marijampolė with mounting concern. Lulled into a sense of security by the vast concentration of troops in the area, the Russians and their collaborators were growing more insolent every day. Evidently they had forgotten that the war which Moscow had declared against the Lithuanian people was no longer one-sided. By 1947, the Vytautas Unit could stand no more, and decided to teach these parasites a lesson. The plan they devised was simple: first invite the most obnoxious of the Marijampolė administrators to a party and then kill the whole lot of them. After some discussion, the unit's executive staff decided that the best time for such a party would be the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday — a traditional time for feasting in Lithuania. They announced the engagement of partisan Mažvydas to liaison officer Pušėlė. The staff allocated 3,000 rubles for expenses, and instructed Pušėlė and Mažvydas to work out the details themselves.

The selection of Pušėlė was an excellent one. Her brother, Giedrutis, had been killed among the partisan ranks. Moreover, her job at the Marijampolė Trade Union Commission had put her in contact with many important officials and administrative department heads. Since she was on friendly terms with most of them, it seemed only natural that the mock engagement be celebrated in her room. She undertook to buy the provisions and to make various other preparations, while Mažvydas concentrated on devising a method for doing away with the guests. By far the easiest way was to poison them. He would need only to get them thoroughly drunk, and then introduce a small quantity of arsenic or cyanide or some equally virulent poison into their

glasses. Liquor presented no obstacle—any one could buy as much as he wanted in the state-operated stores. The difficulty lay in obtaining the poison. It was impossible to buy any in Marijampolė. Therefore, Mažvydas decided to try Kaunas. He provided himself with a Soviet passport, a work permit, a union card, a certificate which stated that he had completed his military obligation, and an affidavit attesting to his proletarian origin. Then he boarded one of the perpetually late-running trains, and rode to Kaunas in a cattle-car, set aside for the rank-and-file citizens. He parted company with the train when it slowed down at the Green Bridge just outside the city limits and completed the journey on foot. Having spent most of his life in Kaunas, he was afraid that somebody might recognize him if he wanted to disembark at the terminal.

Conditions in Kaunas were not at all well. The people's spirit was low. They were constantly being harassed by the Russians, and seemed to be extremely cautious and afraid. After two days, Mažvydas still found himself unable to obtain poison. So, he took care of some other matters and left.

There seemed to be no other way of "liquidating" the guests except by shooting them. For that purpose, Mažvydas selected twelve able-bodied men from the Vytautas unit. They were to assemble at a pre-arranged destination on the evening of the party and there to wait for his signal. And, in case unforeseen circumstances interfered with this arrangement, Pušėlė and Mažvydas were to carry out the executions themselves. On the whole, Mažvydas' plan presented no problems. But there were a couple of problems presented by Mažvydas himself — or — to be more precise, by the difficulty of finding him a proper outfit for the occasion. The first problem was with the dress-suit trousers. Mažvydas was so tall that the cuffs had to be let down all the way. Then it turned out that shoes in his size were impossible to locate. We finally settled for his old combat boots, highly polished, and assured ourselves that the newly lengthened trousers would hide the offending parts.

At long last, the "affianced-to-be" was ready. His suit fit perfectly, without a single crease, and his boots shone like mirrors. His tie, as well as the handkerchief which protruded from his breast pocket were both the same color: red. What this represented was open to conjecture — the interpretation ranging anywhere from burning love for his "intended" to a

164 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

newly discovered political awareness of the Communist Party.

Now that he looked presentable, Mažvydas began to check over his guns very carefully. Selecting two, he slipped one underneath his belt and the other into his trousers' pocket. Fortunately, the jacket he wore was fairly loose, so that no bulges were visible. As a final precaution — to decrease the rate at which alcohol is absorbed into the system — he swallowed a large amount of melted fat. Thus armed and forearmed, he reached Pušėlė's apartment.

He found her in the company of her friend, Albina, and two other young women whom she had asked to come early and help set things up. One of them was Saulutė. She was a member of the passive resistance movement and had been informed about what would take place that night. The other was a certain Karveliūtė, who belonged to the League for Young Communists.

Pušėlė greeted Mažvydas with a convincingly romantic kiss, and introduced him to her friends. Then she explained that he worked as an instructor for the Athletic Association in Vilnius. The grim charade was under way.

To keep Karveliūtė from becoming suspicious, Mažvydas was forced to act the part of a man who was very happy and very much in love. But this was far from easy. Three years of unrelenting conflict with the Soviets, three years of combat, constant risks, and sleepless nights — all these had left their mark upon his personality. Even pretending to be one of the gay and smiling people proved very difficult for him.

It became increasingly more difficult as the evening wore on. Time seemed to be crawling at a snail's pace. Half an hour elapsed, but none of the guests made an appearance. Conversations were begun, only to trail off into uneasy silences. Mažvydas was growing more and more concerned, while the young women fidgeted and looked ill at ease. Finally, after another half hour, the first guest appeared.

This was the Russian chairman of the Executive Committee, which constituted the governing body for the Marijampolė area. He staggered in half-drunk already, but when he saw how much liquor and food there was, he staggered out again to look for his friends. They must be crazy, he said, to pass up such a feast. He promised to go and get them to come personally. Pušėlė put on her coat to accompany him. As soon as she was gone, Karveliūtė took charge of Mažvydas and

started bombarding him with questions. Where was he born? How and when did he meet Pušėlė? How soon would the wedding take place? Would they be living in Vilnius afterwards? *etc., etc.* Mažvydas felt himself at a loss. He was certain that Pusele had concocted some kind of story to tell her, because she was making a big show of acting like the Communist Youth League's friend. Unfortunately, he hadn't the remotest idea of what this story might be. He only knew that the game would be up if his answers didn't agree with it. Therefore, he sidestepped all questions except the most general ones by laughing and then quickly changing the subject with Saulutė's help. He was even more concerned now. Why was she so inquisitive, this Karveliutė? Could the Communists possibly have gotten wind of their plan? But, no. When Pušėlė and the Russian returned they brought two of the invited guests with them. They had even managed to find an accordion player somewhere. Of the new guests, one happened to be the secretary of the Marijampolė District Executive Committee (also a Russian), and the other a Lithuanian collaborator by the name of Steponas Bakevičius. The latter was no less than the Secretary of the Marijampolė Communist Party, and had also recently been elected as Marijampolė's delegate to the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet. With the arrival of these two worthies, the festivities were set to begin.

First of all, there was the matter of toasting. In honor of the occasion the first toast was dedicated to Mažvydas' and Pušėlė's future happiness. The second toast quite naturally, was dedicated to Comrade Stalin and the third to the glorious Lithuanian Socialist Republic. And how could they neglect to toast the Red Army? Or the glorious Communist Party? Or its Soviet youth, which would make it more glorious still? Toast followed toast in rapid succession. Cheeks grew flushed and spirits soared. Saulutė struck up a flirtation with Bakevičius which was so convincing that the newly elected deputy began to fancy that he might be falling in love. At least it seemed so, for he looked very smug as he sat there, tossing down glassfuls of vodka as rapidly as they were poured for him.

When the time came, Pušėlė slipped out to contact the waiting partisans. Here was more trouble. For some reason her abrupt departure seemed to bother Karveliutė. The moment Pušėlė had gone, she focused her eyes on the door and kept staring at it practically the whole time of her absence. She did

166 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

let up once or twice, but only to cast suspicious glances at Mažvydas.

Fortunately, Pusele returned rather quickly and immediately cuddled up to her “intended” in such a way as to suggest that she had found even this brief separation from him almost too much to bear. Of course, the real reason for doing so was not romantic in the least. It was the only way that she could tell Mažvydas what had happened without endangering either of them. Her voice was no more than a whisper when she spoke. It appeared that she found most of the hand-picked partisans already assembled at the appointed place. They had listened intently while she elaborated the details as well as the complications. Although they didn’t think that the Communists had gotten wind of the assassination plot, they wondered whether killing so few officials was worth the task. Nevertheless, they promised to remain where they were and to abide by the final decision of Mažvydas.

At that point, the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a certain Gurevičius, who headed the passport office. He came panting through the door and announced that he had been running practically all the way from Sasnava just to make sure that he wouldn’t miss the festivities. Albina looked amused:

“Perhaps there were bandits after you,” she quipped. “What else could have made you run such a distance?”

From the frying pan to the fire, thought Mažvydas.

Gurevičius asked everyone to be silent for a moment and then launched into an explanation. He had been running because he had been delayed at the office, he said. The reason for the delay was interesting. It appeared that a thousand blank passports of the kind that authorized the bearer to travel through restricted zones were missing. Although he and his staff had spent hours trying to track them down, they had had no success whatsoever. They hadn’t even been able to figure out how the passports disappeared in the first place.

“Most likely the work of bandits,” concluded Gurevičius. “They must have gotten those stupid *stribs* at the office drunk, and then recouped what they had spent on liquor, tenfold.”

After the company had settled down again, Albina proposed another toast to the happy couple. Then she said a few words of congratulations and wished them all the best.

.A Partisan "Engagement" 167

Bakevičius also wished them luck and drained his glass in one gulp. He didn't give a speech, though. By this time, he could barely turn over his tongue. Meanwhile, Gurevičius was doing his utmost to catch up with the others. In addition to the health and happiness of the engaged couple, he drank a toast to the speedy recovery of the passports and went on to quaff quite a few glassfuls to nothing at all. The only one who stopped drinking was Karveliute. She curtly refused all offers to have her glass refilled and, in general, appeared to be somewhat tense and agitated. Perhaps, mused Mažvydas, she already sensed the imminence of doom. The knowledge of what was to happen made him extremely uneasy, especially when he chanced to overhear the remarks of the unsuspecting guests. He analyzed everyone of them carefully. Some struck him as grimly humorous: here were people planning what they would do tomorrow, when none of them had more than two hours to live. However, there were other remarks which made him wonder if his plan was as secret as he had supposed it to be. In fact, he soon worked himself up to the point where the most innocent of phrases seemed loaded with innuendoes. Even Pušėlė was heaping coal on the fire, he thought. For instance, when Deputy Bakevičius happened to ask whether she had enough liquor to last the night, she had assured him with the following words:

"Don't worry. You'll never finish it all — not even if you turn yourselves inside out, trying."

It was the sort of answer any hospitable Lithuanian hostess might have given, but, to Mažvydas, it suggested that she was unwittingly tipping him off.

In due course, the accordion struck up a waltz, signifying that the dancing had begun. Everyone joined in at once, with the exception of the "happy" couple. They remained seated, mechanically tapping their feet to the tune of the melody in order to conceal how very nervous they were. Mažvydas became even more nervous when he noticed that Young Communist Leaguer Karveliutė was whispering something or other to the Russian chairman of the Executive committee. Her expression seemed deadly earnest, and the suspicious glances which the latter was beginning to cast in his direction suggested that he was the topic of discussion. Mažvydas was right. In no time at all, the Russian approached the table and began to ask him all sorts of questions. Fortunately,

168 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

Mažvydas had already answered similar questions twice since the party began and encountered no difficulty in satisfying the Russian's curiosity.

The eating and drinking resumed as soon as the music stopped. Mažvydas regretted having consumed so much melted fat because the liquor was having absolutely no effect on him, and it took quite a bit of pretending for him to act as tipsy as the rest. He was aided to some extent by what he had seen of drunken Russian table manners. Therefore, he seized and held all his cutting in the fist of one hand, and frequently grabbed the food from under the guests' very noses.

When the time came for another dance, he and Pušėlė backed out again saying that they felt too tired. She put her arms around Mažvydas and began to caress him — hoping, in this way, to hide the signs of his mounting anxiety from the rest. As for Mažvydas, he was debating with himself about what to do. The small number of guests indicated that postponement was in order. Yet, what good would it do? If the Soviets suspected anything at all, they would either arrest him the moment the festivities were over, or else have Pušėlė so carefully watched that her usefulness to the partisan movement would be negated and her own life made miserable in every conceivable way. Even if they suspected nothing, there were problems. Under what pretext, for instance, could the partisans stage a similar get-together in the future? And who could guarantee that more Soviet officials would turn out then? Better stick to the original plan and get the thing over tonight.

Just as Mažvydas was arriving at this decision, loud voices were heard in the hallway. Although the accordion and the shuffling of the dancers obscured the particulars, he managed to catch the general drift of the conversation. It appeared that Albina, who had been warned by Karveliūtė to be wary because there was something not quite right about Pušėlė's fiancé. During a momentary lull in the music, Mažvydas even heard the safety catch of an automatic being released. His suspicions turned out to be well-founded, after all. He only hoped that he could prevent the Communists from striking the first blow.

By this time, the room was illuminated by candles alone because the electricity had been turned off at ten o'clock. Taking advantage of the semi-darkness, Mažvydas pulled out

the gun which he had placed in his pocket earlier and cradled it between the palms of his hands under the table. His position afforded an excellent vantage point from which to fire in the event that Gurevičius decided to rush him with his own gun blazing. This, however, was not the case. Gurevičius came forward slowly, with Albina at his side. Then he detached himself from the girl and sat down with Mažvydas for a little chat. At this juncture, Pušėlė suddenly remembered something that still needed doing in the kitchen and excused herself. The situation was becoming too tense for her nerves, and she needed a chance to compose herself. The proposed chat turned out to be the same sort of interrogation to which Mažvydas had been exposed to so many times during the course of the evening, that he knew the answers by heart. What he didn't know was how to dispose of the gun which he still held in readiness under the table. Fortunately the opportunity was provided by Gurevičius himself. Without interrupting the barrage of questions, he turned aside for a moment in order to pour both of them a drink, and, as he did so, Mažvydas slipped the gun back into his pocket unnoticed.

"It's high time we started looking after your interests," Gurevičius remarked. "These newly engaged fellows are so full of love that they forget all about liquor."

Mažvydas forced a smile. "Now, I'm sure that I'll never get up from the table. I'm already seeing two of everything, as it is."

Saying this, he took the professed drink and imitated Gurevičius by draining his glass to the dregs.

Shortly afterwards they were joined by the chairman of the Executive Committee, who wanted to know where in the world Pušėlė had gone.

Here was the perfect opportunity for losing both of them. With an elaborate show of drunken concern, Mažvydas assured them that he would personally locate his wayward fiancée and staggered off in the general direction of the kitchen. It would have to be done right away or not at all, he concluded. And it would have to be done without any help from the other partisans. Attempting to contact them now would be fatal. Too many suspicions had been aroused. Everyone at the party — with the possible exception of the musician — seemed to sense that there was something very fishy going on. And it wouldn't be too long before they put two and two together. . . .

170 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

“The hour has struck,” announced Mažvydas the moment he found himself safely inside the kitchen. “Better get ready for action, ‘my dearest’ because we haven’t a minute to lose!”

Pušelė wasn’t so sure. Wouldn’t it be to their advantage to hold off for a while? Or even to scrap the whole operation altogether? After all, only a handful of Soviet officials had actually turned up.

But Mažvydas wouldn’t hear of it.

“Delay is absolutely out of the question. We must carry out the operation now — we have no other choice. The Soviets will never let me leave this house a free man. They’re bound to arrest me if only to satisfy their own curiosity about my background. And once they start checking — well, I don’t have to tell *you* what will happen once they start checking. No. The best and the only strategy is to get it over with right away. You’d better think of some pretext for getting the guests back into their seats. Don’t worry. I’ll do the rest. None of them are heavily armed to begin with, and I’m sure I can put the whole lot out of commission. Besides if by some fluke I should forget to give somebody his full quota of bullets, I’m sure that neither you nor Saulute will find it very difficult to make up the difference.”

Without further argument, Pušelė slipped a cocked pistol into her purse and went out to rejoin the guests. Mažvydas gave his own pistols another quick going-over while waiting for Pušelė to signal him that everything was set. When the signal came, he emerged from the kitchen. At first, he sauntered nonchalantly towards the table keeping both pistols well out of sight behind his back. Then he suddenly lunged forward and started blazing away. He had acted with such lightning speed that the officials never even knew what hit them.

Gurevičius was the first to fall. He was succeeded by the Secretary of the Executive Committee, and after him, in rapid succession, followed the Secretary district Deputy Bakevičius and the Russian chairman of the Executive Committee. Also killed was Young Communist League Member Karveliutė. As for the musician, he was so terrified by the proceedings that he took off like a shot himself — and he left in such a hurry that he forgot all about his precious accordion.

Now that the worst was over, Mažvydas bustled about the room picking up the weapons of the dead Soviets. It was much darker than before because one of Pušelė’s candles had been

accidentally shattered during the first volley of shots. Suddenly Mažvydas stopped short and gasped. One of the bodies appeared to be moving. He stopped again and took a good look. Sure enough, there was the chairman of the Executive Committee trying to extricate himself from underneath the table. After defeating this worthy's efforts with a well-placed bullet, Mažvydas began to check the other victims to kill anybody else. It was then that he noticed Albina. Trembling all over, she lay huddled in a corner and followed his movements with terror-stricken eyes. Mažvydas was heartbroken to see her like this but there was little he could do about it. She was only suffering from shock, whereas Pušėlė and Saulutė had both been hit by ricocheting bullets. Pušėlė in the hand and Saulutė in the shoulder. Mažvydas quickly extracted the bullets and then hastily ushered the girls from the apartment.

Speed was of the essence, for the *strib* who lived next door — or even for that matter, the musician — might have already informed the police. It was imperative that the trio get out of the city before the Soviets had a chance to blockade the roads. The young women were supposed to be doing the guiding. But both of them had been so badly shaken up that, by this time, neither was able to tell which way was which. At one point, they even managed to lose their way in the maze of narrow streets, and regained their bearings only with the aid of a compass. Finally, Mažvydas took over and the group made some headway at last. They left the city limits behind, and soon reached the designated shelter. The partisans were overjoyed to see them. The group leader, himself, stepped forward and extended his congratulations.

"That makes sixty for you, counting tonight," he said to Mažvydas while shaking his hand. "And everyone of them dispatched singlehandedly."

The young women were immediately taken to the nurse's quarters, where their wounds were examined and dressed. Pušėlė seemed to be the most badly hurt of the two, for the bullet which had struck her hand had passed very close to the bones below the wrist. Even so, with prompt medical attention, there was every reason to suppose that no permanent damage would result.

Now that everything had been taken care of, Mažvydas heaved a sigh of relief, and smiled. It was the first time he felt

172 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

like smiling all evening. The other partisans gathered around him, clamoring for details. Among them were the men who were to have assisted in the operation. Having heard the shots and figuring that their services were no longer needed, they had left Marijampolė and reached the shelter some time before Mažvydas who now lighted a cigarette and began to describe what had happened that evening. The men listened intently as he spoke. Seven years ago, they would have shuddered at the grim details. But the unrelenting cruelty of the Russians and their collaborators made squeamishness a luxury which the partisans could no longer afford.

CHAPTER XXIX

AFTERMATH

The Soviets learned about the assassination of their officials later that evening—shortly after a sentry happened to spot the musician heading towards one of the bridges on the outskirts of town. He seemed to be in a tremendous hurry—so much so, in fact, that the sentry became suspicious and promptly ordered him to stop. What was the reason for such frantic haste, he demanded to know. The reason was simple enough. Terrified by the recent turn of events, the musician had somehow gotten it into his head that the partisans would kill him if he remained in Marijampolė, and was running out of the city as fast as his legs could carry him. Unfortunately, he couldn't explain this to the sentry because one of Mažvydas' bullets had grazed his neck and paralyzed his vocal cords. He tried using sign language, but the frenzied gestures merely heightened the sentry's suspicions and resulted in his own arrest. It was not until the sentry had turned him over to the police that his story became known. Having been given pencil and paper by one of the officers there, the musician quickly wrote out a fairly accurate account of the incident, although the why's and wherefore's of it were not altogether clear to him. But it proved more than adequate for the police, who promptly alerted their counterparts at the NKVD and MVD and thereby brought the matter to the attention of chief NKVD interrogator Greisas. It so happened that the interrogator had been among those invited to Pusele's engagement party, although some last minute business kept him from attending. Realizing how close he had come to sharing the fate of the other officials, he was determined to apprehend the partisans at any cost and threw every recourse at his command into a full-scale manhunt. By morning, all roads leading out of Marijampolė had been blocked and every

174 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

form of transportation placed under the closest possible surveillance. Hordes of armed NKVD and MVD troopers patrolled the streets and ransacked nearly every house in the city. They had been told to be on the lookout for a young man of unusual height and two girls, both blondes, who were believed to have been acting as his accomplices. However, since the trio in question had already effected their escape, it went without saying that nobody could find the slightest trace of them. The only person the Soviets managed to pick up was Albina, and she could shed no more light on the subject than the musician had already done.

Meanwhile, elaborate preparations were being made for the interment of the slain Communists. On the day of their funeral, theatres and other places of amusement in Marijampolė were shut down, and the entire city was placed under official mourning. The funeral itself was attended by scores of Soviet dignitaries. Even Justas Paleckis, the president of the satellite Lithuanian Republic, arrived from Kaunas for the occasion. But he was so angry at what he considered to be the gullibility of the victims that he refused to utter a single word of the customary eulogy over their graves. And when someone happened to question him about it afterwards, he retorted that he had no sympathy to waste on fools. Since they were stupid enough to fraternize with “bandits,” a violent end was exactly what they deserved — the less said about it, the better.

The Marijampolė Soviets apparently felt otherwise. Shortly after the funeral, they retaliated by launching a massive wave of arrests. Anyone whose activities were the least bit suspect was ordered to be hunted down and taken into custody. Ironically enough, this same operation also took the life of NKVD interrogator Greisas, although he had so narrowly escaped being killed only a few days before.

He died while trying to apprehend a member of the passive resistance movement named Šarūnas, who was a junior at one of the local secondary schools. It happened like this. Accompanied by an armed Russian trooper, Greisas marched right up to the school, pulled Šarūnas out of class during the middle of a lecture, and informed him that he was under arrest. Šarūnas had to think fast if he wanted to save himself. Might it be possible, he asked the interrogator, to stop at home for a moment and pick up an overcoat? The weather

had turned very chilly, and he was wearing only a little summer jacket. Since Greisas intended to search the student's quarters anyhow, he complied readily enough and ordered Šarūnas to lead the way to his house. Once there, Greisas left the Russian posted outside the entrance door, accompanied Šarūnas upstairs, and proceeded to search the apartment. Here was the opportunity Šarūnas had been waiting for. Unnoticed by Greisas, he tiptoed to his bureau, removed a loaded automatic pistol from one of the drawers and slipped it into his overcoat pocket. He was just about to open fire when Greisas — who must have heard the click of the trigger being pulled back — jumped him and tried to wrest the gun from his grasp. Šarūnas refused to let go and during the struggle that followed managed to get off a shot point blank against the interrogator's forehead. Greisas crumpled to the floor, lifeless. Šarūnas stayed around only long enough to confiscate the dead man's pistol. Then, armed with two guns, he rushed from the apartment—fully determined to use both of them if the Russian sentry made any attempt to stop him. But the latter had taken to his heels the moment he spotted Šarūnas on the staircase, and was already well beyond firing range when Šarūnas reached the front door. There remained only the matter of getting safely out of Marijampolė, which Šarūnas accomplished easily enough. Encountering a farmer driving his cart along one of the side streets, he jumped in and ordered the man at gun point to take him to the outskirts by means of the quickest and safest route.

The Soviets never did catch up with Šarūnas, nor with the partisans who had staged the “engagement party” massacre. They pursued the investigation for a while, then dropped the whole thing and marked both cases closed, unsolved.

As for the Vytautas area unit partisans they were so elated by the success of their campaign against Marijampolė NKVD that they decided to follow it up with a massive assault on the MGB troops stationed in the neighboring town of Liudvinavas. Since an undertaking of this kind could not be carried out inside the city limits without endangering many innocent people, the first order of business was to find some pretext for luring the *emgebisti* a safe distance away into the countryside. After a great deal of deliberation the partisans concluded that the best way to accomplish this would be by raiding a *sovkhos* — distillery located several miles from Liudvinavas, on what was formerly known as the Butka

176 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

estate. The *emgebisti* were bound to come rushing out the moment they were informed about the raid and could be ambushed with comparative ease before they ever reached the *sovkhos*. The plan was put into operation at once.

Very early one morning, a handful of partisans sneaked into the compound before the sentries had a chance to realize what was happening and seized the entire contents of the *sovkhos* distillery, along with most of its grain supply. They then took off and headed for the Butka forest, there to conceal the confiscated goods.

In the meantime, many more partisans had already entrenched themselves along both sides of the road about a mile from the *sovkhos*, and were waiting impatiently for the *emgebisti* to show up. They waited and waited. Two hours went by, but there was absolutely no sign of anyone. The partisans couldn't possibly understand it. What was going on? At long last, a reconnaissance scout came running up with the news that the *sovkhos* *power* lines had been accidentally cut during the raid, making telephone contact between the compound and Liudvinavas impossible. If the report was to reach the MGB at all, it would have to be delivered by a messenger. Only none of the *sovkhos* officials had courage enough to venture past the gates — so afraid were they that the partisans might still be nearby.

Here was an unexpected development, to say the least. Unfortunate, too, because the whole operation would have to be scrapped unless the partisans could come up with some way of expediting the delivery. Two partisans quickly donned civilian clothing and set out, post haste, in the direction of the *sovkhos*. When they were close enough to be observed by those inside, they slowed down considerably and started behaving as though they were drunk. They staggered about, holding on to each other, and shouting at the tops of their lungs that they had been walking all the way from Liudvinavas just to see if they could sober up. This bit of play acting did the trick. Knowing how severely the partisans punished whatever drunkards happened to cross their path, the *sovkhos* officials concluded that the raiding party must have left the area, and promptly sent one of the sentries to Liudvinavas with the report.

The MGB didn't waste any time either, because it wasn't long before reconnaissance scouts reported that three sleds

packed with *emgebisti* were already on the road, and moving rapidly towards the section where the partisans lay waiting. Moments later, the sleds came into range and the partisans opened fire. The bullets flew so thick and fast that most of the *emgebisti* were mowed down on the spot, while the few who had managed to leap from the sleds unwounded were quickly picked off in the ditches where they had run for cover. Ten minutes later, the entire contingent of twenty-one *emgebisti* had been wiped out and their weapons confiscated. However, it soon became clear that re-enforcements were on the way. Reconnaissance scouts had spotted two additional sleds pulled out of Liudvinavas while the ambush was still in progress. These contained *emgebisti* who were rushing to the aid of their comrades — having been alerted by the heavy partisan fire that something had very definitely gone wrong.

The partisans were not especially looking forward to a second noisy shoot-out. The sounds of the first one had undoubtedly been heard in Marijampolė, and Soviet troops from that quarter were probably half-way to Liudvinavas by now. They kept the *emgebisti* at bay with machine gun fire only long enough to let the reconnaissance scouts escape, then drew back into the Butka forest and joined with the raiding party.

All in all, this particular operation turned out to be quite profitable. In addition to putting the feat of God into the *emgebisti*, the partisans had managed to acquire a large quantity of wheat, a goodly stockpile of Russian weapons, and some 400 litres of 200-proof alcohol. The latter was eventually offered for sale on the black market, and the proceeds from it did much to improve the financial situation of the Vytautas unit.

CHAPTER XXX

ON THE ROAD TO THE WEST

In March we had to complete preparations for a journey to the West to restore contact. We provided ourselves with various supplies, including special drugs for treatment against the frontier dogs. We then repaired to various organizations to obtain final instructions. Unfortunately, we had to pass through an area where only a few days before an important liaison man had fallen into the hands of the MGB. From him the Russians had succeeded in learning the whereabouts of the Iron Wolf staff headquarters. They also succeeded in capturing part of the archives. Now, they were hoping to discover the leading resistance center and in this effort had amassed a sizable segment of their political police force in the adjoining surrounding countryside.

Some detachments had closed off the roads; others, with machine guns occupied positions in the hills. A third force carried out exhaustive searches among the inhabitants. At first, dozens of *emgebisti* would surround a farmer's homestead and make a superficial survey. Then, an exhaustive search would begin in which the Russians would pry into every nook and corner of all the houses. Sometimes, they would even dismantle the stoves, and turn over fodder and litter from the barns. In some places they would dig up the earth to a depth of a yard. In their quest for armed resistance shelters, they used special metal spits that were from two to three yards long. With these, they sometimes probed the entire farmyard, edges of fences, stables and barns. They broke down walls to find out whether they were double; and measured the houses themselves from within and without.

On the strength of reports from local Communist intelligence, the Russians suspected a certain farmer of having on his premises an armed resistance shelter. Finding nothing,

after an exhaustive search, they dragged in the farmer's wife and ordered her to disclose the whereabouts of the shelter. When she refused to answer their questions, they set trained dogs on her. Drenched in blood and torn by the dogs, the woman continued to refuse to answer the questions of her tormentors.

At farmer K's in N. village the *emgebisti*, while looking for archives, wrecked the storeroom floor and with buckets and sacks removed more than half a yard of earth, but found nothing. A staff liaison woman, named Palma, was arrested but was so wily that no correspondence of any kind was found on her and after a brief examination they released her.

When we reached the zone of activity of the Vytautas area unit, we learned about a painful misfortune which had befallen it. The unit staff had installed a dwelling in the Gulbiniškiai village where the chief of staff, Kunigaikštis, and two other functionaries were living. Among those was Pušelė. After the Marijampolė and Butka blows, the Communists had strengthened their reconnaissance. Meanwhile, the duty officer, Kunigaikštis, had to go out every night on various assignments. It happened that during the Communists' watch the nights were light, so after a time they succeeded in determining that there must be a shelter on one farm.

After several hours' search on the suspected farm the Communists began to strip the floor of the house. As they were probing the ground they came upon the site of the shelter. Alerted to this, the partisans inside started to destroy documents and writing implements. In the meantime, looking for the entrance, the Communists began to dig up the earth with spades. Since the shelter was designed to live in and not to defend, those inside had no alternative but to blow themselves up. The explosion was so powerful that the shelter roof flew into the air and all four walls collapsed. Among the comrades who perished, only Pušelės face was not badly mutilated and could be recognized. The Communists removed all three bodies to Marijampolė. Later when other battle comrades visited the scene of destruction at the shelter cross and Lithuanian State coat-of-arms, bloodstains and remnants of the combatants' dismembered limbs were still visible.

Under these appalling circumstances, our comrades perished. Among these was Kunigaikštis, who left behind him a remarkable impression on the neighboring inhabitants.

180 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

Women could not speak of him without tears, for whenever Kunigaikštis appeared, all households rejoiced. He was able to dry the tears of the mother weeping for her last fallen son, of the sister who had lost a brother, of children who had lost their parents. He could always instill hope, even in those who, amidst the Communist nightmare, had been driven to desperation. Although everyone mourned his death, his bereaved wife and young children were left to endure the most poignant grief of all.

Bereaved, also, was Saulutė who, with the passing of Pušėlė, had lost her best friend. For it was Pušėlė who, after the Marijampolė “betrothal,” had accompanied her on the same path of hardship, battle and death. Now, she was left alone without any close relatives. Some had been killed; others were struggling for survival in Siberia. Until then, she alone had managed to hold out on the soil of her fathers. Just a year had passed since she had left the Kaunas Conservatory and began actively participating in the resistance movement. She was innately musical and remembered hundreds of treasured partisan songs by heart. In Pušėlė she had found a great friend; but now, that friend was no more.

After ten days we moved in the direction of the frontier. Among the guides was the Vytautas unit commander, Vampyras himself. During the night we traveled some nine miles, but towards daybreak, we felt exhausted. Weapons, knapsacks, munitions supplies and other equipment needed for such a journey weighed heavily upon Rimvydas and myself. Our clothing, too, seemed heavy because the weather had grown much warmer during the last few days.

At Menkupis the scenery was magnificent. As dawn broke in the glades through which we were passing, hundreds of birds began carolling in many voices and their songs seemed to lessen our fatigue. It was necessary to hasten our steps because daylight was almost upon us and we still had more than a mile to cover.

Several more combatants had arrived at the prearranged meeting place. Now we were fifteen men, three of whom had volunteered to guide us through the frontier. We arranged to breach the Iron Curtain not near Punks, where the Communists had installed a system of reinforced-concrete pillboxes, but farther to the right.

CHAPTER XXXI

WE BREAK THROUGH THE IRON CURTAIN FOR THE FIRST TIME

Once the exact details of our expedition had been determined, we said a short prayer and set out in the general direction of the Polish frontier. Although there were fifteen of us, all told, only Rimvydas and I, accompanied by three experienced guides, were slated to make the crossing. The remaining members of the party would be returning to their units as soon as the five of us were safely on Polish soil. They had come along for the sole purpose of protecting us along the way, and they were fully prepared to deploy themselves as targets to help us get through in the event of a possible enemy attack.

The night was pitch black and the journey extremely difficult, especially for me. I had caught a chill the day before when I had been careless enough to lie down on a stretch of wet grass for a rest, and now I felt queasy and decidedly uncomfortable. I must have been running a fairly high temperature, too, because every pore of my body was oozing with perspiration. However, I made no mention of the fact to my comrades and kept up with them as best I could. Our progress was considerably slowed down by unexpected delays in making contacts with liaison officers and obtaining food supplies, so that we did not come within sight of the frontier until daybreak. Here, we decided to stop and rest until evening. We took great care to conceal ourselves among the underbrush, but it was not until after the sun had dried the dewy grass and obliterated our footprints that we could begin to feel even a modicum of security.

Immediately after lunch, Vampyras and two of his men set out to reconnoiter the area. For one thing, they had to determine at what point the crossing could most easily be

182 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

made. For another, they had to find out the exact time schedules of the border patrols and the locations of concealed sentry posts. In about an hour and a half they were back — with some rather bad news. It appeared that they had nearly given the whole plan away. What had happened was this. The three scouts had been reconnoitering a strip of terrain some eight hundred yards from the border for quite a while — with nary a Russian in sight — and had allowed themselves to be lulled into a false sense of security. As a result, they failed to notice the approach of a mounted border sentry until the man was practically on top of them. Of course, they dove into the bushes the moment they did, but by this time the Russian was so close that he could hear them scuttling about. With lightning speed, he leaped from his horse and pulled out his automatic.

“Who’s there?” he barked, pointing the weapon in their direction.

Vampyras and his men remained perfectly still — scarcely daring even to breathe. The sentry waited and listened for what seemed like an eternity. But hearing nothing else, he finally climbed back on his horse and ambled away. His nonchalant departure suggested that he had failed to notice the presence of the scouting party. He had probably concluded that the noises had been made by animals scurrying beneath the underbrush and had left it at that. Still, we had no sure way of knowing. . . . Therefore, the five of us decided to take leave of the others and to set out for the border at once — before complications of an even more serious nature could bar our way. Besides, why should we risk so many partisans’ lives unnecessarily? We were well armed with anti-tank grenades, not to mention automatic and semi-automatic rifles, and we would certainly be able to defend ourselves against any Russian attack if ever the need arose.

It was a good quarter of a mile to the crossing point and still broad daylight. We crept forward slowly and cautiously, keeping a constant look-out for concealed outpost installations. After an hour or so, we arrived at the spot where the Russian sentry had just narrowly missed intercepting our advance scouts. On the ground nearby lay a cap which one of them had dropped while hastening to make his getaway. The fact that the cap was still around confirmed our assumption that the Russian had not attached any importance to the incident — at least not enough to warrant further investigation,

because it was obvious that he hadn't been back since. Feeling greatly relieved, we concealed ourselves in the very same bushes and remained there for the rest of the afternoon. We were now much too close to the border to risk traveling except under cover of night.

As soon as it had grown dark enough, we emerged and prepared ourselves for the final leg of the journey. Partisan Stumbras, who had crossed into Poland many times before, took over the lead. The rest of us followed behind him at fifty yard intervals, hoping in this way to minimize the danger of being spotted as a group. For a while, we trudged along a densely-wooded ravine. But after a few hundred yards the ravine ended, and we found ourselves facing a wide stretch of open terrain. This was the most dangerous part of the crossing. We advanced on tiptoes, holding our weapons in constant readiness and keeping our eyes on Stumbras. Suddenly, he raised his hand in a pre-arranged signal to drop. We fell flat on the ground and listened. The sound of Russian voices could be heard not very far away. The sounds were succeeded by shapes, and before long four border patrol guards came into view. We tracked every move they made with our weapons, but they were so engrossed in conversation that they walked right past the spot where we lay without noticing us.

Shortly afterwards, Stumbras gave the signal to advance again. Since it was now much darker, we closed the distance between us and continued on our way. The closer we came to the border line, the more tense we grew. Every one of us was drenched with nervous perspiration. Finally, Stumbras signalled again — this time to indicate that the place where we would be making the crossing lay dead ahead. It consisted of a strip of land which had been ploughed and harrowed and, afterwards, mined. Fortunately for us, Stumbras knew where the mines were located and told us exactly how to go. We moved forward cautiously, making sure to step in each other's tracks, so that later the Russians would have no way of knowing how many people had participated in the crossing. At last, we found ourselves facing two posts which marked off the border. The post on the Lithuanian side was painted red, while the post on the Polish side was painted in black and white stripes.

It is impossible to describe how we felt the moment we found ourselves beyond the Iron Curtain, for such moments of

184 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

sheer ecstasy occur only rarely in any man's lifetime. We wanted to shout and sing for joy — and we might have done so if Stumbras had not insisted on absolute silence being maintained. Only after we had left the border far behind us did we stop to rest and to congratulate ourselves.

CHAPTER XXXII

AMONG OUR OWN PEOPLE IN A FOREIGN LAND

Our rest period was necessarily brief. There were all sorts of preparations to be made. For one thing, Stumbras ordered us to paint the soles of our shoes with turpentine so that the sentry dogs would not be able to pick up our scent in case the Russian border guards took it into their heads to follow us. (Experience had taught him that these individuals were not above pursuing their quarry for distances as great as twelve miles.) A short time later we were on our way again.

The farther we moved away from the border, the more light-hearted we felt. Everything about the countryside struck us as new and wonderful. The scent of elderberry blossoms permeated the night air, and we decorated the buttonholes of our jackets with clusters of them — just as we were wont to do during the days when we were young and Lithuania was free. The sable sky, with its myriads of twinkling lights, seemed brighter to our eyes than ever before; and our ears thrilled to the strains of May-time hymns being sung in the distance. We noticed many young people strolling about, too. Many of them were singing folksongs or just laughing and having a good time. Frequently, bands of them passed so close to us that we were forced to duck for cover to keep out of their way.

But what impressed us most of all was the language. Everyone seemed to be speaking Lithuanian, even though this particular section had been under Polish domination for over twenty years.

Even the countryside had retained a Lithuanian look about it. The cross-roads were still adorned with folk art crosses of the kind that the Communists had destroyed throughout Lithuania long ago. Granted, a great many of them had been damaged by the Nazis, but even these razed crosses were dear to our hearts. They bore witness to the fact that we

186 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

were still among our own people even if it was on foreign soil.

We decided to call on our friend, Nykštukas. The whole family was overjoyed to see us coming through the door.

“Heavens! What do I see? Isn’t this a miracle?” exclaimed the grandmother of the house. “We were sure that the Russians had murdered every single one of you. No news of any kind for a whole year!” Then she burst into tears.

“Don’t cry, Mother,” said Nykštukas soothingly, as he greeted us. “Don’t you know it isn’t easy to defeat a Lithuanian? And that there are still one or two left alive among your old friends?”

Meanwhile, the son of the host had seized his accordion and, to its accompaniment, began to sing: “*Lietuva brangi, mano tėvynė*” (Dear Lithuania, my homeland.)

After the recent nervous tension, this popular song served as the best possible tonic and we, too, joined in the singing, forgetting our ordeal of the past.

We were able to enjoy the comfort of this family for only about an hour. As a precaution against losing our way, we asked our host to escort us part way. We were especially afraid of stumbling into minefields which still remained from the war.

Our journey on the Polish side differed appreciably from our journey in Lithuania. There, we had to be on the alert the whole time, ready at any moment to open fire. Here, however, we had only to keep silent and avoid contact with the civilian inhabitants. Our weapons were on our backs.

After ten days we met, at a prearranged place, with Daunoras who, together with Lokys, had visited us from the West the previous summer. During our meeting we learned that they had returned safely and that only Daukantas had fallen into the Communists’ clutches. We communicated to Daunoras all the news we had concerning Lithuania.

We described the situation in separate reports, and we replied to letters that were intended for us. We also contacted Lithuanian organizations abroad and asked them for support for our ruined country.

After meeting Daunoras we realized that we would not be able to carry out all the given tasks and that because of the unfavorable trend of international events, we would be obliged to abandon them. Since Daunoras promised to return to us in the autumn, all that was left for us to do was to establish improvised methods of contact and say good-bye.

CHAPTER XXXIII

GETTING BACK INSIDE THE IRON CURTAIN

Having gotten everything in shape, on the evening of June 4 we took leave of our comrades and set out for the frontier border. Our party of five was now joined by a young combatant named Vėjas . When the Russians occupied Lithuania this young man withdrew into the Lithuanian territory of Poland and, after some time there, linked up with the armed resistance movement. Now, he wanted to return to Lithuania.

On the same night, we reached the forest that extended to the frontier itself. While forcing our way through the dense thickets, we nearly lost our direction, and got our bearings only as we approached the Lithuanian frontier. We fell back into the forest a little and then stopped. At dawn, frost gathered and we huddled together to keep warm. Later, we ventured to light a small fire of dry brushwood. From earlier experience we knew that the Polish frontier guards were not remarkable either for zeal or vigilance. Moreover, Poland, though under the Communist yoke, breathed more freely than Lithuania.

The morning of June 5 (Ascension Day) dawned. We set up sentries, paired in twos, covered ourselves with branches and began to snooze. But as the sun began to shine brightly, sleep vanished. We put aside our original order and, turning over, basked in the sun. The gravity of our situation remained, however, and at midday, during prayers, we did not forget to implore God's protection on the task that lay ahead.

Two hours or so before dawn, Stumbras and I set out to reconnoiter. We crawled through the woods up to the frontier itself and, hiding in the bushes, studied it. We were just midway between two MVD garrisons each of which had a hundred guards. Along the frontier directly before us mounted

188 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

patrols and foot patrols passed. We could see the direction in which the trenches ran and where the shelters of the outpost guards were. We observed how at dusk the guards were changed. They had been strengthened. We agreed that we had better not tell our comrades about these large Russian forces, in order not to make them unduly nervous. When we returned, they were already prepared to move and inquired about the findings of our reconnaissance. We told them what was most important, saying nothing about the strength of the guard. We indicated the route we would have to follow from the frontier and marked it on the maps of those who possessed them. We warned them that, in the event of a fight, all would have to strictly obey whatever orders our leader, Stumbras, might give.

When we arrived at the edge of the forest we had reconnoitered, I ordered two of our companions to take up strategic positions and, with intensive automatic fire, to mislead the enemy. They were to continue firing, even when we were free of the enemy, so the Russians would think that we had been beaten off and had not crossed the frontier. We then took affectionate leave of the two remaining men and lined up in single file, carrying our weapons in our hands. Before us, to the left, was a pine grove in which we had noticed outposts. Somewhat farther behind these were guard posts armed with machine guns. Taking all this into consideration, Stumbras attempted, while crossing the frontier zone, to keep further to the right as he sought out the more recessed areas that might be accessible to the guards' machine guns. In doing so, he moved too far to the right, into other outposts.

"Give the password!" a Russian voice suddenly shouted.

In a flash we dropped to the ground. Bursts of fire from our automatic weapons were our answer to the Russian's challenge as engagement began. A hundred rockets illumined the sky in the evening dusk as fire opened on us from three sides. Our two comrades who had remained on the Polish side opened fire with their semi-automatics. Not realizing that we had moved to the right, their bursts passed straight over our heads. We were fighting with the first outposts now at a distance of only a few yards and had already begun to press forward because the enemy's fire was intensifying from all sides. I tumbled into the first convenient trench and there, with my Finnish automatic, I greeted a Russian who, from a

Getting Back Inside the Iron Curtain 189

range of several yards, was shooting past my ears. Because of the darkness, I could not fire with any accuracy. Only where flashes of fire showed did I direct my burst. Not far from me our youngest comrade, Vėjas, was nervously experiencing his first baptism of fire. I could hear him struggling to strike back the lock of his automatic and I advised him to strike the handle back with his heel. Puffing and blowing, he swore softly: "The devil—not a rifle!"

The firing from our closest enemies soon died down. They had either been put out of action or had exhausted their ammunition. In their place, and in our direction, other Communists were hurrying, discharging rockets from time to time. Now, abruptly, our men began to move from the frontier into the depths of Lithuania. I leaped out of the trench last because I was on the right side where the enemy's fire was concentrated. With a dash, I found myself at the top of the hill and quickly overtook my withdrawing comrades. They assumed that I had been killed and were arguing about how to collect the documents that I was carrying. I called out the password and they replied, and we continued our withdrawal together.

We retreated as had been arranged, through uninhabited countryside that was checkered with trenches left from the war, holes excavated by bombs, and wire entanglements. But soon other MVD frontier detachments began to fire. We hurriedly occupied a hillside and when the enemy drew near we struck with concentrated fire. The Russians dispersed and at a trot we headed for the interior. We stopped running only long enough to smear our soles with turpentine to keep the dogs off our scent. Meanwhile, the closer enemy detachments had ceased firing and only with rockets could they determine the direction of our retreat. Hundreds of rockets now swept the frontier zone and as soon as some were extinguished, fresh ones flared up.

After about five miles of swift withdrawal, we stopped to rest. We were all exhausted and sodden with perspiration. To avoid the risk of falling into the Russians' clutches in the morning, we decided not to continue ahead in the same direction. Masking our footprints and once again smearing the soles of our shoes with turpentine, we began heading in the direction of Liubavas where the Russians' own center was located.

190 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

On approaching a brook we took off our boots and obliterated our tracks by wading through the water. Those whose boots had been hurting their feet decided to travel barefooted. Seeing that two of the men had tied their boots to their knapsacks, Stumbras said jokingly, "Men, put on your boots again! If the Russians kill us they'll take us for *stribi*! Remember, they're still on our heels!"

Twice on the way, we spread out for action: once, against horses grazing in a meadow, and another time, against a heap of drying peat! After the last incident, quite nearby we saw a rising rocket. We dropped to the ground instantly and could hear an exchange of Russian countersigns. This was a meeting of the mounted *enkavedisti*. They had completed their ring of encirclement. Fortunately for us, we had already succeeded in getting beyond its confines. When the rockets died out we shouldered our knapsacks and silently moved on. It was clear that the Russians intended to leave us within the ring and to beat every inch of the ground in the morning with sizable forces. We were fortunate indeed that we had been able to move as quickly as we did and had not gotten caught in the ring.

Now, we were heading toward Liubavas where we encountered minefields. For some fifteen minutes we had to move very slowly because we were placing our feet in the tracks of our leader, Stumbras. After passing through the minefields safely, we felt more secure because we didn't think the Russians would risk entering them. So we sat down again for a short rest. In the frontier zone it was already fairly quiet. Only here and there were rockets still rising and isolated shots or bursts of firing could be heard.

When the moon rose and it became lighter we took stock of our supplies. Our losses were very small. Not counting the ammunition used in the encounter, Rimvydas had lost a grenade and I an American pocket flashlight. I thought to myself that a Russian would be delighted when he found it and would suppose that the confrontation had involved an American. For the Communists cursed the West. They believed that only with foreign help had we become invulnerable. Our new recruit had suffered the most. When fixing the lock of his gun, he had grazed all his knuckles. Nevertheless, the youth was pleased that he had passed his first test honorably. From a poorly functioning rifle he had

Getting Back Inside the Iron Curtain 191

managed to fire thirty shots.

We did not stay long because dawn was approaching and we had to travel about a mile and a half yet to the spot planned for a rest. For the halt we chose a trench between thickets which were spread over an area of several hundred yards. This was a good place for reconnaissance because here, all the houses had been razed during the war. After stopping, we quickly got in touch with the nearest inhabitant, appointed a watch and then tried to get a little sleep.

Until sundown, it was quiet. Reconnaissance information showed that all MVD forces of the frontier and Marijampolė district had pursued initial retreat for a distance of some twenty miles. Despite their failure to overcome us, we cleaned and oiled our weapons, loaded our cartridge belts and replenished our munitions reserves. When the sun had set, we thanked God for our present success, had supper and then once again started off. Enroute, we made a detour to visit Stumbras' "daughter" (a term we used for any girl for whom a resistor manifested sympathy.) As the assembled family welcomed us warmly, it became apparent that our leader had recently been here. A son rushed out to keep watch for us, and the women quickly heated some milk and cooked us an omelette. Seated among the family and our hosts we refreshed ourselves. After the recent nervous strain to which we had all been subjected, we were able to relax and feel very much at home with this family, forgetting our daily cares.

An hour and a half later we were again groping our way through the darkness of night. On making inquiries of a farmer we learned that during the day a large number of Russians had been looking for some parachutists. Although we were nearly twenty miles from the frontier there was still danger of a confrontation with *enkavedisti* who might be furtively following us. In fact, hardly had we left the homestead than we heard bursts of gunfire about a mile and a half away and conjectured that Karvelis' men had encountered the Communists.

With intensified vigilance we continued to go. Suddenly we noticed two silhouettes darting across our path. We levelled our guns and began to beat the bushes. Two civilians, v/ith their hands raised, crept out. They turned out to be two robbers who had been prowling about the countryside plundering from neighboring farmers. Two of our men

192 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

recognized them. The robbers said that they were looking for stray cows, but when one of our men pulled out a sack from the bushes, both robbers fell on their knees before Stumbras, begging him to forgive them and swearing that they would never steal again. Stumbras warned the robbers that another time they would not be let off so lightly if caught stealing, and ordered them to get lost without looking back.

Due to this encounter we had to change our direction and hide our tracks because these thieves, not long out of Poland, might have a second specialty —that of Communist sleuths, especially at this time when Russians were scouring the neighborhood. But it might also be otherwise. They might think that since the Russians were scouring the neighborhood, the partisans would not dare to patrol the villages and so they could rob with impunity.

After following a precautionary zigzag course, we finally reached the headquarters of our company commander.

CHAPTER XXXIV

DANGER AMONG OUR OWN KIND

In the underground shelter of the company commander, Karvelis, we learned of the furor we had created by breaking through the Iron Curtain. They had realized that this was due to our own efforts and was not simply a matter of luck. Since the Russians everywhere here were looking for parachutists, it was clear to Karvelis's men that we had slipped through; but Karvelis himself had not returned to the shelter. As we surmised, he had taken part in the recently heard fusillade. We later learned that he was wounded in the hand.

In the morning, fourteen of us assembled in the company staff shelter which was only designed for five. Approximately six feet high, it was about seven feet wide and ten feet long. In the front part were gun racks and beyond were planks that had been nailed together to serve as beds. Opposite the beds hung a cross and the State coat-of-arms, the revered symbols of our people and the armed resistance movement. And on the shelves, stationery materials were deposited.

There was sufficient room in this underground shelter for five men, but for fourteen it was a terribly tight fit. We stripped to our undergarments and, wedged closely together, one against the other, filled the entire space.

About ten o'clock we received a report that the whole neighborhood was swarming with Russians. Two groups of foot and horseback and with dogs were approaching in our direction. It was evident that they suspected something. Clad only in shirts we buckled on our belts and began distributing the weapons. Two men with anti-tank grenades took up positions at the entrance to the shelter. Everybody was forbidden to smoke, talk or move. If we were spotted we intended to make a sortie and try to break through the encirclement. While awaiting this bloody possibility, we

194 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

began to feel the lack of air. The lamp that was burning had been extinguished and now a shortage of oxygen caused us to breathe more quickly.

To restore morale, we overlooked the warning not to talk. We began to wonder whether we had taken final leave of our “daughters” and wives, realizing that the prospect of death was ever before us. The company secretary continually requested silence because he had with him a stack of orders and instructions, a summary of an educational nature, and other matters. Amidst the talking he could not concentrate on the material before him and it was already time to begin to destroy it so that it could not fall into enemy hands.

Suddenly, a dog began to bark in the yard and the footsteps of several men could be heard rumbling above our heads. This meant that our “guests” were already here, searching for us. In the shelter a deathlike silence again prevailed. Russian voices were audible and after some ten minutes, all was still again and the dogs no longer barked. But in our shelter the supply of oxygen was steadily decreasing and now we not only breathed rapidly but we felt cold and clammy.

After three hours of extremely tense waiting we could hear approaching footsteps. From an agreed signal we recognized the farmer’s wife from a nearby homestead. As her smiling face appeared in the entrance she told us that the Russians had consumed all the hens’ eggs by sucking them and then departed. Our anxiety at once left us and we filled our depleted lungs with pure air which now flowed through the entrance. Three of the men even climbed out of the shelter. Those remaining again lighted the lamp. We were all soaked with perspiration.

We learned later that MVD detachments were moving along the highway in the direction of their headquarters. It was now quiet until evening and we could even sleep a little. Since Karvelis had not yet returned, we set out at night directly through the fields, guided only by a compass, in the direction of the Paneriai shelter. In that shelter we found Karvelis, who was wounded. Here, the day was much pleasanter than the previous one we had spent, and we chatted freely and slept well.

The next night, we resumed our journey and safely reached the shelter of the district commander, Vampyras. He was astonished that we had been able to return so quickly. We

Danger Among Our Own Kind 195

greeted him with good morning and began our report. From our knapsacks we took our part of the printer matter brought from the West. This included newspapers of the free world, journals, and several information pamphlets. With trembling hands, as though accepting some relic, our hosts took the materials from us and buried their gaze deeply in the pages.

An analysis of the international situation obtained through resistance channels indicated several more years of arduous struggle. This clouded the faces of Vampyras and Plunskas whose expression reflected profound brooding. Ahead of us lay the difficult summer days of the armed resistance movement against an enemy a hundredfold more powerful. How many more lives would this summer demand, we wondered?

Although activities were curtailed in summer: the publication and distribution of our press, the maintenance of contacts, concern for civilian welfare needs and operations that would brook no postponement, many sacrifices were still required. About two hours or so passed before Vampyras grew weary of searching in the pages of a free press for reassuring news.

Collecting all the publications (he was one of those who adored the West), he handed them to Rymantas and then buried his face in his hands, exclaiming: "They have abandoned us at Yalta and Potsdam. . .and go on repeating the same blunders!" Then he lapsed into silence. No one attempted to disturb this uneasy calm. For we all knew that a long, terribly bloody and almost hopeless road of conflict and death lay ahead. A ghastly nightmare lay heavily upon us, and the first to cast it off was Rimvydas, who began to clean his automatic. After a moment, I spoke up.

"We are powerless to move world events in a direction more favorable to us. We must continue to fight for freedom using the most effective methods. We must not lose heart. That would only be useful to our enemy. Sooner or later the tenacity of our people's struggle will be recognized and our nation will rise again among other freedom-loving peoples. So let us consider now how to reach the district commander more speedily."

The road leading to the district commander was still very far away and again we travelled all night. When we stopped to rest, we could see armed Russians driving people to meetings,

196 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

because fresh elections were being prepared. Evidently, after the slaying of S. Butkevičius at Mažvydas's hands during Shrovetide at Marijampolė, it was necessary to "elect" a new deputy. And that deputy, newly nominated by the party, was now touring the neighborhood and explaining "the most democratic Constitution and the most democratic elections in the world."

To avert the possibility of his being "removed," like his predecessor, the new candidate of the Communist Party not only attended meetings armed with an automatic, but he was accompanied by a group of armed supporters as well. Some corralled "voters" to the meetings and others guarded him. Then, after the meeting, the deputy would roam the villages with his henchmen and demand to be entertained by the people. When the *emgebisti* drove past us in the direction of Marijampolė, the infuriated Vampyras suggested that we greet them with our automatics, but we decided to abstain. If we should happen to hit the appointed deputy, there would be fresh trouble and terror for the people, and for a third time this year they would be forcibly driven to meetings and to "the most democratic" elections.

CHAPTER XXXV

LITHUANIANS HELP STARVING GERMANS

Following with our eyes our daily “partners” —the deputy’s *emgebisti* companions—we withdrew through the forest to the outskirts where liaison men should already be awaiting us. At the place of resident N., which this time had been prearranged as our contact point, we met a German woman begging with her two children. To meet a German woman with a sack or basket of bread in 1946 or 1947 in Lithuania was not a rare phenomenon.

When the Potsdam conference transferred East Prussia to the Soviet Union, the latter decided to colonize that land with Russians. But first, it was necessary to destroy the Germans who still remained there. Therefore, the Russians so “organized” life and the economy that in East Prussia, the most fertile region of former Germany, famine occurred. To protect themselves against starvation the Germans, especially German women, began to travel to Lithuania and Latvia secretly in search of bread. Roaming Lithuania, these women would go with their baskets from one farmer to another, begging for flour, groats, potatoes and bacon. Sometimes, they would even stay for a time with a farmer and help him with his work, or even settle in an empty homestead whose owner had been deported with all his family to Siberia.

The armed resistance movement did not forbid starving Germans either to settle for a time in Lithuania or to beg food there. True, they were from East Prussia, where Germans had not been friendly to us. At various meetings and demonstrations, with the East Prussian Gauleiter Koch at the head, they had often threatened Lithuania and demanded the annexation of Klaipėda (Memel). But from 1946 to 1947 many of the women left in East Prussia had been raped by the Russian soldiers. They were now hungry victims of the Communist regime, like so many of our own people. Neither

198 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

the men of the armed resistance movement nor the farmers ever reminded these begging women of the former aggressiveness of the Nazis but would instead meet them with understanding and sympathy. Nobody ever refused either food or a night's lodging to them. The woman we encountered during our retreat was one of the later arrivals. Seeing us, she became terrified as her children timidly clung to her. To reassure her, Sakalas and I drew nearer to introduce ourselves. When we began to speak in German, the woman sighed with relief.

“Thank God! I thought you were Russians. I was so frightened that I didn't notice the Lithuanian emblems on your caps. I've heard a lot about you, and I'm lucky to see you today.”

When we questioned her about herself and her life in Prussia, the visitor told us that she had only been in Lithuania three days. She said that she had come from Koenigsberg by train and was now wandering about, collecting food from the local residents. She told us that before the war, she had lived well and that her husband had been a structural engineer who had been killed in the war. They had three houses with plots of land. During the bombardment, two of the houses were destroyed and she now lived in the third. But life in Koenigsberg had become unbearable. Epidemic diseases and famine were raging there and many of those who had survived the war had since died or been deported to the Russian interior. To finish off the rest, the Russians were confiscating from the city inhabitants even the vegetables which they grew in their own small gardens. All the hopes of the Koenigsberg people were now centered in the Lithuanians. The kindheartedness of the Lithuanians astounded her.

Sakalas explained that the Prussians' condition was as serious as it was because the people there were not resisting the tyrant. Not to *oppose* crimes against humanity was almost to *approve* them. In an attempt to urge the Prussians to resist and enlist them in a common struggle, he had sent a couple of groups to East Prussia, but nothing had come of this. It had not even been possible to make contacts. Sensing that this German woman was one of the most understanding, Sakalas tried to appeal to her spirit of resistance. He reminded her of the value of uniting as members of a single family for the protection against adversity, of all.

Lithuanians Help Starving Germans 199

Cautioning the woman to remain silent about our meeting, and wishing her luck in her quest for food, we took leave of her and went into a room where other men were assembled. They were disgruntled that we had spent so much time talking to the German beggar, but Sakalas explained that it was his duty to solicit the support of every person of good will in the common struggle, especially when he or she came to us for help. And for all anyone knew, this woman might even be a descendant of those Lithuanians who had lived beyond Koenigsberg. We then went on to talk about how to reach Varnas' company, which was on the route leading to the district commander.

We were accompanied along direct and safe routes as far as the river Sesupe by the host with whom we had stopped that evening. After crossing the river, we felt more secure because here was Sakiai district and its deputy was still alive. By dawn we reached the outskirts of the Kazlų Rūda forest, where Varnas had established himself. We had to spend several days with him because we really did not know which company the district commander was visiting at the time. It was assumed that he was with Neptūnas, but we had to confirm this through liaison men and then report to him concerning our return from the West. Finally, one evening, we reached Neptūnas' company. Around a dwindling fire, several dozen men were being led in prayer by the district chaplain. The faltering light of the fire illuminated the faces of the praying combatants as well as the metal parts of their weapons. Only the occasional crackling of the burning embers interrupted the gravity of their devotions.

Early the next morning, the camp was astir. Before long, Holy Mass began at an improvised altar at which Grafas officiated. All the men took the Blessed Sacrament. Yet even during mass, they were never parted from their weapons. Following the service five new combatants took the oath of allegiance.

Later, after dinner, a meeting was held in which we communicated the information we had brought with us from abroad. Then, in joint effort with the others present, we determined the tasks that had yet to be accomplished. After this meeting, the work of Rimvydas and myself was completed.

CHAPTER XXXVI

NIGHTMARE BECOMES REALITY

While visiting Varnas' company on the night of June 12, before our meeting with the district commander, I had a dreadful dream. It seemed as if, during the day, I had gone to my home and from a distance I could see a group of foreign soldiers in the farmstead. The yard, garden and house were full of them. Forcing my way through, I approached the house and was faced with a frightful spectacle. In a hearse, in a black coffin, I recognized my brother Juozas, whom I had liberated from prison. He was still breathing and on seeing me, he groaned painfully. Then, raising his half-dead head, he pointed to a terrible wound in his chest that had been inflicted by machine gun fire and said that those responsible for his death were the foreign troops assembled there. And those were his last words. At the same moment, the mournful strains of a funeral dirge could be heard. Suddenly, an insatiable thirst for vengeance against all the alien aggressors thronging the premises took possession of me. Then and there, I wanted vengeance, but I realized my powerlessness. Tormented by futile rage, I awoke.

Neither I nor my traveling companion, Rimvydas, could imagine whence such a strange dream had come and what it could portend. No fewer than some sixty-five miles then separated Juozas and myself. On reflection, we decided that this terrifying dream must have come about as a result of the documents I had read the previous evening which described the frightful tortures that some of Varnas' men had suffered under the Communists.

Although after a time, I forgot the dream, it remained in my subconscious. Some time later, having handed in my foreign travel warrant, reports and other documents, I was working in the Kazlų Rūda forest as a rank-and-file combatant.

Nightmare Becomes Reality 201

One evening, after an intensive day's work with the typewriter, I was chatting with some comrades near a tent. Just before midnight we could hear the sounds of the countersign in the region of the campfire. I was handed an envelope addressed to me and recognized the handwriting of my traveling Rimvydas. Tearing open the envelope, I found a letter inside which read:

“Dear. . . Your dream, which you described to me at Varnas’ was the truth. On June. . ., in the morning, your home was surrounded by several dozen *emgebisti*. Juozas perished and your mother and brother were arrested and deported. . . Juozas’ body was thrown out at Veiveriai. I express my deepest sympathy. Rimvydas.”

Such was the hideous reality which had taken place just days before and which my dream had foretold. Juozas was the first of our family to be sacrificed for the freedom of the homeland and human rights.

I felt great anger and hurt. At the same time, something terrible oppressed me. I wanted to grasp this dreadful truth but my head swam from a thousand thoughts. I longed to take vengeance on the entire world because the darkness which engulfed us told me that there were no longer any decent human beings on earth who would in any way contribute to our salvation. How could I stifle my mental agony when I reflected that, only a few days before, my beloved brother, Juozas, had perished at the hands of our deadly foes. With Juozas, I had been reared more closely than with any blood brother or battle comrade. From the days of our infancy to the doors of the university, we had been inseparable. While at the university, our somewhat different specialties had to a certain extent parted us, but in the ranks of the armed resistance movement we were again united in thought and action.

Reluctant to disclose my distress to my comrades, I withdrew from the campfire and walked to the camp outskirts. With every step I found it harder and harder to restrain my tears. When I felt sure that I was alone, I stumbled into the dry moss and, resting on my automatic, gave vent to my pent-up anguish. Somewhat calmer then, I said part of my rosary for the soul of Juozas and once again repeated the words of our oath — to spare no effort in doing what was necessary to resolve the fateful conflict.

I was not at first aware of the approach in the shade of the

202 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

forest of the adjutant, Naktis. Finally, however, I yielded to his request to rejoin our comrades at the campfire. Here, I tried to forget, but in vain. It was extremely difficult for me to reconcile myself to the fact that I would never again meet Juozas in this life. Life now seemed unendurable.

I reviewed in my mind the hundreds of comrades-in-arms no longer among the living. The journey of all had been the same — from the battlefield to the graveyard or dunghill. The *enkavedisti* collected bodies, or parts of them, on the battlefield, loaded them haphazardly into a cart and then carried them to the town to be thrown away. And here began the most appalling description of man. The Red activists kicked and beat the bodies, spat on them, dragged them through the streets with horses and did everything that a degraded wretch of Communist training could devise to vent his fury on these victims. Then, at night, the desecrated corpses were cast into ditches, trenches, dunghills, swamps, lakes or rivers.

After his slaughter, the body of my brother Juozas finally reached the field of one Raslavičius in Veiveriai where it was dumped in the war trenches. As elsewhere, so here, too, the bodies were covered with just a few spadeful of earth which the first rains at once washed away. And in winter, the abandoned corpses were not buried at all. They were therefore speedily dismembered by dogs, wild animals, and birds. And where bodies of slain partisans *had* been buried, skulls and the bones of arms and legs protruded from the earth if dogs had not carried them away.

When one thought about this, one wondered: Are we not made to fight under such dreadful conditions? The free, who enjoy human rights, are very likely to consider us mad because they do not know what it is to lose one's freedom. Nor do they know the sacrifices that must be made, by men and women alike in Lithuania, to tight oppression and tyranny.

If we have managed to survive and continue our fight against Communist cruelty and oppression, it is due in large part to our women, to whom we are greatly indebted. For they have rescued many of us from almost certain death by warning us in time, by supplying us with information, by binding up our wounds and healing us, and by making the supreme sacrifice themselves, when necessary, in order not to betray secret information. None among us, for example, can

Nightmare Becomes Reality 203

remember the secret name of Nastè, the sister-of-mercy, without sorrow in our hearts. She could easily have adapted herself to the Communist regime because she was experienced in hospital work. Yet she felt it her duty to fight on the side of her own people.

When, during a skirmish with the *enkavedisti*, the leg of the partisan Erelis was broken above the knee, it was essential to take him to a hospital to save his life. He was provided with fictitious documents and the bone breakage was officially explained as the kick of a horse. After several weeks of treatment it was still not possible to put his leg in a cast, and the *enkavedisti* had already begun to suspect that a partisan was being treated in the hospital. Nastè, who knew the case, could have done nothing and avoided all danger. Instead, she determined to do what she could to save Erelis from death. Without knowing to what detachment he belonged, she smuggled him out of the hospital at night, took him to his native district and then transferred him to a local partisan detachment, providing him with the necessary medicines. After placing Erelis in safe hands, Nastè summoned a surgeon from Kaunas, who set his leg.

From that time on, Nastè became a sister-of-mercy of the armed resistance movement. She nursed Erelis so faithfully that in two weeks he was much improved and could be moved from her district to that of his own company. But when Nastè, escorted by several armed men one night, was in the process of moving Erelis, the *enkavedisti* attacked them. An engagement ensued and before Nastè had time to jump from the vehicle she was wounded in both legs. Unable to retreat she gallantly defended herself on the spot. When a Russian tried to set his machine gun on the road, to cut off the partisans' retreat, she wounded the gunner with her pistol and saved her comrades.

Thus did the sisters-of-mercy, assisting in the armed resistance movement of their own free will, earn and deserve the love of Erelis and the respect of their compatriots. There were also many other loyal and self-sacrificing liaison women. Among these, Vaidilutė was outstanding. An ordinary field worker, she was a real combatant, for whom a journey of several hundred miles meant nothing. The most perilous liaison tasks, in which she was responsible for transporting various documents and resistance materials, did not frighten

204 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

her. And whoever had the good fortune to entrust her with a mission could be certain that she would successfully discharge it. It would take Vaidilutè no longer than twenty-four hours to carry resistance press material sixty miles. Because of this, partisans conferred upon her the name of "great book-carrier." Vaidilutè was not impressive to look at. She was short and slightly stooped and her face was heavily lined from care and privation. But behind her modest and unassuming exterior lay immense reserves of loyalty and an iron determination which were manifested many times during the struggle for freedom. Whoever knew Vaidilutè would recall with deep respect and admiration her selfless devotion to the cause to which we had all dedicated ourselves.

CHAPTER XXXVII

FIGHT AGAINST THOUSANDS

Following my journey with Rimvydas to the West, the Lithuanian resistance movement encountered new problems. The summer season was always the most inconvenient, but we knew that every undertaking required sacrifice. This was especially true in Dainava's district.

Early in July, the command of the Dzukas's armed resistance movement assembled in the **Punia** pine forest, at the district commander's headquarters, to discuss forthcoming assignments. Since several combatants had accomplished the detachment leaders, considerable movement had been detached by the Communists. Moreover, there had been carelessness on the part of the resistance. The **Punia** pine forest harbored the headquarters of the district commander as well as certain staff sections all year round. But the commander's main underground shelter was accessible only in winter, with difficulty. It was excavated at the foot of a bluff near a rivulet. In winter it was convenient for the concealment of tracks, but in summer the brook tended to hamper such concealment. The shelter itself had two zigzagging exit channels which were very well hidden. Despite this, the Russians succeeded in detecting it.

During the night of July 10 about three hundred American trucks packed with MVD troops drove up to the **Punia** pine forest. Local Russian detachments joined them, some of whom encircled the forest while others began searching the bushes. The local inhabitants could not understand why so many Russians had come into the woods. Some supposed that war with the West had begun.

The enemy wanted desperately to deal a mortal blow to the armed resistance movement. When they discovered that there were staff headquarters in the forest, they assembled a

206 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

sizable force and began searching every foot of it. They finally discovered the bunker in which the district commander and seven men were living. The others had managed to escape.

The Russians encircled the bunker and posted machine guns at strategic points. Then an MGB colonel tried to entice the resisters from the shelter. Walking on top of it, he urged the men inside to surrender without a struggle and “guaranteed” them immunity. He was still speaking when, through the channel of underground ventilation, the smoke of destroyed documents began to swirl.

When the files in the shelter were destroyed, opinions were divided on the best course to follow. Some, along with the district commander Ažuolas, considered the enemy’s strength too great to attempt to break through. But a majority were in favor of making the effort. It seemed better to them to die in battle. In so doing, they could inflict some losses on the enemy. When the headquarters documents and other records had been destroyed, Ažuolas took leave of his comrades-in-arms and shot himself. The others started leaving through the emergency passageway. Their unexpected appearance took the Russians by surprise and they were momentarily at a loss where to shoot. Meanwhile, Aras opened fire against them and as the other partisans began emerging from the bunker, the Russians started hurling grenades at them. Three of our men were stopped by grenades before they had time to go into action. Those who succeeded in getting out alive tried to break through the triple lines of encirclement, but our fire was only a drop in the bucket compared with that of the enemy, which poured in from behind every trunk. Only Senis managed to get through and then hide in the thickets. The Russians moved closer to the bunker (and finally entered it.) But they found nothing that was useful to them.

After this unfortunate occurrence in the Punia forest the Communist press dared to admit publicly that a secret resistance organization was operating in Lithuania. Heretofore, it had announced only that isolated “gangs of bandits” were disturbing the clam of Soviet life. This time the newspapers said that they had succeeded in liquidating Dainava’s district staff. But their rejoicing was premature. After a month, the supposedly liquidated staff was carrying out activities which were increasingly troublesome to the Russians. It was, however, a piece of luck for the enemy that

Fight Against Thousands 207

two of our men who had been stunned by the grenades recovered. In their name, the Communists issued an appeal — circulated in thousands of copies — to the armed resistance movements, urging the partisans to see reason and to abandon their erroneous path.

At the end of July a new and great calamity overtook Lithuania. The Russians began a fresh mass deportation of inhabitants to Siberia. Aware of this the armed resistance tried to help these people by warning them to hide.

It was already dawn in the neighborhood of Raišupis and six partisans no longer knew where to flee. They were so exhausted they could hardly lift their feet. Sharp pains stabbed their backs, and their heated boots steamed with perspiration. This was the third day they had been hunted from place to place by the Communists and the third day the Russians had been carrying out deportations to Siberia. The six men had been dashing from one homestead to another to report the dreaded news. Forgetting the fatigue of their summer labor, the terrified people tumbled headlong from their beds and fled half-naked into the fields, thickets and forests.

Everybody sought, as long as possible, to cling to his own soil rather than perish in the depths of Russia from hunger and exhaustion.

One question haunted the six weary combatants and overshadowed their daily misery. Where would the people's suffering end? Where would they live, having abandoned their farms? For them, the future was truly dreadful. Weary and needing rest, they chose a farm with stone stables that seemed safe.

About noon, the six men noticed some dozens of Russians headed in the direction of the farm. The group leader, Liūtas, immediately ordered the men to withdraw in the opposite direction. He thought the houses would cover their retreat but after creeping a few yards beyond the farm they noticed the enemy forces occupying positions in this direction as well. There was nothing they could do then but return to the stables and prepare for action. They could still fight because they had good weapons and were the best sharpshooters in the entire Tauras district. The prospect of imminent death and recollections of their exiled countrymen fortified their resolve to fight to the bitter end. But the Russians postponed their attack in order to gather more men to surround the farm.

208 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

About two o'clock in the afternoon the Russians began crawling toward the farm, spattering it with machine guns and automatic rifle fire. They directed their salvos at the stables. The partisans defended themselves gallantly. With accurate fire they thinned the ranks of the enemy creeping towards the farm. But others succeeded in approaching from the side on which the stables were covered by other houses. After another hour, the intensity of the partisans' fire slackened; one had fallen, several were wounded and others had run short of ammunition. The Russians could still reach the stables with grenades. Our men rallied all their efforts in order not to fall into the enemy's hands. With their last cartridges they drove the Russians from the farmyard, bolted from the stables and began collecting the arms and ammunition of the dead enemy.

As the fighting continued, other Russian detachments reached the farm. Some of them hurled grenades into the stables; others held them in readiness for the fresh targets. The fighting subsided when the last partisan, Jovaras, was wounded. The wounded fighter for freedom managed to shoot a Russian who was attempting to stab him with a bayonet. With this shot Jovaras killed his sixty-seventh enemy. Among those were several officers, including the chief of the Prienai MGB.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ARMED RESISTANCE PREPARES CADRES

Despite the many painful blows that struck us, the struggle had to be carried on. It was necessary to select and train new combatants to replace the officers whom the enemy had eliminated from our ranks. The first training courses took place in mid-August of 1947. The instructor was the Tauras district commander himself.

There were about seventy combatants in the training camp, including myself. Work continued all day and the intervals between maneuverings and tactical drills were filled with theoretical lectures. Also covered were the partisan statutes and disciplinary regulations.

The camp command was always on the alert. When the paths leading to the camp became worn and obvious, the command decided to move to another place, where the training program was completed and examinations were held. Watches were presented to the two men who most successfully passed the examination. And all who passed in accordance with the standards set by the district commander were promoted to NCO. The camp program then concluded with a parade and general entertainment.

Since all the unit commanders and other commanding functionaries had assembled for the closing ceremonies of the courses, two days following the close of the training camp were allotted to meetings. During these meetings the operations of individual detachments and their commanders were examined. One unit commander who was not wholly suitable for his duties was changed, and considerable attention was paid to the section that looked after the welfare of the partisans and the families of those arrested and deported to Siberia. In planning resources for grants in aid, this section had to be helped by economic groups familiar with agricultural operations.

210 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

Methods of fighting the collectivization of agriculture, that had now begun, and Lithuanian colonization were also discussed. All detachments were instructed to keep battle diaries.

The success of the first courses encouraged the district commander to organize additional courses to be given approximately a month later in districts within the confines of the Birutė under my command. A training program was formulated and candidates for it were selected from various units.

The training was to begin on September 9 but work the first day was irregular because candidates from the Iron Wolf unit had not arrived yet. When they arrived a day later, there were several men missing from their group. Uosis told us that Šarūnas, along with five other men, had perished. The Communists, with the help of dogs, had discovered the shelter in which Šarūnas had sought refuge with his comrades. The shelter had been heavily surrounded, and there had been no hope whatever of breaking through. Šarūnas had then shot his men in the temple and then himself.

In addition to these victims, the liaison woman of Šarūnas' company, Ramunė, had fallen into the Communists' hands. The *protéges* of the Kremlin had tortured her terribly. As they were preparing to carry off the bodies of the six partisans which had been thrown into a cart, they tied Ramunė to the cart and dragged her along in its wake. She collapsed repeatedly, but the Communists kept clubbing her with the butt ends of their rifles, compelling her to follow. During the interrogation her fingers and wrist joints were crushed between doors. People saw how loosely they hung from bloody sleeves when she was tied to the cart. Despite this terrible torture, the Communists were not able to learn any secrets from her.

Early on the morning of September 12 I watched the compact ranks of our trainees, from my tent. Almost unconsciously my thoughts reverted to the period ten years before, when Lithuania was independent, and I began to compare the cadet companies of the Lithuanian army of those days with this company of hardened battle experience. The superficial differences were not great — the green color of the equipment and uniforms was the same, although now preferred a diagonal material, and used automatic weapons. But the

Armed Resistance Prepares Cadres 211

facial expression of these armed resistance men was different. On their faces were indelibly inscribed the feelings born of a thousand days and nights of danger and scores of battle actions. Their bodies bore the scars of both serious and minor wounds. Thus, Karys had a shortened right elbow. But this did not prevent him from skillfully handling his automatic rifle. Strazdas, too, as a result of an injury, had lost much of the flexibility of the joints in his arms. And Skirgaila had eight wounds already. Sakalas, also, could hardly find a sound area in his body. And for more than a year, Bijūnas had been unable to make a verbal report because his palate had been torn out. You could hardly find among these dozens of men one who was not disfigured with a battle wound.

And how mixed were the ranks of our combatants! Students, high school boys, employees, farmers and workmen. Included also were intellectuals of middle age, soldiers of independent Lithuania and volunteers of the wars of independence. If one looked carefully one might perhaps find a priest as well. All were brought together by a love of their homeland and a feeling of duty to defend their sisters and brothers from barbarous terror. Inspired by a deep longing for freedom, yet realizing the difficulty of their struggle, they set out to defend their country. In doing so, they were compelled to renounce their personal life. These monastic warriors relied totally upon their personal and combined strength. The camaraderie in these ranks united farmer with student and one marched alongside the other as they trod the sand of the Kazlų Rūda forest. At the end of the training program, they hoped to obtain the rank of a junior NCO, although they had long ago earned it. From the schools they attended, they had brought with them considerable military knowledge which had broadened further during two, three and four years of resistance.

After breakfast one morning, as the trainees were chatting together, the liaison man, Arturas, arrived and reported that in a nearby village the Communists were coercing the farmers, demanding of them grain and other supplies. This disturbed the men immeasurably and they wondered how they and the other inhabitants could survive the winter until the next harvest if they were deprived of their present supplies. The training program they were engaged in prevented them from interceding.

212 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

Seeing the men's concern, our old comrade, the inimitable and imperturbable Arturas, puffing his pipe, said reassuringly, "We'll survive! With God's help, these bastards won't deport us to Siberia. . . A shrill whistle cut short Arturas' words as the men got up to attend a lecture.

The participants of the economic group looked after our food and did not attend lessons. This day, four guards were helping with the kitchen work. The night before, after the whistle had sounded for silence, they were caught still talking and for that were now peeling potatoes for dinner. An elderly woman and a fifteen-year-old girl were also working in the kitchen. While gathering berries a few days before, they had lost their way and wandered into a camp area. Since the girl's brother was a *strib*, they were both detained in the camp for security reasons until we moved to another place. The woman was surprised to see us. She was from Kacergyne, where the armed resistance men had once destroyed a *strib's* center. She had perhaps seen partisans' bodies desecrated in the town and could scarcely understand why the Communists had dismembered them with saws and then yoked them with rosaries.

Now, she began to understand it all. When sixty men lined up for the evening ceremony, the woman stood near a pine tree. Tears rolled down her wrinkled cheeks as she joined with us in the words of the evening prayer: "Lord, who hath liberated the people and inspired them with a thirst for freedom, restore, we pray Thee, free days to our homeland! Grant us strength to bear the hard lot of the partisan! St. Casimir, lead us in battle, as Thou led our forefathers." When the final words of the prayer died away in the depths of the forest, the woman would still not retire. She remained there, as though petrified, and listened as our men, seated about the campfire, sang softly their songs.

During the days the woman lived with us, she carried out the kitchen work entrusted to her diligently and conscientiously. This particular day, she worked harder than usual because she knew we were expecting the district commander with the adjutant. After dinner I had the unpleasant task of questioning and punishing two combatants to my unit — Vaidila and Daina. Some time before, they had been sent to Kaunas on a mission and had dropped in at the railway station restaurant and bought some vodka. After

Armed Resistance Prepares Cadres 213

drinking more than he should have, Vaidila became light-headed and tore the emblem of Lenin's head from a militia man seated next to him, trampling it underfoot. The militia man instantly summoned to his aid several officials who tried to arrest Vaidila but Daina drew his pistol and the *emgebisti* began to panic. Having freed his hands, Vaidila also drew his pistol. Russian blood began to flow, restaurant windows were smashed and some of the window frames were carried out into the street on Russian shoulders. Vaidila and Daina, unscathed, discharged the task entrusted to them and returned safely to headquarters. But I had to punish them because through their behavior they had caused danger to other combatants who were simultaneously executing other tasks in Kaunas. As punishment, I forbade them to use liquor for two months, which included the celebration feast at the end of the training program.

Toward evening, the district commander and his adjutant arrived. He was received with full military honors. He had scarcely eaten and inspected the camp when bursts of automatic rifle fire were heard in the eastern section of the camp. These were followed by several others coming from another direction and then all hell seemed to break loose. A sentry came running over to report that a few hundred yards away several Russians had appeared and an engagement was underway between them and the third section of trainees.

We had anticipated such attacks and were prepared for them. The camp had been divided into five battle sections. Each section contained its own trenches and had to hold out until the entire camp was ready for evacuation. We were not prepared to hold out longer because the Russians might bring up fresh forces, causing us additional losses. In every action, our tactics were to deal the enemy a sudden blow, inflict maximum losses on him and then withdraw. This time, Rymantas, the leader of the training program, assumed command of the operations.

The enemy had about sixty men. Rymantas succeeded in approaching their camp and attacking it from three sides. As the attack began, we had no forces on the right wing of the camp. The trenches there were supposed to be defended by the third section, which was now fighting elsewhere. To secure it, the first and second sections went into action. Meanwhile, the enemy was quite near the right wing. Machine gun fire began

214 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

sputtering near the tents and a group of guards were ordered to retake the captured trenches and to reinforce those threatened with capture on the right wing. The group leader, Sargas, began to advance first. Not far behind him was the sentry, Jūrelė. He started firing from a German infantry machine gun and with a sudden dash, surged ahead. As he charged forward, he lost his balance and fell back with the machine gun on top of him.

“Jūrelė wounded,” he called out.

Sargas ran over to the machine gun. Jūrelė pulled out a Russian pistol and crawled back resting himself against a pine tree. Meanwhile, the other three combatants of the group of sentries managed to reach the trenches and tossed grenades at the enemy. Unfortunately, the group leader, Sargas, was shot and could no longer handle the machine gun. Daina then took over the weapon, and the sentry group regained control of the trenches. The situation on the right wing was thus restored.

Meanwhile, the first, second and third battle stations disengaged themselves from the enemy. The first two sections occupied their own trenches, and the third one occupied the trench regained by the sentry group. The economic group whose area the enemy had not attacked received orders to occupy a forest clearing to the west of the camp, and to hold it until all sections had withdrawn through it. Still, the Russian offensive did not cease. Blindly carrying out their officers' command “Forward!” they ran directly into our fire and fell, one after the other, alongside their trained dogs.

Suddenly, a shout from Rymantas cut across the clatter of the automatics. “I'm wounded. . . Intensify fire!”

Two enemy bullets had pierced his neck and right arm. At the same time, on the left wing the crossfire of the enemy knocked out Tautvydas, a combatant of the third battle section.

Although their leader had been put out of action, our men did not scatter. With coordinated fire, they mowed down the ceaselessly advancing Russians. In the interim, documents were being collected in the camp and preparations made for evacuation. Orders were received to retreat through the valley, and after about half-an-hour, the enemy's fire started to taper off. The Communist survivors and wounded began to retreat in panic. The battle was won.

Now, the men of the camp were divided into three groups.

Armed Resistance Prepares Cadres 215

Dispersing into smaller bands, we withdrew and went our separate ways. It was out of the question, of course, to continue the training program. There was little doubt that the Russians would return the next day with sizable forces.

Further withdrawal took place without significant incident.

We encountered a detachment of Russians at one point, but they soon retreated when we opened fire on them. As we assembled for evening prayers, we paid tribute to our comrades-in-arms, Tautvydas and Sargas, who only a few hours before were snatched from our midst. Intently gripping our weapons we repeated the words of our oath to continue the struggle for freedom and justice for all our people.

CHAPTER XXXIX

UNDERGROUND OF DEATH

When we were unable to carry out our second training programs we returned to our everyday routine. Meanwhile, the Russians had sent heavy reinforcements to their nearest support forces. Day and night they combed the woods and farms, and with rods two yards long they tested the ground, searching for enemy soldiers.

It was during this unsettled period that I met Anbo, to whom I had to transfer my responsibilities as commander of the Birutė unit on September 20. After briefing him on his duties, I detached my insignia of office and pinned it on his shoulder. Anbo sighed deeply. "It's easy for you, stars, to glisten," he said, touching the insignia. "If only our murderous duties were as easy!"

The mood of us all was decidedly depressed. A kind of presentiment, which we understood only four days later, pursued us. It had seemed to me that perhaps I was sad because I would be leaving my former staff officials whom I had come to love as though they were my own blood brothers. Such a feeling was normal, under the circumstances. For no work had been too difficult for any of them. Everything had been carried out with integrity and devotion and because of this diligence and camaraderie, our unit had won first place in the district orders.

Where I was now living, intensive house searches were underway. For this reason, my former unit men, following their meeting, invited me to go with them. I refused to seek security for myself, leaving other friends in danger. Moreover, I felt that my automatic could, at a critical moment, help to "soften" the crisis. It turned out that this decision on my part proved to be what many call "luck." Four days later, a terrible calamity occurred.

Underground Death 217

Scarcely had day dawned on September 24 than enemy forces from Marijampolė stormed the Birutė staff headquarters where the new unit commander, Anbo, with two staff officers and three guests, including the district chaplain, were staying. The MGB soldiers prowled about the neighborhood, then turned into Daunora's farm, crowding together in the house. They were very cold and seemed interested in nothing. But their objective was to pursue our combatants into the shelter, which they had discovered earlier, so it would be possible to destroy them all at once.

The shelter in question, where some three or four staff members worked, prayed and rested, was not very safe. It had not been possible to excavate it deeply because of the water level. But a good feature of this underground shelter was that it was near Veiveriai hamlet, with a sizable group of enemy troops. For some time, the Communists did not suspect that the staff of an armed resistance detachment was so close to them. From the shelter, on quiet evenings, we could hear Communist shouts, arms practice and songs, and we could observe the direction of their movements. On top of the shelter, to hide it, was a summer "kitchen" made of boards which we used to creep into during the day.

These headquarters of ours were discovered by the Russians quite accidentally. One evening, when two *stribs* were returning from a visit to girlfriends, they entered Daunora's farm to steal some food. While they were looking for eggs in a potato storehouse not far from the shelter, they could hear the clicking of a typewriter. At that time the entrance to the shelter was open and the *stribs* could see it. They hurried back to the MGB headquarters and reported what they had seen. But the Russians did not immediately attack the shelter. Through their agents, they arranged to keep watch until the shelter was full. They waited in a room of the farmhouse, pretending to be on a routine mission so our combatants would have time to assemble in the shelter. An hour and a half later additional MGB detachments arrived at Daunora's farm. At that time those inside the house emerged and posted machine guns around the entire farm. Our earliest presentiment of misfortune now became clear.

The Communists seized the owner of the farm, an eighty-year-old veteran, dragged him to the site of the shelter, and ordered him to dig. At first, the old farmer tried to defend

218 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

himself by insisting that he knew of no shelter, but the Russians began to beat him and repeated their command to dig. When the soil began to crumble, the resistance men underground discharged several bursts of automatic fire. No one would volunteer to dig after that, but the Russians proceeded to tear down the summer kitchen boards.

The situation of our partisans was now hopeless and they began to destroy documents and records so that they would not fall into the enemy's hands. Papers were burned and typewriters and duplicating machines were smashed. Even boots were cut and slashed so the enemy could not use them.

Meanwhile, not daring to dig further into the shelter, the Russians decided to take it with grenades. Piling the grenades in heaps of seven, they ran one after the other past the shelter and hurled the grenades at it. To avoid injuring themselves from their own grenades, they dropped to the ground, as they tossed them. Others, with machine guns maintained a crossfire above the shelter to prevent anyone from attempting to crawl out. Meanwhile, our men inside the shelter prepared themselves for death. They prayed and sang songs and hymns. But their voices could scarcely be heard outside above the clatter of machine guns and sounds of Russian blasphemy.

Finally, the grenades ripped a hole in the surface of the shelter. Amidst dense clouds of smoke and dust, Survila and Vaidila appeared on the shelter surface, firing their automatic rifles. Our remaining comrades inside blew themselves up with grenades.

Not taking any chances, the Russians kept lobbing grenades at a hole in the roof of the shelter for about half an hour. Finally, when they felt certain that no one remained alive inside, they forced the old farmer into the shelter to remove the remains of the bodies and any documents that might still be intact.

Following the destruction of the staff bunker, the Russians next tried to wash the bodies and stitch on the detached parts, especially with regard to the faces, and then stuff the corpses into uniforms. The corpses were then photographed and taken to Veiveriai where they were deposited near the former vicar's hen house. Here, the Communist activists assembled with cries of glee. They then rounded up suspects, brought them to where the corpses lay, and with blows and obscenities, demanded that they reveal the

Underground Death 219

names of living relatives of the dead partisans. But it was out of the question for anyone to identify them, even if they wanted to, because two of the corpses had their skulls split open and not even a father could have recognized his own son among them.

A month later, five of our men visited the dreadful place where our shelter had been destroyed. There, in the place of the summer kitchen, posts and timber ends wrecked by bullets jutted out of the ground, the earth was heaped into hillocks by grenades, and bloodstained scraps of paper lay scattered about, mingled with rusted parts of typewriters and shreds of clothing. Inside were similar evidences of devastation. Among these were a lacerated Vytis or Knight, the Lithuanian State emblem, and pieces of a rosary which the partisans used in their evening prayers.

CHAPTER XL

“DEVIL’S DOZEN” SAVES SITUATION

At the end of September we had to carry out an assignment not far from Kaunas. Since the matter was urgent, our group found itself in that region without having been able to notify the local partisan detachment. We were therefore obliged to spend the day without shelter. To escape Communist detection, we called at a small wayside farm. Conversing indoors with the owner, we learned that he was a Soviet functionary, the regional secretary. From early morning, he had been rummaging through papers. One minute, he would scribble something on them, and the next, he would erase it and begin again. Apparently still dissatisfied with his efforts, he would scold his wife and children to give vent to his anger.

The situation appealed to our sense of humor, and one of us remarked teasingly, “That isn’t a plough you’re using, Dad, it’s a pencil.”

After breakfast, the secretary packed some of the papers he had been going through into his portfolio and got ready to leave. As was our custom in such cases we told him that he would have to remain with us until we set out first. To this, he replied, “Tomorrow morning I have to deliver the completed sowing plan to the commune. But so far I’ve only had time to register a third of the region. I must go or I’ll find myself behind bars!” The poor fellow implored us not to detain him any longer.

With a reassuring gesture, I again interposed to halt his exit. “Don’t worry! We can’t let you go so easily. Let us have your papers — we’ll all sit at the table together and in a couple of hours, your plan will be completed!”

The secretary’s anxious face relaxed and he heaved a sigh of relief. “Indeed, men, if you lend a hand you can really save

“Devil’s Dozen” Saves Situation 221

me. And why should I drag my feet through the mud anyway? All the farmers have already sown or are sowing whatever grain they can. So most likely, nobody in the commune will bother to verify how much has or has not been sown according to these papers.” Thus the secretary agreed to our proposal.

Skirgaila and I sat down at the table to work. The secretary explained the papers to us and answered our questions. We understood now how the plan was to be fulfilled. We decided that we could improve upon it by a baker’s dozen, i.e., by thirteen percent more than the commune had counted on in its plan. We were also able to locate the figures that were needed among the secretary’s disordered papers.

After the two proposed hours, the seed corn was registered. We checked the total number of hectares twice with the abacus. Then we handed the completed work to the secretary.

“Here you are,” I said. “Take it away. You won’t find another such plan in the entire region! And notice that the plan has exceeded the previous one by a full thirteen percent! Only don’t brag about who set it up because then you really *will* land behind bars!” I warned.

The secretary was truly delighted and then attempted to justify himself to us. “You see, I’m still a novice. It’s only the second month they’ve included me. Previously, I didn’t bother my head about the plans they jabbered about at their meeting. I sowed as much as I could of what available land I had. But now, there are hundreds of plans — hundreds of projects, until you could drown yourself in all these papers! According to them, not even a hen ought to lay its eggs without a plan!” The secretary now complained openly as he stuffed the papers into his portfolio.

We understood perfectly well his annoyance at this mountain of Soviet bureaucracy. In every sphere of life there were innumerable plans that had no possibility of being effectively carried out.

Plans were also formulated to bolster Soviet propaganda and improve the Soviet image in the eyes of the world. Such planning was considered “progress,” despite the fact that every branch of production in Lithuania had declined two- to fivefold from the prewar level. Now, we partisans had contributed toward fooling the Russians by registering the farmers’ seed corn according to the Communists’ “sacred”

222 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

plan! For this “contribution” the secretary had entertained us hospitably and then thanked us as we departed.

About this time, resistance activity in Kaunas and its vicinity had experienced a number of jolts. Mindaugas, the Birutė staff functionary, had been given the job of confiscating food products from certain food manufacturing concerns. He carried out this operation quite successfully. On September 15, while looking after a means of transport in Rotušė Street, he came upon a so-called *užsėdimas* - *zasiada* (the name given to arrests which the political policy carry out in the apartment of a suspected person). Working diligently, Mindaugas immobilized five MGB officials and then liberated dozens of arrested partisans. As he was being pursued down unfamiliar streets by a crowd, he cut through several yards and eventually reached his comrades. Enlisting the help of a combatant named Vytenis, he hurried to warn all liaison points that had any kind of contact with the posts in Rotušė Street, about what had happened. On Žaliakalnis, Green Hill, they came across another *zasiada* and again had to deal with the matter. An important MVD functionary who tried to arrest them was shot.

The shot officials were evidently well-known antagonists of the Lithuanian people because they were interred with full Communist pomp and ceremony. Their red coffins were escorted by several military bands and a crowd of uniformed Russians, and in front of the coffins, on red cushions were borne the Communist orders of the slain officials. As indicated one of those slain near the City Hall was Mayor Kirov, the deputy chief of the Kaunas MGB.

After the assassination of these MGB officials, a mammoth investigation of documents and suspected persons began in Kaunas. The Russians were now exceedingly cautious. The secret police would rarely attempt to interrogate suspicious persons or check their documents until they had first knocked their victims down and safely handcuffed them. Those who suffered most were cyclists because it is anything but pleasant to be knocked off a bicycle. Nevertheless, during this exhaustive search not a single partisan fell into Russian hands.

Calamities occurred most frequently when our men were unable to defend themselves. Such a calamity overtook five of the Birutė unit men at the end of September when they were

Devil's Dozen" Saves Situation 223

trapped in a shelter on the farm of Major Dovydaitis. The shelter had been excavated under a barn and when the MGB soldiers burned the barn, death was inescapable for the combatants. After the Communists attempted to identify the corpses by using confiscated photograph albums, they resorted to every imaginable method of sadistically desecrating them.

CHAPTER XLI

“STAND NOT UPON THE ORDER OF YOUR GOING”

Because of constant collision with the Russians, Lithuanian farmers were quite familiar with the misery of the Soviet Union workers. They exerted every effort, therefore, to remain on their own farms which, according to Communist law, already belonged to the State. And the State was attempting in every way to drive them into the *kolkhozes* (collective farms.) With this threat, Soviet officials burdened our farmers with unendurable obligations of various kinds. They did not allow them to buy agricultural implements and fertilizers and instead of organized State farms (*sovkhos*), *kolkhoz* and group farms in order to psychologically prepare the farmers to collective life and work. Psychological and economic pressures on the farmers included various privileges for the newly created *sovkhoses* and *kolkhozes*. They were exempted from State taxes and other obligations; they were supplied with fertilizers and even seed, and machine-tractor stations served them.

Despite Soviet official pressure and the economic privileges offered in the *kolkhozes*, the Russians failed to break the will of our farmers or to deceive them. By the end of 1947 there were still very few collective farms in Lithuania. Unable to defeat our farmers by economic pressure, the Russians resorted to other methods — deportation of the farmers and their families to Siberia, and bringing colonists from Russia to their deserted farms. This collectivization and colonization of Lithuanian agriculture meant the final phase of the Soviet Union's undeclared war against Lithuania.

The armed resistance movement had to take up the fight against colonization, especially in the provinces. It was impossible to do this in the towns, where a good many

“Stand Not Upon the Order Of Your Going” 225

Russians had been brought and were protected by the army and police forces (MVD and MGB detachments). For this reason, the resistance movement against Lithuanian colonization was fought mostly in the provinces where conditions for the struggle were more favorable.

In the Tauras district, the Aušrutai *kolkhoz* had already been organized. The idea for its establishment had been prompted by several empty farms which had lost their owners in 1941 when some Germans were repatriated from Lithuania. Later, the Russian Communists exiled or imprisoned the owners of other farms which were to be included in the projected *kolkhoz*.

After that, fifteen families were brought from Russia to operate the empty farms. Several of these *kolkhozniks* had been indoctrinated in the principles of Russian imperialism and Communism. They constituted the regional “authorities” and were MVD agents who were to help the occupational government in its fight against Lithuanian farmers throughout the Pilviškis commune. This was one of the reasons why the armed resistance movement resolved to liquidate this *kolkhoz*.

This question had already been discussed at a summer meeting of the Tauras district commanders. They all agreed that collectivization and colonization must be inflexibly opposed. Opinions differed only on the methods to be used. It was my view, along with that of two other combatants, that in this anti-colonization action, force should be prevented. Others believed that better successes would be achieved if the operation was carried out with greater force and speed. Since these were the views of the majority, they prevailed.

Liquidation of the colonists’ *kolkhoz* was to take place on November 12. The operation was to be carried out by Šturmas, the Žalgiris unit commander, with the help of seventy men. Two days before this, however, an attack had to be made on the State alcohol distillery at the Antanavas *sovkhos*. The primary purpose of this attack was to pin down the Russian forces so that it would be easier to liquidate the Aušrutai *kolkhoz*.

While we were preparing for the assault on this *kolkhoz*, the Russians were registered and classified according to the nature of their work. The decision was made to attack eight homesteads where the most malevolent Communist activists

226 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

were living. From the date collected by our intelligence, it was known that there were about thirty-five armed Russians at the *kolkhoz*, and they had two machine guns.

First of all, appeals were to be issued in the Lithuanian and Russian languages. In these appeals the armed resistance command ordered all newly settled colonists, or those to be settled, to remove themselves, of their own free will, from Lithuania within a month. A simultaneous warning was issued that colonists failing to obey this order would be punished by partisans according to their laws. This order did not apply to those Russians whose activities were not injurious to the Lithuanian people.

On the evening of November 9, about seventy Žalgiris men, with several staff combatants led by Šturmas surrounded the spirits distillery in the Antanavas *sovkhos*. Some of them cut off the roads to the estate while others penetrated its center. In two hours our men had loaded all the distilled spirits (200 litres in every keg), into two *sovkhos* trucks, collected a certain number of cows, and departed. Since the spirits could not be placed in the subsequent means of transportation, the kegs were smashed and the spirits spilled. After that, the guards were removed and all the partisans fled.

The next day, there were not only no spirits but a labor force was lacking at the *sovkhos* center. The workers had obviously taken advantage of the attack and were lying in their beds dead drunk after an orgy of distilled and raw alcohol. Naturally, a hunt for the vanished goodies began at once and lasted several days. In the Kazlų Rūda forests, dogs, Russians and *strib*s competed with one another on the scent. MVD and MGB troops scoured the roads, searching for the hidden alcohol. And it was well worth searching for; every keg of 200 litres cost about 50,000 rubles because on the black market the price of 25 chervontsi or 250 rubles were paid for one litre of spirits. They succeeded in discovering one keg which was somewhat leaky. Then, of course, the Russians availed themselves of the opportunity and drank perhaps even more than the Antanavas' workers had, because they returned to the Jankai MGB headquarters with their noses ploughing the earth. Our men now had a splendid chance to attack them, but they refrained because they were after bigger game—the Aušrutai *kolkhoz*.

On November 11, when the neighboring MGB

detachments were looking for the remaining spirits in the Kazlų Rūda forests, our men occupied all the roads to the colonists' *kolkhoz*. In the evening, each of eight groups surrounded the farms assigned to them. The objective was to disarm the colonists without shedding blood if possible, but at the same time to discourage them to such an extent that the very next day they would not only leave the *kolkhoz* but would also leave Lithuania. However, on these eight farms the Russians began to resist and shoot at our men through the windows. The partisans, of course, returned the fire, forcing the Russians who were living in wooden houses to capitulate. It was only a matter of time before the stone houses from which the Russians had been defending themselves with machine guns were captured. Having silenced all resistance, the partisans distributed a generous crop of their warning notices and withdrew.

The next day a number of coffins were carried in the direction of Pilviškis from the Aušrutai *kolkhoz*. And the colonists' families, with their goods and chattels loaded into carts, left before dawn. En route they inquired from chance wayfarers which were the safest and nearest roads to Russia.

That these two armed resistance movements had made a deep impression on the Communists was shown by what happened to Justas Paleckis, the puppet “President” of occupied Lithuania. This father of the Lithuanian collaborationists had come to Šakiai to present Soviet orders of “honor” to certain mothers. Suddenly the MGB had intercepted a rumor that a hundred partisans were marching in the direction of Šakiai. Forgetting that he had not yet distributed the “orders,” Paleckis summoned three Russian armored cars and left for a more secure place.

CHAPTER XLII

JOURNEY TO ROUSE THE WEST

It was a beautiful December night. Kardas and I were walking over the plains in the direction of N. liaison point. We were encumbered with cartridge supplies and grenades, pistols, partisan press matter and correspondence for abroad dragged down our belts. There was a long letter from Lithuanian Catholics addressed to the Holy Father. After an account of the persecution and torture of believers, the letter ended with the following words:

“From all sides we are surrounded by the occupying forces. We cannot much longer endure the present oppression. We shall perish together with our belief, our Catholic traditions and customs, and even our own language. When such dark thoughts assail us we are reminded of the Arab and Turkish hordes, when great Romans like Urban II and Innocent III arose. The Eastern hordes of today do not fear diplomatic words. Therefore, we often ask: where are the civilized peoples of the world? Where have millions of Christians disappeared? Is there no longer justice and love left in the world? Are there no more great men? Don't they know that their Christian sisters and brothers are being exterminated? Are world Christians tranquilly slumbering in the vain belief that the Communist hordes, after they have exterminated us, will stop and go back? We, who know them better than anybody else, say 'No!' They will not stop. Already, now, a hundred million people of various nations are forging weapons night and day to subjugate the world. The decisive hour of battle will soon arrive. And then woe to the slumberers because they do not see that Christianity and culture are in mortal peril. Therefore, they should not fall asleep on atomic energy. Soon, Communism will possess no less effective weapons. We implore Your Holiness to say

publicly a few words of consolation to the Lithuanian people. We earnestly beg Your Holiness to be so good as to transmit in some way or other our complaint to the United Nations so that the nations' leaders may be warned and put an end to our torments. Holy Father, we have hope of being heard. We have suffered sorely for our sacred belief and for our loyalty to the Holy Sea of the Apostles. We therefore hope for Your Holiness' help. We are already in agony but before dying we would hope to hear Your Holiness' fatherly words and the consolation of the Catholic world, with the hope that our children will no longer suffer spiritual slavery. We believe that your potent word will arouse from lethargy the leaders of the peoples who love freedom."

So we were going on a very dangerous journey to arouse the West from its lethargy. We were going in the same direction from time to time glancing at our watches and compass. We avoided crossroads and unfamiliar farms. On our way an awakened swan would rise from the bushes or a frightened hare would dart across our path. Suddenly, from afar, the clatter of Russian machine guns and German automatic fire were heard and rockets flashed vividly in the sky. Our comrades had apparently run into some stealthily lurking enemy. With redoubled caution, we moved ahead.

In half an hour we reached the farm meeting-place. Kardas knocked at the window in the prearranged manner, while I stood to one side with my weapon in my hands, prepared for any eventuality. After a while the door was opened, and we both silently entered.

Hardly had we had time to discard some of our clothing than our host produced a package sent here from the district staff. Among various letters and documents there was the district commander's order with the BDPS resolution according to which I was to be sent abroad on various resistance tasks. It was stated in the letter that the journey had to take place during the darkest night of December. Although it had not been unknown to me, the reminder in writing of this serious task compelled me once more to make up my mind. At this time our host's attractive daughter prepared refreshments. But we were unable to be entertained very long because it was necessary to proceed farther with this difficult assignment. The assignment fell to me when other partisans were unable to carry it out. In September, having fallen into

230 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

difficulty with the Russians, they had been forced to blow themselves up.

At the same time, the district commander had sent an order to Mindaugas. In a few days he had to transfer his duties to another combatant and get ready to accompany me on the journey abroad. After three days we met at a prearranged spot to prepare our journey program, choose volunteer guides and receive the district commander's confirmation.

On the night of December 15, in the region of the Tauras district staff, leave-taking was held with the *dipysiuks* (the name given to men sent abroad on special missions). Some thirty-six combatants gathered for the farewell banquet. Among them, a member of the resistance center (BDPS), Taučius, and representatives of battling Latvia arrived. Toasts to a united fraternal struggle and to the BDPS command were short". It was necessary to hurry so that there would be time to hide our tracks. Besides, during the night we had to cover some twenty-five miles in the direction of Sintautai.

When we had covered about half our journey, we stopped at a farm to eat and rest. Suddenly, the host's son, who had undertaken to keep guard outside, reported that some men were prowling through the garden. It was too late to escape through the door so we retreated to another room, opened a window, prepared our weapons and waited for the prowlers to approach the house. The men in question began to knock at the window, and we realized then that they were not Russians but our own people. It turned out that they had come across our footprints in the snow and since they knew the direction we would be travelling, they followed them until they reached our hiding place.

The new arrivals were ready to accompany us. We were now a group of seven well-armed men. We walked in the direction of Sakiai through fields which had not been tilled for several years and were overgrown with tall weeds. At last we reached the farm where the Žalgiris men were waiting for us. The room was crowded with combatants who narrated their adventures under a dim light. Our companions soon joined them.

Among these adventures, that of Perkūnas was particularly interesting. The past week, after confiscation of the *sovkhos* property, he was resting in a barn, well-covered with straw. Some Russians who were very fond of searching

Journey To Rouse the West 231

barns, turned up, assembled the neighbors, and ordered them to turn out the straw from the barn into the yard. Perkūnas thought that his last hour had come, but before dying he resolved to sell his life dearly. However, as luck would have it, at the place where he was hiding in the straw a lazy or comfort-loving Russian chanced to be in charge, and instead of shifting the straw with a pitchfork, he simply ordered the men to get hold of heaps of straw and trundle it from the barn. That was just what Perkūnas wanted. He was so well-buried in the straw that he was rolled out of the barn in it and nobody noticed!

When we had rested somewhat, the command was heard: "Finish! Get ready to march!" About thirty men set off in double file through the fields of the Sintautai neighborhood. At one village another group of partisans was to meet us, but it had not yet arrived. We had to wait two days, which were not spent in vain. During that time we made camouflage overcoats from white tablecloths. When Butautas, Kariūnas and Feliksas finally arrived, the other partisans returned, and we continued on. Before long, our group of six reached the former Lithuanian-German frontier.

CHAPTER XLIII

“ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION”

At a place where the Sesupe river was not frozen over, we found a boat and rowed over to the other side to Prussia. We found everything smashed, shattered, demolished and defiled. Even the frames of windows and doors had “on reparations account” been wrecked and burned by the Russians. After inspecting these signs of Communist “culture,” we advanced across East Prussian fields.

This time, we decided to break through the “Iron Curtain” not via the Lithuanian-Polish border but between East Prussia and Poland, because we thought that the Russians would not guard it as closely. Therefore, we were now proceeding through the dead land which Germans call East Prussia but we call simply “Prussia.” Here, formerly dwelt not Germans but Lithuanians and the Prussians who belonged to the same Lithuanian family. While journeying through this land we had an opportunity to meditate on the fate of its peoples and nations over the centuries. How strange that the children of the children who had once conquered this Lithuanian land with fire and sword had now encountered a similar fate! Having conquered the Prussians, the German Order of the Sword treated this Lithuanian tribe as cruelly as the Communists were treating us today. But the Germans were more astute than the Russians. They gradually changed their tactics and allowed the Lithuanians to survive. Thus, here in Prussia the first Lithuanian books were printed. Here, the greatest Lithuanian poet of the eighteenth century, Donelaitis, first expressed himself. Here, the first Lithuanian newspapers were published. But in this relative freedom and economic well-being, the Lithuanians slumbered and surrendered more and more to the cultural policy of Germanization. Although at the beginning of the twentieth

century the Lithuanians here elected their own representatives to the Prussian Landtag and the German Reichstag, the Germans were dominating power. Then came Hitler to deal the Lithuanians a final blow. His underlings began to send Lithuanians to concentration camps and to eradicate from the map all Lithuanian place names, and when the Russians came, the Lithuanians fled to the West. Now, German might in this Lithuanian land had been shattered by Russian power.

Here, where a few years ago fertile fields were drained, were now growing weeds the height of a man and the thickness of a finger. As we passed through them they tore our clothes and scratched our faces. On our way, squealing boars, or perhaps pigs that had become wild and which had previously been housed in Lithuanian or German stables, dashed out from the undergrowth. There were no human footprints on the road. In the nocturnal darkness not a glimmer of light was visible. From time to time we passed through the remains of farms, where fire-blackened rafters or pieces of timber swayed in the wind, mournfully creaked and groaned. At crossroads lay smashed road signs, and our route was generally strewn with the debris of war. This formerly flourishing region might now be appropriately called dead earth. But in our abandoned homeland, too, there were similar places where farms had been ruined and the fields were thickly overgrown with weeds.

We made our way with difficulty. Heavy packs of food supplies, anti-tank grenades, and consignments for foreign destinations weighed heavily on our backs. Cartridge pouches dragged down our belts. We were tired and sat in the snow to rest. One longed to find some shelter, however humble, where we might stay a while. But there was not a living thing around us. After we had rested in the snow and checked our itinerary on the map, we resumed our journey. We trudged through the fields because we could not find suitable roads. In several places we came to deep ditches about three yards wide, covered over with only a thin crust of ice. We traversed them by making temporary foot-bridges; but from one of such improvised crossings, Kariūnas' foot slipped and he plunged up to his ears in the icy water. At Mindaugas' suggestion we decided to stop at the very first ruin of a homestead that we might come across and there light a fire, dry our clothes, and eat something.

Some two or three miles farther on, we at last discovered a

234 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

convenient place. In the cellar of a destroyed house we lit a fire and began to dry ourselves. From snow and raspberry juice we brewed some tea. According to our home recipe this was the best medicine against a chill. Mindaugas extracted from his pack a chunk of Lithuanian bacon. We even found a little "fire water." In this manner we hoped to protect ourselves from fatigue and get some sleep because by dawn we had to cover a good stretch of road. And our meal really did help. Butautas and I even ventured to sing a little ditty in this wilderness where our brother Lithuanians of old used to sing. Here, the rest was so pleasant that we were afraid of growing sluggish and overconfident.

Finally we got up to leave. But our strength was not equal to the remaining six miles without additional rest. We found it necessary now to squat in the snow every two miles or so. It was evident that our last days spent in Lithuania had weakened us considerably and toward morning, we could hardly drag one foot after the other. But we finally managed to reach Viliūnai. At the end of the road we came across human footprints. To continue farther in the same direction was dangerous, we knew. For we might meet an inhabitant of this wilderness and, seeing our white overcoats, he would realize that we were not Russians and might take us for American parachutists. Therefore, on reaching an intersection of three roads we turned to the right, arrived at some sort of cemetery, and stopped in the ruins of an estate.

Here, we decided to spend the day. It was a good choice—we actually found some conveniences. For instance, near one of the chimneys we found a metal ladder which the Russians had not yet dismantled "on account of reparations." Making use of this we arranged a look-out post on top of the chimney. From here we had an excellent view in all directions. No living creature could approach within a mile without being observed.

Besides his specific duties the guard had to brew tea and cook sausages and see to it that the clothing of his sleeping comrades did not catch fire. Having found some pieces of board we even repaired the windows on one side of the room to keep the wind out. In the yard we came across a keg of gasoline from which the Ivans had made a little stove. We dragged it into the room, affixed a chimney and arranged "beds" of boards. Then we wrapped ourselves in our clothes and lay

down to sleep. The smoke from our improvised stove was well concealed by a big oak tree near the house.

The day passed relatively quietly, although to the east there were indications of life; the barking of dogs was heard and smoke rose from two places. We surmised that Stalupėnai must be in that direction. About 3 P.M. the guard also observed a truck with three men driving along the road. Most likely they were Russian soldiers who were scouring the country for war loot. We got up toward evening feeling rested. As a memento we took a few snapshots, then cleaned our weapons and, when it was dark, set out on the next stage of our journey.

The route had become more difficult because it had been snowing all day. Leaving Stalupėnai on our right, we crossed the highway and descended the slope. Here, unfortunately, we came upon a swamp with wide ditches. The ice was very thin. In order not to break it Šarūnas first lay on his stomach and then crawled to the other side of the ditch. The rest of us followed his example. But a few hundred feet ahead, there was a bigger obstacle, a stream. On this, the ice was even thinner and in places there was open water. Having found a large stretch of ice, Šarūnas again lay on his stomach and began to crawl to the other side. This time, however, things turned out worse, for not far from the bank the ice gave way and our comrade plunged into the water. We could do nothing to help him, but he nonchalantly scrambled to the bank and then helped *us*. He found several hayricks set up, stripped them and made a "bridge" from the boards over which we crossed the stream, dry-footed, only Šarūnas himself was soaked to the skin. Our first concern was to dry him off because it was bitterly cold. His clothing stiffened and his weapons froze. Only several miles farther on did we find a suitable cellar where we again lit a fire, and, undressing our comrade, began to dry his clothes.

Two hours later, we set out again. We followed a good part of the route along the highway until we came to a hamlet where we saw houses in which lights glimmered. We turned left, crossed the railway line and gathered in some wrecked buildings to rest. A cold east wind began to blow, and we started off again. At dawn we began looking for a convenient hide-out. We hoped to find a Lithuanian or German family, but our efforts were in vain. Whenever we cautiously stole up to a

236 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

window from which the light of a kerosene oil-lamp shone, we heard from within the sounds of Russian words. At last we found some large hayricks and decided to spend the day in them.

We each dug a hole in one but this kind of makeshift bed was difficult to arrange. The hay had become tightly stuck together and our hands were numb from the biting east wind. We packed the heaps of hay into some sort of order and entrenched them with snow so that nobody would notice them. Then we crawled into our "beds." We made some additional adjustments, leaving small holes in the sides for observation. We decided to remain in the ricks all day so that the nearby *kolkhoz* inhabitants would not spot us. Our enemies did not frighten us very much here. If they should happen to come across us, we did not expect that their forces would be numerous, and we would be prepared to deal with them. Nevertheless, as a precaution we lay down without removing our boots. Our soaked puttees congealed around our legs and our frozen boots rattled like bones.

When it began to grow dark we slipped out of our resting places, our teeth chattering with the cold. A piercing wind was blowing from the northeast. Each of us now set about repairing the holes in our "beds" and by the time we had fixed up everything we felt somewhat warmer. Although we had no appetite we ate a snack and began our new night march. About a mile farther we reached the highway. We decided to use it even though we saw several sleighs and vehicle tracks on it. It was important for us to make good time because we had to cover about fifteen miles by midnight in order to reach Rominta (German Heideminde).

As we approached Poland, we noticed a light in a house. Perhaps here, we thought, there might be some non-Russian family, and decided to make sure. Four of our men hid in a ditch while Šarūnas and I crept up to the house and looked through a window. But there were no Lithuanians or Germans inside. The people bustling about in the room were very unkempt and the children were sitting on the dirty floor. This was a family of Russian *kolkhoz* workers. We had begun to move away from the windows when we heard Mindaugas' voice call out in Russian: "Stop! Where are you going?" It seemed that our other comrades had not been sufficiently observant and had not noticed that Russian workers were approaching

and were about to enter the house. We pretended to be Red Army men and went in with them. Chatting in a friendly manner, we tried to find out what we wanted to know about the new Polish-East Prussian frontier. Only three of us talked because the others could not speak Russian fluently. We learned that the nearest *kolkhoz* was called Kirov to which the occupants of this house belonged. We also learned that there were other *kolkhozes* further on. There was even said to be a cooperative. We feigned interest in it because we wanted to buy some cigarettes.

Although we took leave of the Russians in a friendly manner we nevertheless had to put them off our scent. However dull-witted these serfs of the Communist system were, they still might have recognized that we were not Russians and report us to the police. We therefore retraced our steps about a mile, took advantage of the bushes to hide our footprints and then returned past the same houses, although turning off about five furlongs to the west. After traveling on a little farther, we came across the *kolkhoz* center. From the trampled snow we assumed that more people were living here, so we turned off the highway and moved towards some woods, the outline of which darkened the horizon.

We approached the woods with great caution, advancing in battle order with our weapons held ready for firing. It was indescribably dark and snow from the branches of pine and fir trees bent under its weight poured down our collars. We had to protect our eyes constantly with our hands, and did not dare to use our flashlights for fear of being seen. We proceeded this way for several miles as we pushed ahead into the depths of the forest. Since we had not noticed any human footprints we ventured to light a fire. Brushing aside the snow, we squatted around the glowing flames for a pleasant rest. Our faces, sharpened from the bitter wind, and our benumbed hands revived in the welcome heat. With the help of a map, we had scheduled another area as our stopping-off point. It was beyond the roads shown on the map and we anticipated that it was about a mile farther ahead. Again, we set out.

We soon encountered various obstacles left from the Communist-Nazi conflict. Our path was impeded by wire entanglements, heaped masses of timber which littered the ground and deep anti-tank ditches that intersected the route. We had to surmount these obstacles, inch by inch, while about

238 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

us a frigid snowstorm raged. Nevertheless, when we reached our destination we were grateful for that unfriendly blizzard because the snow had speedily obliterated our tracks. Now, security was more important to us than a sheltered area — we were approaching the frontier.

CHAPTER XLIV

BLOOD FLOWS AT THE IRON CURTAIN

The morning of December 21 dawned. It was Sunday. We all set about looking for kindling and firewood that would emit the least amount of smoke. After eating, we plucked fir branches to make a bed, placed our bundles beneath our heads and, with our steel “sweethearts” in our embrace, tried to sleep. One of us was constantly on watch and in addition to our security, he was also responsible for the preparation of food.

We arose from our bearlike lairs after midday. Although it was past the hour for Mass, we wished to pray and invoke the Lord’s blessing on our mission and on the struggle of our people against the godless tyrant.

Being Sunday, our dinner was more palatable than usual. Instead of boiled sausages there were fried ones on the cover of our kettle. And no less tempting were the roasted *tomtits* with onions. To improve the tea we infused it with some drops of aniseed, while Mindaugas offered us a special drink to relieve our fatigue. After we had gulped down the universal beverage, vodka, we began to prepare and clean our weapons. Generally, when partisans set about this task, a scrap ensues. In order to avoid this, we asked one another what he had dreamed. Feliksas’ dreams were the most vivid, although they were not optimistic.

According to our schedule, we were now to set out for the Rominta river, near the town of the same name. For the Russo-Polish frontier was supposed to be in this vicinity.

“Help, Heaven,” I remarked quietly and ordered Mindaugas to begin the march. Now, after noon, a deathlike silence reigned. The fallen snow had covered over the tracks of man and beast. Only in one place in the forest did we find signs of Russian activity. Here and there were disorderly piles of firewood and under one’s feet spread scattered tree branches.

240 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

Timber had evidently been felled here. Fortunately for us, today was Sunday and a “going-out” day for the Communists. They would not trouble us today.

After covering several miles we came upon the remains of a former military camp. In the shade of young fir trees rows of wooden crosses were assembled. This had to be a German military cemetery because the Russians, we knew, shunned the crosses and desecrated them.

After passing the camp, we turned right and then reached the highway. There, we detected traces of trucks and ski scouts. Mindaugas was convinced that this was the frontier zone. The unusual quiet, along with the tracks of ski scouts, confirmed his belief.

From the highway, we again turned right where we expected to reach the critical spot — Rominta river and its bridge. Now, we proceeded through a ravine enclosed on both sides by hills. And further we came to trenches and barbed wire entanglements.

In this dangerous zone we marched in double file, holding our weapons ready for action. Although we were able to leap over the trenches, we were slowed down by the barbed-wire entanglements. To our left we ran a path which led to a bridge. We had to hug the side of the path and then pass over the bridge at the last moment because we might encounter MVD patrols on the path itself. This mistake cost us dearly for we were seen by Russian ski troops who were proceeding along the highway. As though stunned with disbelief they stopped and watched us for a long time as we withdrew into the bushes. Then they hurried off, apparently to summon help. What were we to do? Mindaugas took hold of himself, however, and holding the map in one hand and his weapon in the other he went ahead to the bridge. The rest of us followed, and the last in line wiped away our footprints, with a branch from a fir tree.

We reached a narrow path to the bridge and about a hundred yards ahead we could see two Russian sentries. Although they were uneasily glancing around, our white overcoats concealed us. We caught them unaware and instead of a command, automatic shots were heard and the Communist sentries reeled and collapsed. Keeping a distance of eight yards between us, Mindaugas and I had already rushed across the bridge and were lying down on the other side of the road. Several feet of the banks of the river had been washed away,

affording us good cover. Butautas crept over the bridge. Just as they were in the middle, the Russians opened fire, and we fired back. Mindaugas and I, from our side of the stream, and Feliksas and Kariūnas, from theirs, shot at a Russian detachment of fifteen men. Our combined fire rendered fruitless the MVD leader's command, "Forward!"

Mindaugas and I kept firing repeatedly, as we attempted to withdraw so that we could yield our positions to Šarūnas and Butautas. The latter were shooting from kneeling positions on the bridge while Feliksas and Kariūnas were firing from the trenches. The Russians, their eyes blazing, rushed headlong into our fire despite the fact that their comrades were dropping, one after the other.

Suddenly, Butautas dashed across the bridge and was caught by the Russians' firing. The next moment, he fell to the ground, lifeless. Šarūnas, who was crawling after him, confirmed mortal bullet wounds in Butautas' chest and head. He threw Butautas' automatic into the river and then crawled the rest of the way over the bridge. The Russians' fire had now slackened somewhat because about eight of their group had been put out of action.

Mindaugas and I yielded our positions to Šarūnas while Feliksas and Kariūnas, climbing cautiously out of their trenches, crawled over to the bridge. Just as the Russian forces had begun to fall back, fresh MVD detachments started to close in on Feliksas and Kariūnas from the rear. Their shots struck Feliksas' knapsack, which contained anti-tank grenades and, a frightful explosion sounded. Feliksas was torn to pieces as clouds of smoke intermingled with snow rose in the air. Kariūnas, who was lying a few yards away, had his gun torn from his hands by the explosion. He recovered it, and dashed across the bridge.

The MVD men now leaped into the trenches which Feliksas and Kariūnas had occupied, and opened fire on us. We were in relatively secure positions but decided not to engage in further conflict. Our object — to cross the bridge — had been achieved. On the other hand, we were not secure from the rear because the clouds of vehicles and isolated shots could be heard in the forest. We quickly began to withdraw from the bridge. The Russians started to press after us. We gathered behind the hillocks and decided to take a stand, once again, against our pursuers. Looking carefully about us, we loaded

242 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

our automatic cartridge clips. Before long, we noticed the Russians stealthily approaching with bared weapons. Fortunately, they could not see us because a slope hid us from their view. When they were quite close, we began firing and ended their pursuit. But there were others on our right wing who kept on shooting blindly in the direction of our fire.

Then another misfortune befell us. An explosive bullet fired by the enemy struck Kariūnas in the leg. We could hear his outcry: "Kariūnas wounded!" Two of us ran over to examine him. His wound proved to be very serious: The bullet had torn the muscles of his leg and splintered the bone. To bind the wound here was unthinkable because we sensed that the foe was surrounding the hillock. It was essential that we withdraw quickly.

A considerable loss of blood had sapped Kariūnas' strength and he began failing rapidly. Realizing this, he reconciled himself to the thought of separation. With deep pain in our hearts, we were compelled to bid him farewell. He wished us luck and begged us not to forget his mother. It was a moment that tormented our souls, and we could not hold back our tears at the thought of having to abandon our comrade under such painful circumstances. When Russian machine guns began firing nearer, we left Kariūnas holding a prepared grenade in his hand. Shortly afterward, an explosion ended his agony.

It was already quite dark now and we still had to cross the highway. This should be the end of the East Prussian frontier zone — the frontier marked on the map. It was usually less carefully guarded than the frontier zone itself, which was about two miles wide. But at this moment we could not get our bearings very well, especially how far we were from the highway.

Relying on Mindaugas' powers of observation, we waded, through half-frozen mud and finally reached the highway. We crawled across it, expecting machine-gun fire at any moment. But we heard nothing and were apparently not spotted by the enemy in the darkness. Halfway across the highway, we ran into a wire fence more than two yards high. Summoning all our strength, which in time of danger was not lacking, Šarūnas and I seized the lower wire and without much difficulty pulled it loose. When we had all crawled through, we breathed more easily and then dashed ahead.

It was now quite dark, but only when we were about two miles from the frontier did we stop to rest. And only then did we dare to think about the hours that had recently passed. We uttered reassuring words with difficulty. Our sunken eyes distrusted the slightest rustle of every leaf and twig and peered questioningly into the suspicious darkness. We broke the silence with a prayer, thanking the Almighty for our success and remembering our recently dead comrades.

After prayers, we exchanged a few words but our speech flagged. We began to feel the cold because during the last ten hours we had become wet and not only our outer garments but also our underclothing was no longer dry. From the increasing cold, our clothing had even congealed. Nevertheless, it had been essential to go on. Not only from the experience we had just had, but from previous experiences as well, we knew that guards of the Communist regime were on watch at the so-called "frontiers" of the colossal prison of the Soviet Union. They could not reconcile themselves to the possibility that we might eventually break out of this nightmare jail. Even as we were advancing, we heard three separate shots fired. The guards had evidently seen our tracks and were signalling to the sentinel garrisons.

We continued on through the forest about two miles. On the outskirts, we could see some Polish houses along the side of a road. We passed by them very cautiously and ready for action because we were afraid of encountering Polish frontier guards who may have been notified by the Russians.

CHAPTER XLV

ARMED GREETINGS FOR POLISH COMMUNISTS

We continued our journey conscious of great weariness in all our limbs. That night, we were confronted with a march of about twenty-five miles so as not to fall prey to the search that might be organized the next day by Russians and Poles combined. What else could we do when our forces were so small? We finally decided to call on a farmer and ask him for a sleigh. We were fortunate in meeting a compatriot at the farm, who came from Kaunas. Because of him, we received something to eat, and the farmer consented to trust him with a sleigh and two horses.

After traveling about nine miles we sent our compatriot back and continued ahead on foot in the direction of Pseroslis. A journey by sleigh was more to our liking than one on foot, so after tramping some distance we called on another farmer. He turned out to be a village elder or bailiff and began to explain to us the procedure for acquisition of a sleigh. We replied that we did not like that procedure and still less the regulators of the procedure! The functionary then capitulated and drove us not only to Pseroslis but some ten miles beyond it. As we went through the hamlet we had the nerve to drive past the police station. Before sending the village elder back home, we advised him to forget the procedure fixed by the authorities and cautioned him not to report anything about us to them.

We then called on a third Pole at whose place we refreshed ourselves, using our own supplies. Again, we requested a sleigh. Here, again the farmer began to explain about the prescribed procedure. His wife particularly wished to obey the requirements of the authorities. As we left, we promised the woman that her husband would return in three hours. After driving about six miles in the direction of Fornetka, we bade the farmer farewell, cautioning him as we had warned the

previous farmer.

We now began to consider at whose farm we might stop next. The locality here was favorable: A rivulet flowed nearby and the configuration of the ground was uneven and overgrown with bushes. We ticked off on our fingers the most appropriate homestead and called there. It was just before dawn. In the yard, cocks were crowing and in the stables, horses were clamping in expectation of being fed.

When we knocked at the door, the farmer's wife admitted us quite agreeably. We asked permission to rest and seeing how tired we were, she prepared beds for us, even in the guest room. After washing and arranging their weapons, my comrades fell asleep. With the assistance of the women in the household, I prepared breakfast from the last remnants of our food supplies. About twelve o'clock I exchanged watch duty with Mindaugas. He now took over the watch as well as the drying of socks, boots and clothing.

Scarcely had I had time to close my eyes than our hostess hurried in to report that the Suvalkai commandant had telephoned orders to Rutka, Vyžoniai and Pseroslis militia and UB (Security Police) that certain armed men from East Prussia were supposed to have broken through the frontier and were headed in the direction of Fonetka. Several sleighs had already been ordered for the militia and Security Police in the neighborhood. It was clear whom they were after.

We equipped ourselves for the journey and asked the farmer to get horses ready for us at once. We hid our outer garments in the sleigh and donned others given us by the farmer. Danger lurked everywhere as we headed toward Smolnikai. We drove slowly awaiting dusk, and arrived at Smolnikai about four o'clock. We were particularly surprised by the driver's manner as we parted. He refused to accept any payment from us, explaining that he himself was an anti-Communist partisan and deemed it his duty to help us.

At Smolnikai we had difficulty obtaining a sleigh. In one case the only horse available had been brought in the town before the Christmas holiday. Other people to whom we applied were afraid of us! And we ourselves were afraid of going from one inhabitant to another lest one of them should give us away. Evidently, one of the drivers had already betrayed us because the police were aware of the direction in which we were headed.

246 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

After lengthy bargaining, we finally obtained a sleigh. We started off and after we had driven for some time in an easterly direction, we saw three sleighs approaching us. We attempted to camouflage our uniform emblems and weapons so they would not glitter in the moonlight. As the first sleigh approached us, we could see armed men seated in it. We tried to crowd most closely together, hoping they would take us for ordinary citizens and let us go our way without incident. But as we began to pass them, we suddenly heard gunfire and the command: "Stop!" In a flash, we were in a ditch and returning their fire. The excited horses reared and then fell in the road as the wounded and dying men in the sleighs moaned. Only one was able to leap from the sleigh and escape with his life. Having thus paid our "respects" to the Communized Poles, we realized that they were no match for us.

Following this clash with the first sleigh, those in the sleigh behind leaped out and made for the houses on the right side of the road. Several, not realizing how poorly their comrades in the first sleigh had fared, boldly tried to bar our path. One, a lieutenant, crept out from behind a tree toward me and, levelling his automatic, called out: "Who's there?"

Instead of replying, I knocked his gun from his hands, stuck my own in his stomach and ordered: "Hands up!" Then Mindaugas appeared and as I flung the Pole's automatic over my shoulder, Mindaugas gave him a sharp blow on the ear with two fingers with his hand as he shouted in Polish: "Go to the devil, Mr. Lieutenant!"

The Pole was either taken aback with terror or overjoyed at escaping with his life because he quickly touched his cap with two fingers, did a quick turn with military precision and then set off, running in the direction of the destroyed sleigh.

The other Polish Communists in the area had an excellent view of the goings on and of course realized that we and not their comrades, whom they had expected, were present. So, gathering in the houses, they opened fire on us from a range of about twenty-five yards. We answered their fire with a stepped-up firing of our own. Wherever shots flashed from the houses, we answered in kind.

The hovels and stables used as shelters by the Poles offered no adequate cover against our fire and before long they began a disorderly retreat. The snow-covered slope was now dotted with about twenty retreating Poles. We continued to

fire parting shots at them until they finally vanished from sight.

With the clash over, we took stock of our losses. Fortunately, they were very slight. Šarūnas had not had time to remove his knapsack from the sleigh and the knapsack contained what remains there were of his food and travel needs. Moreover, he found several holes in his greatcoat. Mindaugas and I were more fortunate. We had our bundles on our backs and did not find a single tear in our clothing. The “UBisti” on the other hand, would now have the sorry task of counting *their* losses.

After proceeding several miles, we met a “Father Christmas” who was taking Christmas goods to the Rutka cooperative. We made an inspection of the goods and decided to each confiscate a litre of liquor, a pocketful of sweetmeats and a good kilogram of more solid foods. Wishing the driver a “Merry Christmas” we prepared to resume our journey. “Father Christmas” lifted his cap politely and cheerfully drove off.

After the fight with the “UBisti” we were convinced that the situation here was more serious than we had previously imagined. And the conflict had aggravated it still further. Now at every crossroad we might expect to encounter enemy soldiers.

We decided not to continue the journey by sleigh. So we traveled by foot through fields covered with snow. We finally settled ourselves in a deserted bath house. We covered the windows, lit a fire and, sitting around it, set about sampling the wares of “Father Christmas.”

When we left the bath house, we called on a farmer, from whom we learned that we were in the village of Kiciolki. While floundering about, we had again arrived at the frontier. It was necessary to get away from this zone as quickly as possible. We therefore asked the farmer to harness a horse for us at once. At first he seemed to be a willing and affable person but after harnessing a mare he did not invite us to join him but instead drove off at break-neck speed to inform the police.

We realized the gravity of the situation and in order not to be surprised by the police, we would have to cover at least six miles. Endeavoring effectively as possible to conceal our tracks, we arrived at the Cypliškiai-Seinai highway. Here, we

248 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

met a man driving a sleigh who boasted to us that half an hour before, he had driven "UBisti" and Polish guards. Since he was accustomed to driving the military he drove us to Cypliškiai, too. There, to avoid detection, we walked a distance on foot. After that we lay in the straw in the sleigh with one of us seated alongside the driver to keep an eye on him. In this manner we came to V. village where we treated the driver to some of the liquor we had and then dismissed him.

CHAPTER XLVI

CHRISTMAS IN STABLE STRAW

Everywhere, one was conscious of the approaching holiday mood. Women were cleaning and tidying up their homes, and making all their special preparations for Christmas Eve. We felt terribly weary ourselves. Anxiety had bitten deeply into our gaunt faces, and spots and blotches caused by constant exposure to rigid weather, checkered them. Exhausted, we could not collect our thoughts and wanted nothing but sleep.

Our host this day invited us to rest in a back room. Here, we collapsed like empty sacks wherever we chanced to be: one of us on a bed, another in a chair. I supported myself on the butt end of my gun, near the stove. Not one of us attempted to undress, although we were still quite damp. We not only kept our weapons near us, but we kept them loaded. Noticing our caution, our host asked the reason. We could tell him nothing. We soon dozed off, although the slightest sound would open our eyes.

As was to be expected, strong detachments of Polish guards and "UBisti" security police carried out searches everywhere during the day, looking for the Lithuanian partisans. Setting up heavy machine guns in sleighs, they swept from one village to another, ransacking houses in their usual manner. At midday, they arrived at our resting place. We were fast asleep, and our host almost died of fright because he had no time to warn us. The Polish Communists went into the barn and stable, searched the cellars and all the living rooms with the exception of the little back room in which we were sleeping. It turned out that the doors of this room saved us because they were pasted over with paper and it was difficult to distinguish them from the wall.

When the Communists finally drove off, our hosts ran

250 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

over to us. Making the sign of the cross and kissing us, they began talking about the miracle which had just occurred. We rejoiced with them and celebrated our good fortune together. Nevertheless, when night came, we entrenched ourselves in the straw in the stable because it was too risky for us to sleep in the house. And our host agreed with us.

On the day before Christmas, a number of militiamen, frontier guards and security police again turned up in the neighborhood, looking for us. Toward evening, on their way back from the hunt, the Suvalkai security police called on our host. They demanded food and transportation and from their conversation our host understood that others might call here on their way home, also. They were all angry and cursing because they were unable to explain where we were. Only yesterday, before dawn, we had been at Kociolki with Stankiewicz, and half an hour later we had vanished as though the earth had swallowed us up! These visits and angry discussions frightened our hosts. We had to forget all about the Christmas Eve table and spend the quiet night before Christmas in the stable straw. There was barely enough of it to protect us from the cold wind, yet this familiar and wretched environment was very appropriate to remind us of Christ's birth.

In these squalid surroundings we celebrated the birthday of Christ, joining others in the Christian world who, exhausted by war and postwar chaos, nevertheless rejoiced at this cherished holiday. For this was a celebration of the birth of the Saviour who brought peace and tranquility to all peoples of good will.

Unfortunately, the war continued in our homeland. As we huddled in the straw, it weighed heavily on our hearts and minds that perhaps already the same cruel fate had overtaken them as others — the journey punctuated by death to the depths of Russia or a Soviet prison in which human beings were destined to rot. Such a fate had already befallen thousands, and when we left Lithuania the Communists were carrying out fresh mass deportations. We remembered the twenty thousand of our comrades-in-arms, many of whom had chosen a death of torture and had gone to eternity with disjointed limbs, shattered ribs, twisted fingers, and smashed and burned skin.

We felt ourselves united in thought this Christmas Eve

Christmas In Stable Straw 251

with our living battle comrades, many of whom even now lay wounded or dying. We knew that our cause had been in the name of that Truth which the Saviour of the world had brought again this night.

In the morning, on his way to feed the cattle, the farmer dropped in on us. Being a man of good will, he brought with him the remains of the Christmas Eve feast. With the poorest fellow on this great night, we would ourselves have felt the same warmth, even though the biggest MGB force was carrying out its activities in the neighborhood.

The following night we reached the supporters of our movement. We verified contacts and then Mindaugas and I set off on the next stage of our journey.

At the station, dozens of people were gathered and several Poles standing near us were sharing their impressions of the past few days concerning our activities. Giving rein to his imagination one said that about twelve Lithuanian partisans had broken through the frontier and in doing so had killed some Russians. At Smolnikai, they knocked out some of the Rutka and Vyžoniai frontier guards, militia garrisons, and the Suvalkai security police forces. In the course of the fighting, the Suvalkai commandant had perished and the Rutka militia chief had been taken prisoner.

Another Pole pretended to know the direction of our withdrawal. He had heard that all of us had turned off in the direction of Seinai. Stankiewicz, from whom we had obtained the sleigh, had already moved from Kociolki to live in town because he feared Lithuanian revenge. He evidently believed that the police, whom he had informed, would speedily settle with the exhausted Lithuanians. But now it was impossible to find them.

The first speaker again butted in, trying to explain our arms in Poland. He said that the Polish frontier guards this year had hunted down and shot many Lithuanians who had fled from the Russians and were working as laborers with Polish farmers. And now, their comrades had arrived and taken vengeance. But it was still not clear what surprises they would spring on us here because they were said to be well-armed. The Cypliškiai militia were very glad that they had not had occasion to come up against the Lithuanians. Had they done so, more than one of the militia would have failed to celebrate Christmas! Although the frontier guards had a heavy

252 FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM

machine gun in every sleigh, the Lithuanians had brought still better ones with them. They were very polite with the civilian population and even paid in dollars for transportation with horses — so the Pole assured us — scratching his head.

As the train came in, the entire crowd moved. Smiling at the Polish fantasies, we too moved with it. Keeping our pistols ready in our pockets, we boarded the train.

EPILOGUE

It was while Lithuania was under Nazi occupation (1941-44), that I came to know Juozas Lukša as a younger fellow member of the anti-Nazi resistance, the Lithuanian Front, whose members were bound together by strong ties of mutual trust and fierce loyalty.

In 1948, Lukša appeared in the free world after having penetrated the Iron Curtain with fellow freedom fighter Audronis. He asked me through an intermediary (for I was already in the United States at the time), “Can the Lithuanian resistance expect armed conflict between the Soviet Union and the free world in the near future? Will the free world have the courage to come to the aid of the captive nations?” My reply was in the negative. I advised the members of the resistance to rely upon their own strength and to base all decisions on a realistic appraisal of their situation.

What motivated the Resistance

Even now the question often arises : what motivated Lithuania’s youth to join in this heroic and tragic struggle for freedom? Apparently three major motives played a role in their decision. First of all was their desire to come to the defense of their country and to hamper as much as possible the Soviet plans of genocide. Secondly, they had sound reasons for expecting liberation by the West. Lastly, when such hopes proved futile, they were faced with the tragic choice of either accepting their enslavement or of continuing their armed resistance. Their heroic response to the calamitous fate that had befallen Lithuania will remain an exemplary testament indicating to future generations how to fight for freedom and justice, values the resistance fighters fervently believed in and sought to attain for their entire nation.

To be sure, even now voices can be heard expressing doubt about whether it was proper to sacrifice oneself when a realistic appraisal of the situation indicated that there was no possibility of victory, when from a pragmatic viewpoint their self-sacrifice was in vain. It is as though such questioners are of the opinion that it is possible to order someone to either die or not to die for some cause. Without a doubt, soldiers

can be forced to face machine-gun fire, and the “modern” world makes use of such tactics in warfare. Only someone who firmly believes in his cause and lives by it, unafraid of the necessary sacrifices, can put his life at risk of his own free will. His conscience will not let him waver even if the ultimate sacrifice — to lay down his life — is his destiny. Such decisions are extremely personal, and it is highly unlikely that they can be influenced from the sidelines.

The leader of the Kęstutis District resistance, Visvydas, explained to other district leaders of the resistance what motivated the freedom fighters with the following words : “A great number of Lithuanians loved the country of their birth, their native fields so much that they could not bring themselves to leave them behind. The spiritual ties that bound them to their homeland were stronger than their fears of personal safety or any other considerations.”

Soviet-perpetrated Genocide

Rearing its ugly head during both periods of Soviet occupation of Lithuania, the Soviet-perpetrated genocide called forth wholehearted resistance by the Lithuanian and other Baltic nations in opposition to Soviet enslavement as the greatest shame of the twentieth century. This genocide was not provoked by the captive nations, but on the contrary had been systematically planned out even before the nations were occupied by the Soviets. Already on October 11, 1939, the government of the Soviet Union had issued ordinance no. 001223, which dealt with the registration, i.e., the calling up for an accounting, in all occupied countries or areas of all suspected anti-Soviet persons regardless of the existence of concrete evidence of either their guilt or their innocence. Based on this all-union ordinance, several republic-wide decrees were issued in Lithuania describing liquidation techniques for persons suspected of being unreliable by the Soviet regime. To accomplish this purpose, five special commissions were set up that were to secretly and in haste index in a card filing system the names and the addresses of persons who should be arrested.

Group one was to include the nationalists, group two the followers of Voldemaras (*Voldemarininkai*), group three the socialist revolutionaries and the Trotskyites, group four the Christian Democrats, and group five the Populists and the Social Democrats.

At the beginning of 1941, Serov, a third-ranked commissar of

the NKVD (KGB), issued instructions which became the basis of genocide-type mass deportations of the inhabitants of Soviet-occupied countries. Here were detailed directions as to how the “deportations of the anti-Soviet element from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia” were to be carried out. The categories of those to be deported were so all-inclusive that they could easily have been applied to nearly all Lithuanian nationals. In the regulations dealing with the republic of Soviet-occupied Lithuania created especially for this purpose, the focus was on social, economic, and cultural organizations, such as, for example, Catholic organizations, especially the youth organization *Ateitininkai'*, on student clubs, societies, fraternities; also workers' and farmers' professional and social-cultural organizations; on units of the Lithuanian National Guard; and on the leadership and active members of various other patriotic organizations. Thus the lists of persons to be deported included those active in industry, commerce, and agriculture, and influential and active members of society such as professionals, the clergy and the religious, most university professors, teachers, and the families, and, in individual cases, the relatives of the above.

During the years of the second Soviet occupation of Lithuania (from 1944 and still continuing), in certain cases the deportations were carried out by area, thus apparently readying those lands for the projected colonization, chiefly by Russians.

These all-union and republic-wide laws, decrees, and instructions had as their purpose the systematic annihilation of the citizenry of the occupied nations, that is, genocide.

As soon as the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania for the first time on June 15, 1940, the genocidal plans were put into effect. Before a month had gone by, on July 11-12, 1940, over 2,000 persons active in the areas of politics, economics, culture, and the heads of various organizations were arrested, deported and, in most instances, put to death. An identical fate befell the military personnel arrested en masse in early June, 1941.

The first mass deportation of families, carried out during June 14-17, 1941, affected 34,260 persons. Some 12,000 to 14,000 Lithuanians were arrested by the Soviets and imprisoned in Lithuania. Most of these were either slain or died during forced marches to the depths of the Soviet Union. A very small number were freed by the Lithuanian revolt on June, 1941.

Further Soviet plans of genocide of the Lithuanian nation were cut short by the start of warfare with Germany on June 22, 1941.

During the days of June 22 - 25, 1941, the Lithuanian nation rose up in revolt against the Soviet occupational regime and the Soviet armed forces, revealing as a falsehood Soviet propaganda that Lithuania had been incorporated into the Soviet Union of its own free will. Regrettably, it did not prove possible at this time to bring to the attention of worldwide public opinion the atrocities being perpetrated by the Soviet-Union.

The attempted annihilation of the Lithuanian nation by means including deportations to the Gulag concentration camps that was begun during the first Soviet occupation was continued without delay when the Soviets reoccupied the country a second time in 1944. Such was the purpose of the mass deportations of July, August and September, 1945. In 1946, a widespread boycott of Soviet-controlled elections resulted in the deportations of February 16. The ruthless Soviet plans of genocide were continued in 1947 with mass deportations of inhabitants occurring in July, August, November and December. The most terrible deportations occurred on May 22, 1948, affecting mostly farmers, including many small landowners, and effectively destroying the Lithuanian farmers' settlements near the borders of Byelorussia. Over 100,000 persons were arrested and deported at this time. The deportations occurring on March 24 - 27 and in June of 1949 victimized city folk: the families of teachers, university professors, military personnel, and other professionals, also priests, heads of religious organizations, and some Jewish families.

It has been estimated that during those five years of the second Soviet occupation about 570,000 of Lithuania's inhabitants were deported. When to this sum are added the persons slain by the Soviets on Lithuanian territory, it becomes apparent that Lithuania was deprived of one-fourth of its population.

These genocidal atrocities affecting Lithuania and other Baltic nations were hidden from the knowledge of the free world for several years because of the Iron Curtain that came into being on Stalin's orders.

The armed resistance which began to spread throughout Lithuania beginning in the fall of 1944 waged a relentless struggle against these Soviet genocidal atrocities. This active armed resistance lasted from 1944 until 1952, and even for several years afterwards there were sporadic instances of skirmishes involving Lithuanian freedom fighters. Over 20,000 Lithuanian freedom fighters—both men and women—perished in this struggle.

Well-grounded but Futile Hopes

The members of the armed resistance were bolstered by the firm belief that once the Allies had vanquished the Nazis they would assist in the liberation and the restoration of independence to the Soviet-occupied countries. These hopes lasted until 1948. Gradually, as more contact with the free world was established, these hopes began to dwindle.

The hopes for assistance were not a totally groundless illusion. They were based on the provisions of the Atlantic Charter, which were well known to the Lithuanian resistance. The Atlantic Charter had been jointly issued on August 14, 1941, by President Roosevelt of the United States and Prime Minister Churchill of Great Britain. According to its provisions, the United States and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland “seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other;

“Second, they desire to see no territorial changes that do not occur with the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned;

“Third, they respect the right of all people to choose the form of government under which they will live; and *they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them;* (A.D.)...

“Sixth, they hope to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want;...

“Eighth, they believe that all the nations of the world, for realistic as well as spiritual reasons, must come to the abandonment of the use of force.”

Twenty-five other nations, including the Soviet Union, endorsed this declaration on January 1, 1942.

The public declaration of the above principles was reason enough for the Lithuanian resistance to expect the West to come to their aid and to intercede on their behalf. The armed uprising of the Lithuanian nation that occurred on June 22 - 25, 1941, had broken all the abhorrent bonds of oppression cast upon Lithuania by the Soviet Union and was a bold statement of the Lithuanian nation's determination to live unhampered in a free and independent Lithuania.

It is beyond comprehension then, why, disregarding the above facts both Roosevelt and Churchill made no attempt to put into practice the principles of the Atlantic Charter or, at the very least, to demand their realization, and why they failed to make use of the available means

to condemn the division of the Baltic States executed on August 23, 1939, by representatives of Stalin and Hitler or the January 10, 1941, act by which Germany sold a part of Lithuania to Soviet Russia for 7.5 million gold dollars.

The issue of independence for the Baltic States was not even raised at either the Yalta Conference attended by Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin during February 4 - 11, 1945, nor at the Potsdam Conference, where Truman, Attlee, and Stalin met (July 17 - August 2, 1945). The provisions of the Atlantic Charter came to the fore in Yalta not in regard to the Baltic nations but concerning Poland. Even Poland's problem was not fully solved there after Stalin provided assurances that the Polish nation would make known its intentions by means of elections. The two major leaders of the western world who had brought the war to a successful close were not to participate in the decisive decisions at Potsdam: Roosevelt was felled by an untimely death, and Churchill's party lost the elections and he was replaced by Attlee at the conference.

The resulting betrayal of once-free nations into the clutches of the Soviet Union was the greatest act of hypocrisy of the Second World War, brought about by the naïveté of the West and the deceitfulness of the East. Because of this hypocritical act the captive nations were made to endure genocidal slaughter and servitude, starvation, bitter cold, and other terrors of the Siberian frozen inferno. This act of hypocrisy was the fundamental cause of the tragic plight of the Lithuanian resistance.

It was not long after the end of World War II that the true nature of their ally became apparent to the United States and Great Britain. In order to stop new acts of aggression by the Soviet Union, the United States adopted the policy of strengthening the defenses of western Europe and provided the necessary assistance that enabled several nations to avoid the yoke of Soviet enslavement. Too, the United States fought against the Communist threat in South Korea. Later, demoralizing forces within the United States prevented further interference with Soviet aggressive tactics. Such conditions were not conducive to the raising of the question of liberating Soviet-occupied countries. As a result, the members of the Lithuanian resistance were forced to choose either death in the Siberian slave camps or in NKGB-MGV (KGB) cellars, or, weapon in hand, to continue the resolute fight on their own Lithuanian soil in the cause of freedom, justice, and other human rights.

The Greatest Danger

The greatest danger among the many facing the anti-Soviet Lithuanian resistance came in the form of an MGB (KGB) agent who had successfully infiltrated their ranks to become one of the trusted leaders of the resistance, Juozas Albinas Markulis. This MGB agent contacted the chief leaders of the resistance in the spring of 1946 and, before long, had managed to become the supreme commander of the resistance. He sought to combine all the separate districts of the resistance into one. He made Juozas Lukša his adjutant and settled the general staff in Vilnius. He paid particular attention to the liaison men from the free world Jonas Deksnys (*nom de guerre* Hektoras) and Vytautas Staneika (Meškis), who has succeeded in reaching Lithuania from the free world in 1946. Markulis was thus informed of all contacts with the free world, all the secret ciphers and codes, and the plans regarding the resistance made by Lithuanians in the free world. Upon his orders a certain Antanas (later revealed to be an officer of an MGB special unit) would accompany liaison men across Poland to shipside at the harbor in Gdynia. All the various supplies sent to the resistance from the free world passed through Antanas' hands until he was found out.

One by one the leaders of the Lithuanian resistance were betrayed to the MGB by Juozas Albinas Markulis. They were either ambushed and perished in the ensuing battle or were captured by trickery and killed.

On January 18, 1947, there was to be a meeting of the district leaders of the resistance. According to MGB plans, with the assistance of Markulis all the leaders of the resistance would thus be gathered together in one spot and could be eliminated in one blow. Juozas Lukša was delegated the task of organizing this meeting. Several weeks before the meeting was to take place, Lukša and several members of the district leadership, whose suspicions had been aroused regarding the capture of a whole series of freedom fighters, came to the conclusion that treachery was involved, with all the evidence pointing to Markulis as the perpetrator. It was clear that the members of the resistance were in great danger. They warned all the districts and called a meeting of the leadership in a different location and one week earlier on January 10, 1947. The general staff of the resistance was moved out of Vilnius, and thus the trap set by the MGB was avoided. In April, 1947, the liaison men were informed that the problem of infiltration by MGB agents had been taken care of, and they were warned not to allow any supplies meant for the resistance to fall into the hands of the MGB agent Antanas. In

this way, because of the vigilance of Juozas Lukša and other members of the resistance, the MGB's plans to do away with the entire leadership of the resistance were foiled.

It is difficult to imagine what might have motivated Markulis to join in the vile MGB scheme against his fellow nationals in the resistance. He was so capable that he had even convinced two other liaison men who had managed to cross the Iron Curtain and reach Lithuania from the free world to suspect Lukša of having wrongly accused Markulis of being an MGB agent.

It is apparent now, however, from published Soviet sources that the infiltration of the resistance by MGB agents had been correctly resolved. J. Jakaitis stated in *Išdavystės keliu* (On the road of betrayal, Vilnius, 1976, p. 233): "The most important liaison man of the Supreme Command (of the Lithuanian resistance — A.D.), Antanas, who accompanied Jonas Deksnys from Lithuania to Poland in 1946 and later returned to Poland to obtain printing and other equipment for spying purposes, was an officer of the Soviet special forces". This same Antanas was Markulis' (Erelis) closest confidant. All these facts indicate that the identity of the MGB agents who had infiltrated the Lithuanian resistance had been correctly deduced by the end of 1946. The boasts of Soviet intelligence agents regarding their activities thirty years previously support the above conclusion. Thus, we must acknowledge that in 1946 due to the efforts of Lukša and other perceptive leaders of the resistance the Lithuanian freedom fighters escaped the trap set by the MGB. Sad to say, it was not to be for long.

The epilogue was most tragic. In early 1948, Juozas Lukša and Audronis broke through the Iron Curtain and reached the free world. They met with the leadership of the VLIK (Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania) at Baden-Baden, West Germany, on July 7 - 9, 1948, to discuss liaison procedures between the VLIK and the Lithuanian resistance. Lukša returned to Lithuania on October 3, 1950. Soviet sources claim that treachery was involved in his elimination in the autumn of 1951. There is reason to suspect that a Soviet agent operating in the free world had a hand in this. Benediktas Trumpys (Rytis), who had returned with Lukša to Lithuania to join the resistance, was killed in a skirmish. It is uncertain what fate befell a second would-be freedom fighter from the free world, Širvis (Sakalas). He was either killed in battle or captured alive and then slain.

Jonas Deksnys and Audronis reached Lithuania in 1949. Audronis later died fighting the Soviets. It is not known for certain when Jonas Deksnys was captured, but in 1953 and again in 1960 the Soviet

press published his “confessions”, in which he reviled his fellow members of the resistance and the movement itself.

Another young man from the free world, claiming “I want to be with my brothers who are fighting”, Julijonas Būtėnas, a journalist influenced by his close friendship with Lukša and also because of his own convictions, managed to reach Lithuania on April 19, 1951. He joined the ranks of the resistance only to fall in battle in May of that same year as a result of betrayal by the Communist double agent who later played in part in the betrayal of Lukša.

Thus the love of country and the resulting heroic struggle for freedom has demanded an enormous sacrificial offering, including the lives of these courageous young men.

It would be naive to believe that freedom fighters who were captured alive were able to redeem their “crimes” by a simple, routine penitential “confession” or statements discrediting the resistance in the Soviet press. They were terrorized into performing one “service” after another to the Soviets.

As for the Soviet agents who infiltrated the resistance and then treacherously betrayed freedom fighters to their deaths, it is to be hoped that their consciences shall never leave them in peace, unceasingly questioning them: “What have you achieved at this great price and why? What is the true worth of your ‘victorious’ deeds?”

As a result of the exploitation of the captive nations and of the terror and deceit they have experienced, not only the Lithuanian nation but also most persecuted people are entering a new phase of resistance whose most characteristic aspect is the lack of the fear of terror. This bodes ill for those who make use of terror to achieve their ends, for now there exist persons who no longer fear their outrages, and it seems that in the near future the number of these persons will grow into massive proportions.

The Lithuanian and the Afghan Resistance Movements

From the autumn of 1944 until 1953 behind the Iron Curtain, which separated them from the free world, dauntless Lithuanian freedom fighters waged guerrilla warfare against the Soviets, who had occupied Lithuania. During all those years the Lithuanian nation sought in vain to obtain assistance from the free world. About thirty thousand freedom fighters lost their lives during this period of armed resistance.

It was as if in this unevenly matched battle the Lithuanian resistance

was attempting to wash away with its very blood the shame of the Soviets, who were attempting to enslave and exploit a neighboring nation.

Similarly, some thirty-five years later, in December 1979, Afghanistan was invaded by one hundred and fifteen thousand Soviet Red Army troops. After several difficult years of guerrilla warfare, the Afghan resistance succeeded in influencing world opinion: they obtained assistance in the form of arms. As a result they were successful in halting Soviet aggression and forced the Soviets to give up their shameful imperialistic designs.

Such resolutely courageous armed resistance by the Lithuanians and the Afghans was of a new direction and spirit. Fearless in the face of the Imperialistic Terror, it has inspired in all small occupied nations the hope of freedom. Like a flash of lightning that brightens tempest-darkened skies, the hope has sprung up that with the support of free democratic powers resolute nations which persevere in their fight for freedom can stop all future aggressors.

Some Reflections

The Greek philosopher Aristotle in one of his tracts discusses the coward, the rash man, and the brave man. The first two, in his opinion, are incapable of action when faced with difficult situations. A coward “is more conspicuous for his excessive fear of painful situations than in deficiency of courage... Rash men are precipitate and eager before danger arrives but withdraw when it arrives, while brave men are ardent when facing danger but calm before danger arrives”. (Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1975, p. 48).

The American philosopher William James has written: “When life as a whole turns up its dark abysses to our view, then the worthless ones among us lose their hold on the situation altogether... But the heroic mind does differently... It can face them if necessary, without for that losing its hold upon the rest of life. The world thus finds in the heroic man its worthy match and mate... He can *stand* this Universe”. (William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 53 of *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952, p. 826).

The above thoughts can be expanded by applying them to the participants of the Lithuanian resistance. Courage is an inner strength. When joined with a spirit of self-sacrifice and directed toward the good, courage becomes heroism. Such courage is among the four cardinal virtues. In real life the way of heroism is often a tragic road of suffer-

ing. Although the nobility of heroic action can be felt in the grayness of every day life, it is not readily apparent, as is similarly the case with pearls secreted in underwater mollusk shells. It takes a dynamic, brave personality to expose to public view these pearls of great price—these acts of heroism—so that their value could be appreciated by even the indifferent among us today and also remain as a shining example of self-sacrifice to future generations.

Juozas Lukša was such a personality. He appeared suddenly in the free world like a meteor. In his conversations and through this book he managed to lift somewhat the Iron Curtain to vividly reveal the heroism of his Lithuanian brothers who were waging a fierce struggle for freedom and whom the placid free world was trying to forget. All his words and deeds revealed an overpowering love for his country, Lithuania. He had joined willingly in the battle for its freedom, for justice. He now sought to enflame other hearts with the fire which consumed him, and he was successful in inspiring others to believe as he did. He showed us how the fighters of the Lithuanian resistance, by their courage and unyielding opposition, had unmasked the lies of the Soviet occupational regime and by doing so had removed the basis for the deceitful enslavement of people's minds. He constantly urged that the unvanquishable spirit of the resistance would remain an everlasting example for future Lithuanian generations of how to fight relentlessly for human values and for freedom and independence for Lithuania.

The Soviets and their collaborators have been making use of every available opportunity to convince both Lithuanians and the world at large that the heroism of the freedom fighters was of no consequence and that it has no place in history. When such thoughts were expressed some years ago at the Universal and International Exhibition at Montreal by a Soviet official, the chairman of a Soviet artists association, someone from among his listeners spoke up with the unpretentious question, "Whose history?" This question can be suitably clarified further with another: "Would not such a history be one of propaganda, lies, and falsifications?" This co-called history will soon fade away with the passage of time like snow exposed to the scorching heat of the sun.

Just like a sunbeam after passing through a prism bursts forth resplendent in a multicolored spectrum, so too the meaning of the self-sacrifice of our freedom fighters will take on ever new nuances of meaning when viewed through the prism of time. Because of their worthy goals of freedom and justice for all, and their spirit of self-sacrifice, the freedom fighters of the Lithuanian resistance have become the

prophets of a better world that is evolving by leaps and bounds. They are the dawning of a new day on the horizon promising a brighter future, one in which wisdom and justice prevail.

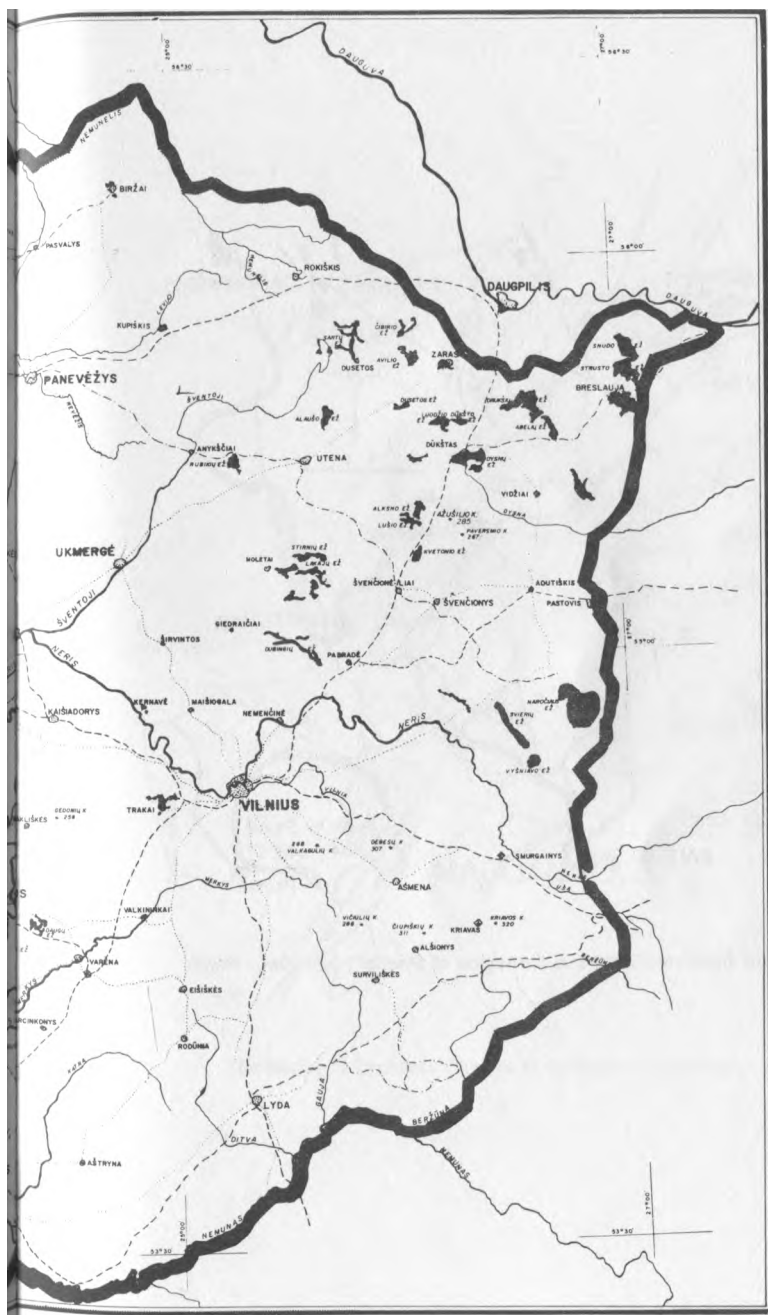
ADOLFAS DAMUŠIS

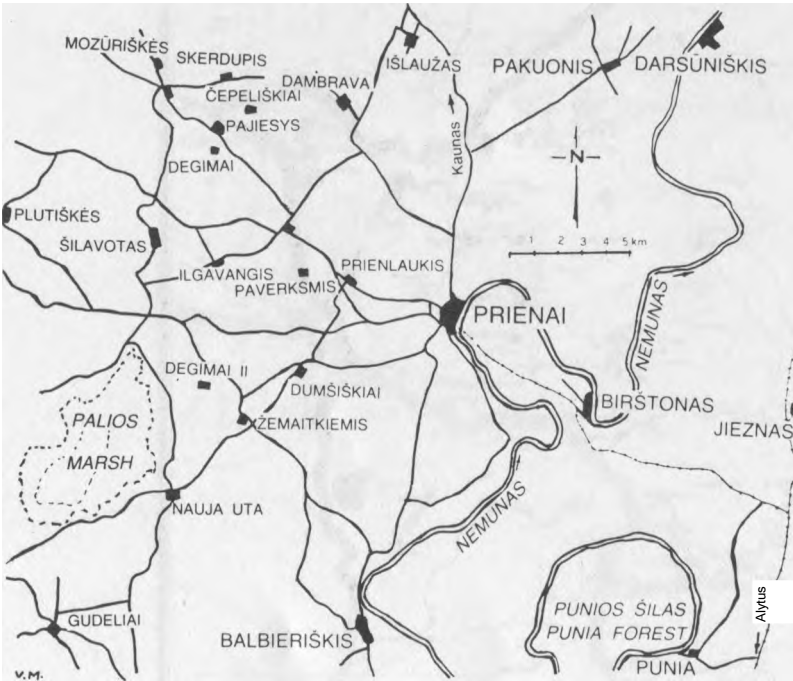
1988

Lockport, Illinois

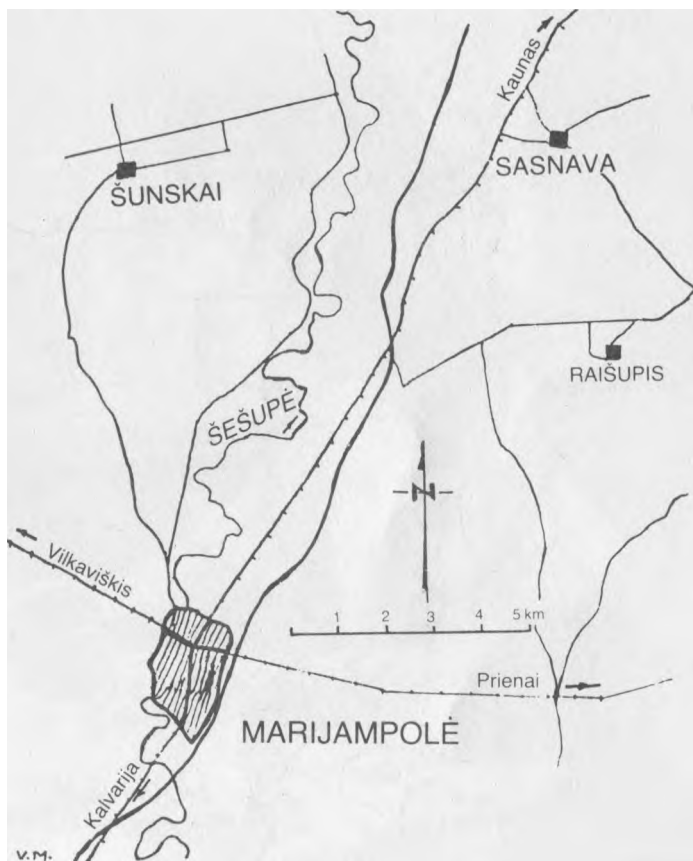
Translated from the Lithuanian by Nijolė Gražulis



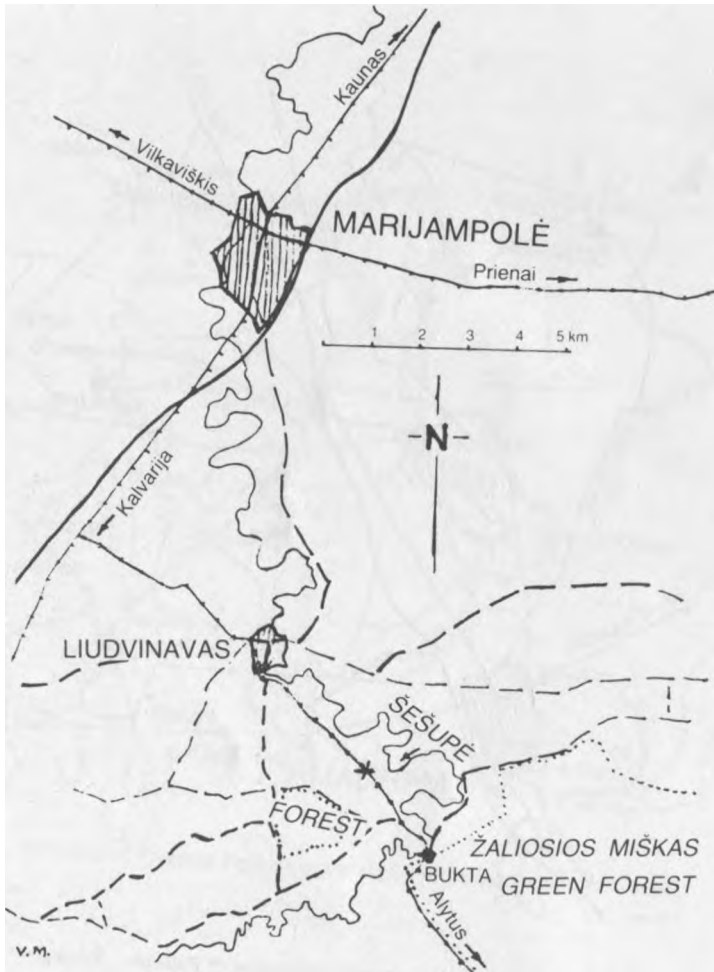




Activities of Freedom Fighters in the region of Prienai - Šilavotas - Punia



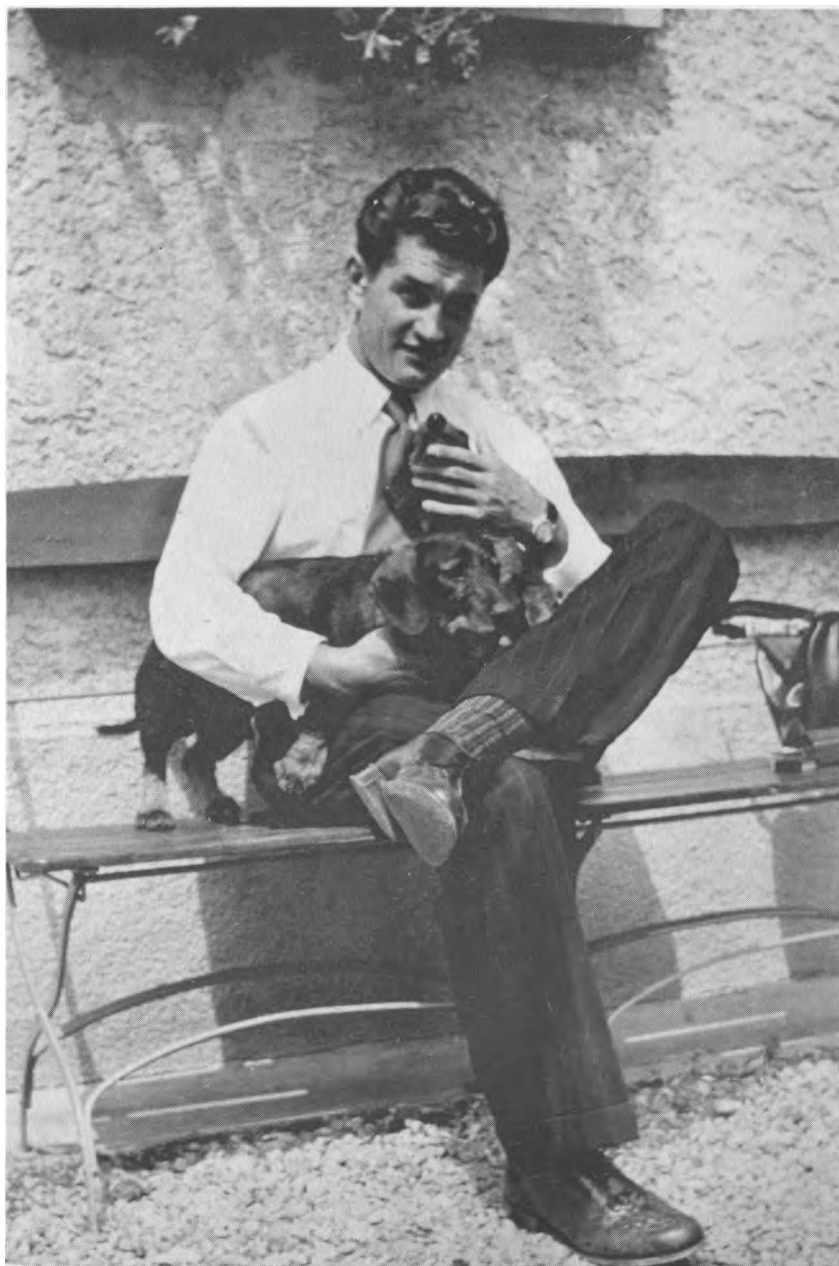
The battles of Freedom Fighters in the region of Raišupis - Šunskai



The battle of Liudvinavas - Bukta



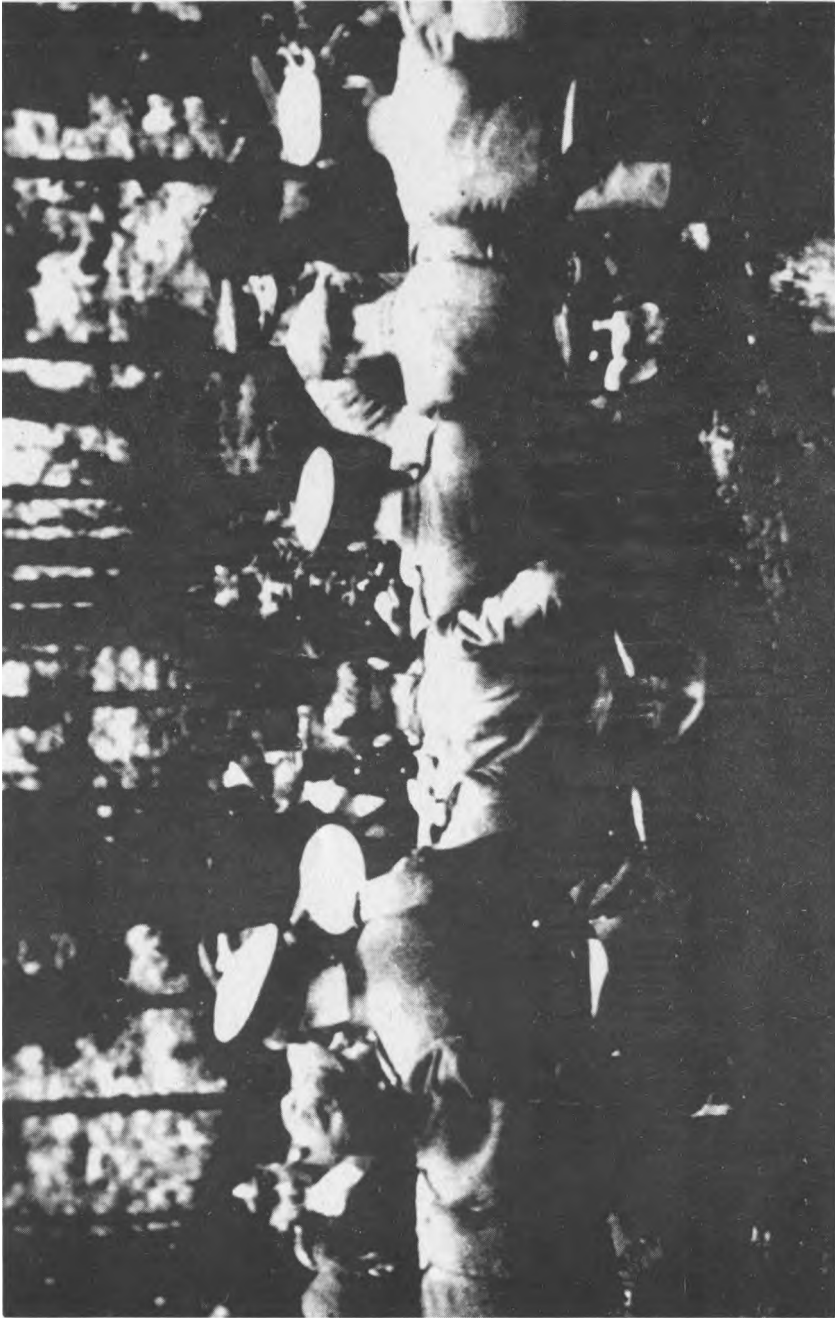
Juozas Daumantas records his experiences before returning to his homeland, where he was betrayed and shot by the enemy.



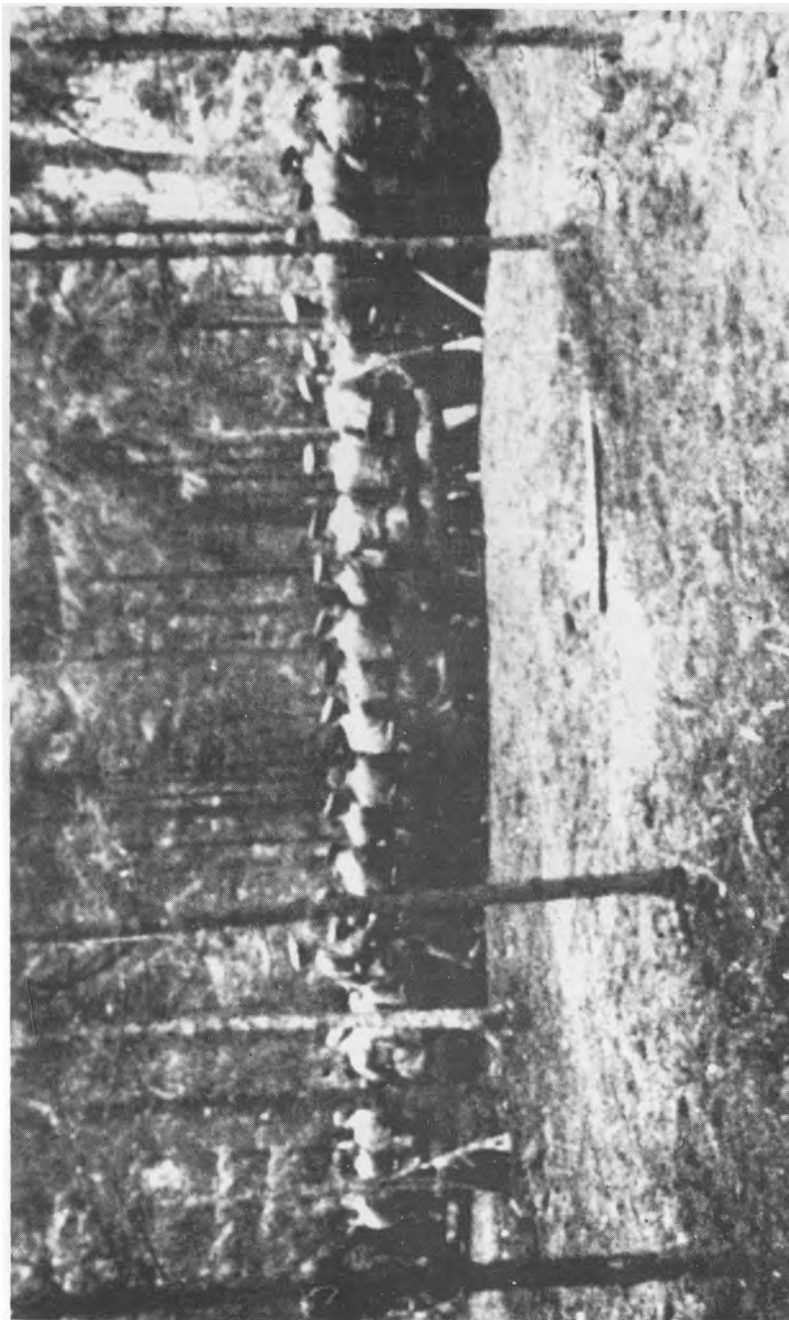
Juozas Daumantas in Paris, France in 1947.



Two young freedom fighters: smile today, tomorrow you may be dead.



A group of freedom fighters with their commanders in the forest.



Instructions to freedom fighters in one of the forest camps.



The men stand at attention to their commander's instructions.

DAUMANTAS, Juozas, 940.53'47'5 pseud.

Fighters for freedom: Lithuanian partisans versus the U.S.S.R., 1944-1947 / Juozas Daumantas; translated from the Lithuanian by E.J. Harrison and Manyland Books, New York: Manyland Books, 1975. 254 p., (4) leaves of plates: ill.; 24 cm. Translation of Partizanai uz geležines uždangos. (D802.L5D313) 74-33547 ISBN 0-87141-049-4: 9.95

1. *World War, 1939-1945 — Underground movements — Lithuania.*
2. *Lithuania — Politics and government. I. Title*

Weekly Record, Dec. 15, 1975-Vol. 2-No. 16

DAUMANTAS, Juozas. ***Fighters for freedom-***, Lithuanian partisans versus the U.S.S.R., 1944-1947, tr. by E.J. Harrison and Manyland Books. Manyland-Books, 1975. 254 p. il. 74-33547. 9.95. ISBN 0-87141-049-4

A firsthand account by a Lithuanian anti-Soviet guerrilla leader who had been able to break out to the West, it was originally written in 1948 and published in 1950. This book is an abbreviated and condensed version, which presents in fluent and idiomatic English translation about two-thirds of the original material. The work describes vividly the conditions in Soviet reoccupied Lithuania during the 1944-47 period. It gives witness to the daily activities of the guerrilla underground resistance and to the efforts of the Soviet security forces attempting to eradicate it. The work as a whole has wider significance, since it illustrates the difficulties of pacification that the Soviet Union encountered not only in Lithuania, but also in Latvia, Estonia, in Eastern Poland, and in the Western Ukraine, all of which were imbued with the spirit of local nationalism leading to a protracted armed resistance to Soviet control. The veracity of this account has been substantially confirmed indirectly by subsequent publications of Soviet Lithuanian materials dealing with the same period. As one of the very few participant eyewitness accounts, in any language, of guerrilla activities in Eastern Europe countries during the postwar period, this book is recommended to all libraries.

Choice, Dec, 1975—Vol. 12—No. 10

DAUMANTAS, Juozas. *Fighters for Freedom-*, Lithuanian Partisans Versus the U.S.S.R. (1944-1947).

Manyland Bks. 1975, tr. from Lithuanian by E.J. Harrison & Manyland Bks. illus. LC 74-33547. ISBN 0-87141-049-4. \$9.95.

The author (whose real name was Juozas Lukša) was one of the foremost leaders of the long Lithuanian resistance to Soviet domination. He emerged in the West to rally support for his cause, and left his story behind, returning home to perish among his compatriots in 1951. His testimony, available previously in Lithuanian, records the nature and activities of the partisan movement in its most forceful years, and reveals the great personal suffering of the Lithuanians. As his narrative shows, his partisans found themselves isolated in their fight for independence against a harsh and overwhelming enemy. Tragically, they were naively convinced that aid would come from the West. Even 20 years after the events, this account remains extremely touching, and provides a valuable firsthand account of voices whose records are few and seldom heard—Rena Fowler, Hoover Inst., Stanford Univ.

Library Journal, Nov. 15, 1975

GLOSSARY

***OF SOME INITIALS AND ABBREVIATIONS
OCCURRING IN THE TEXT***

EMGEBISTI: Phonetic rendering of the Russian initials used designate members of the MGB. (Ministry of State Security).

ENKAGEBISTI: Phonetic rendering of the Russian initials (People's Commissariat of State Security). This organ was later replaced by the MGB.

ENKAVEDISTI: Phonetic rendering of the Russian initials, (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs).

MVD: Initials of Russian words designating Ministry of Internal Affairs.

NKGB: Initials of Russian words designating People's Commissariat of State Security, actually an organ of the political secret police.

NKVD: Initials of Russian words designating People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, a euphemism for a branch of the dread secret police.

STRIB: Lithuanian abbreviation of the Russian word *istrebitel* ("destroyer"). The plural of this term was applied to the members of the so-called "People's Defenders," who had been recruited ostensibly to protect the Lithuanian people from bandits and robbers. In actual fact, their only purpose was to stamp out any signs of patriotism or armed resistance among the Lithuanians themselves.



We also see them gradually becoming aware of how little the free world cares about their plight, and we cannot help but admire their determination to go on fighting just the same. Unheralded, unknown, and abandoned by the Western Democracies in which they had placed so much faith, these young people were destined to share the fate of the Hungarian freedom fighters who came after them—a fate which the author of this book also shared. After having broken through the Iron Curtain in 1947 to plead his cause before the West, he returned to Lithuania in 1950 and was killed by the Soviets a few months later.