

# **As the USSR Collapsed: A CIA Officer in Lithuania**

## *Remembering 15 Years Ago*

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*Throughout its history the CIA's Directorate of Operations (National Clandestine Service) has demonstrated the ability to mobilize quickly in response to world crises by quickly dispatching its officers overseas, sometimes as pioneers in new places or in difficult situations, to collect intelligence and to take advantage of opportunities to advance US national interests.*

***"In 70 hours, 70 years of communism was undone."***

*I was privileged to be such a pioneer when I was sent to Lithuania as the drama of the Soviet Union's collapse was entering its closing scenes. Many colleagues soon fanned out across the lands of what had been the Soviet empire to engage old adversaries and new-found friends. Some former adversaries rejected us outright; others listened but remained wary. Some embraced us, and we forged relationships that would prove critical in the war on terrorism. —MJS*



In January 1991, Lithuanians gathered by the thousands to attend a mass funeral for citizens killed by occupying Soviet troops. By 17 September, Lithuania and the two other Baltic states, Estonia and Latvia, were full and free members of the United Nations.

*August 1991*

At first, I didn't think it would happen; the president had, after all, cancelled my trip to Lithuania at the last minute.

Direct presidential involvement in a CIA officer's trip was unprecedented, but so too had been the tumultuous events that prompted the assignment. Hard-line Soviet leaders had orchestrated a coup d'état to remove the reformist Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. That dramatic turn was followed by the even greater drama of average Soviet citizens rising en masse to successfully topple the coup leaders and restore Gorbachev, though much weakened, to office. In 70 hours, 70 years of communism in the Soviet Union was undone, the Soviet Union had come apart at the seams, and the decades-long Cold War essentially was ending.

On the intended day of my departure, 23 August, Milt Bearden, Chief of the Soviet and East European Division (SE) of the Directorate of Operations, called me into his office. Bearden, a tall Texan, had served in many crisis areas around the world. One of these, as CIA chief in Islamabad, was engineering support to the resistance against Soviet troops occupying Afghanistan. Bearden had watched the Soviet superpower admit defeat and leave Afghanistan in February 1989, a clear sign of the empire's implosion. Bearden then came home to head SE, just before communist governments began falling, one after the other, in Eastern Europe.

In response, Bearden had moved quickly to forge relationships with these former Soviet Bloc adversaries, who would prove invaluable during the Gulf War with Iraq in 1991. As the bastion of communism was about to fall in Moscow, Bearden was eager to continue engaging old enemies— and potential new friends—only this time on what had been Soviet territory.

As I entered Bearden's office, he eased back into his chair, propped his leather cowboy boots up on his oak desk, and broke the news: "Sorry, trip's off, young man," Bearden told me. Then he broke into a grin. "But look at it this way. It's not every day the president puts you on hold."

I obviously looked bewildered, so he explained:

"I was just at the White House this morning. I told Bob Gates [President George H. W. Bush's deputy national security advisor] about your trip, and

he asked me to hold off for about a week. The president wants to get some ducks in order before recognizing Lithuania. It should take about a week. Just change your plans to next week and we'll try again.”

Though I was packed and ready to leave that afternoon for Vilnius, orders were orders—especially when they came from the president himself. I learned later that the “ducks” were President Bush’s effort to gauge the impact on Gorbachev and the Kremlin of a US decision to recognize Lithuanian sovereignty and resume normal diplomatic relations for the first time since they were suspended after the Soviet occupation of Lithuania in 1940.

The purpose of my trip was to establish contact with the fledgling Lithuanian intelligence services and begin the kind of dialogue about cooperation that Bearden had initiated with Lithuania’s western neighbors. Bearden presumably thought I was right for the job because I had recently completed a tour in Moscow and spoke Russian. And, like many operations officers posted in Headquarters, I was eager for a temporary mission abroad.

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## **The Path to the Restoration of Lithuanian Independence**

In August 1991, the Soviet Union still regarded Lithuania and its Baltic neighbors, Estonia and Latvia, as members of the Soviet Union. All three had progressed much further toward a break with the Soviets and real independence than other Soviet republics since Gorbachev’s liberal policies of the mid-1980s had encouraged nationalists to begin breaking with Moscow. In Lithuania, a new political force Sajudis (the Movement) emerged in June 1988 ostensibly to support the Soviet leader’s reforms, but it also promoted a Lithuanian nationalist agenda. Sajudis demanded that the Soviet Union officially acknowledge the excesses of the Stalinist era, halt construction of a nuclear reactor in Lithuania, and disclose the secret protocols of the Soviet-Nazi Non-aggression Pact of 1939 that had granted the Soviets control of the Baltic states.

Encouraged by the successes in neighboring Poland of the Solidarity movement in 1988, Lithuanian nationalists began to drive events with lightening speed. In October 1988 Sajudis elected Vytautas Landsbergis, a

dynamic professor of musicology, its chairman. In March 1989 Sajudis representatives won seats in the Congress of People's Deputies, the Soviet Union's highest legislative body, and began advocating Lithuanian national interests in the Kremlin. In May the Lithuanians proclaimed their sovereignty and declared their country's incorporation into the Soviet Union illegal. State, and even communist, organizations declared their separation from Moscow and began to function independently. On 23 August 1989, the 50th anniversary of the Soviet-Nazi Non-aggression Pact, about 2 million people from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia stood holding hands along a highway from Vilnius to Tallinn to form a human chain stretching over 350 miles. In December the Lithuanian Communist Party seceded from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In 1990, Landsbergis was elected Chairman of the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet. On 11 March 1990, the newly elected parliament voted unanimously for independence.

The Kremlin reacted furiously, first trying to bully Lithuanians with military maneuvers and an economic blockade. The blockade forced Landsbergis to agree to a moratorium on independence while the governments of Lithuania and the Soviet Union entered negotiations. Under pressure from Soviet hardliners, the Gorbachev regime turned to force in January 1991 when Soviet troops seized Lithuanian government buildings in Vilnius. While storming the city's television center, Soviet troops killed 14 people and wounded hundreds. Undeterred, Lithuanians refused to budge on the declaration of independence, which stood until the aborted coup in Moscow ended attempts to restore Soviet control.

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As Bearden had predicted, he gave me the green light, and in the last week of August 1991, just a week after the failure of the coup attempt in Moscow, I embarked on one of the most thrilling and rewarding trips of my CIA career.

The plan was to link up with a Lithuanian contact—I'll call him Vitas—who was traveling to Vilnius in late August and who had ties to then-president Landsbergis. Believing the president would welcome my contact with his intelligence service, he had promised to advise the president about my secret trip. I was to meet Vitas in Warsaw, where he would brief me about border crossing requirements and the situation in Vilnius after the Moscow coup.

In the uncertain, fluid situation of the time, easy entry into Lithuania was not certain. In Headquarters, for example, we had conflicting information about something as basic as visa requirements. As the Soviets still regarded Lithuania as their territory and maintained a presence at crossing points, we thought I might need a Soviet visa. Other information indicated that the Lithuanians were already in control of their borders, and I would be able to enter easily.

If I were to attempt to secure a Soviet visa, it would have been a challenge. Because of my long career in Soviet operations, including the tour in Moscow, I was well known to the KGB, which would have been less than thrilled about my traveling to the USSR's rebellious republic. In the event, we decided that I would leave for Warsaw without troubling the Russians for a visa.

As planned, I met Vitas, who told me the Lithuanians were looking forward to my arrival. Unfortunately, he was still receiving conflicting reports about the visa issue, even from his high-level contacts in Vilnius. We talked it over and decided that I would go overland, by car, on the assumption that, because land borders were likely to be more hectic and crowded, visa requirements would be more relaxed than at the airport in Vilnius.

A colleague in Warsaw drove me on the four-hour trip through northeastern Poland to the Lithuanian border. Like most land borders in communist countries, the crossing in the otherwise sleepy Lithuanian town of Lazdijai was a chaotic mess. Long lines of cars and trucks inched their way to passport control booths, the first outposts of the stifling bureaucracy that was the Soviet system.

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Since my colleague had diplomatic plates issued in Warsaw, he followed custom and sped past the line of cars and up to the red and white gate marking the border. To our dismay we learned why reports conflicted: There were two border stations, one controlled by Soviet border guards and a second by Lithuanians.

As luck would have it, the first checkpoint we reached was the Soviet one. A surly border guard leafed through my passport, obviously failing to find a Soviet visa stamp. I politely explained that I had been misinformed and was told that a Soviet visa was no longer necessary. I begged and cajoled, imitating the abject and subservient citizen of Russian lore before the almighty civil servant, but the border guard was unrelenting. Finally, I offered to buy a visa on the spot. The border guard took the hint but, bad luck again, I had encountered a Soviet official invulnerable to the internationally proven red tape cutter. He refused. "*Viza, viza, a nichego bol'she,*" he barked. "Visa, visa and nothing else." We had no choice but to return to Warsaw and regroup.

### — 3 —

With no alternative and with fingers crossed, I took a flight the next morning to Vilnius. Seated next to me on the plane was a pleasant American woman of Lithuanian heritage from New York. Her parents were on the same flight, returning to their homeland for the first time in 50 years to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary. We parted after landing, and I hurried down the ramp to the passport control area. I made a beeline for the yawning border guard in one of the booths, hoping he was too tired to argue about my lack of a visa. With a bored look on his face, he lazily flipped through my passport, and handed it back.

"You have no Soviet visa," he noted, his finger tapping the passport.

"Well, I was told I didn't need one. That damned American embassy in Warsaw. Wrong information again. I can't believe it," I shook my head.

"Really?" the Soviet answered, "You don't need one?" The guard furrowed his brow and thought for a moment. Maybe there was some new directive, some memorandum passed around that he had missed. "Well, in that

case, alright.” The Soviet shrugged his shoulders and pounded his stamp in my passport. My spirits lifted, I walked through the small gate into Lithuania and became the first US official to enter a Soviet republic after the coup.

Minutes later, my nerves were aroused again. I’d entered a second passport control line, this one staffed by Lithuanians. For reasons not immediately apparent, it had come to a stop. CIA officers are always apprehensive at border crossings in communist countries, and I had come to think it had been too easy so far. Maybe the earlier guard had changed his mind. Maybe I was in a trap, the Soviets having lulled me into thinking I had escaped their notice. I could see some hubbub ahead of me. It seemed centered around an elderly couple that had been pulled off the line, with uniformed Lithuanians in animated discussion, apparently studying their passports.

I wondered what the problem was and hoped that after finally passing through the Soviet controls I wouldn’t be refused entry by Lithuanian border officials. In time, the line began moving again and the passports of other passengers, including mine, earned only cursory glances. With the elderly couple I spotted my seat mate from the airplane. They were all still off the line and talking with the guards. Assuming the elderly folks were her parents, I asked her if there was a problem.

“Not at all,” she laughed. “It’s just that my parents have Lithuanian passports from 50 years ago, when we were an independent country. These guys have never seen these passports before, and they’re amazed.” True. The Lithuanians, one by one, were studying the passports with obvious glee, turning to the couple, patting them on their backs and welcoming them home as heroes. I breathed a sigh of relief. The scene was only the first of many such episodes I would witness in a country emerging from the shadows of dictatorship and experiencing its independence and rekindled pride in itself and its heritage.

— 4 —

On the other side of passport control I found Vitas, who had arranged a room for me at the Lietuva Hotel. A concrete behemoth typical of Soviet

room for me at the Lietuva Hotel. A concrete behemoth typical of Soviet Inturist hotels, it was and still is the tallest building in Vilnius. In addition to arranging the room, Vitas had wangled an invitation for me to a dinner he was to attend in the Lietuva. The dinner's hostess was to be the president's wife, Grazina Landsbergis. Since I clearly didn't want to reveal my CIA affiliation, I went with a cover story that I was a low-level State Department employee on an advance team for an anticipated visit to Vilnius by Secretary of State James Baker. Baker, of course, was welcome in Lithuania, as he was coming to announce US recognition of the Baltic republic's recovered sovereignty and the resumption of a relationship that had dated back to July 1922, before its interruption in 1940.

Vitas explained my true identity to Mrs. Landsbergis, and she promised to protect my low profile and not fuss over me at the dinner. Still, I couldn't hide my US government affiliation, and dinner guests soon began discussing the United States and the Soviet Union. One guest brought up a rumor that the CIA had orchestrated the coup attempt against Gorbachev and proclaimed that it was a clever stratagem the wily Americans knew would backfire to discredit the hardliners once and for all.

Then Mrs. Landsbergis laughed and offered a toast. "Well I don't know about that but, if it's true, I say three cheers for the CIA!" All, me included, raised a glass in honor of the Agency I could not just then admit working for. I commented to a dinner partner on my left, a minister in the new government, that I was struck by the irony of former Soviet citizens toasting the CIA.

"You don't understand," he laughed. "For years Moscow's propaganda portrayed the CIA as the devil, the main enemy's primary instrument of evil. Soviets believe the propaganda is all lies, especially here in Lithuania, so the opposite must be true. The CIA must be a great organization." I was to hear these sentiments throughout my trip. While the CIA was often criticized harshly in its own country, apparently our former adversaries thought otherwise.

The day after the dinner, in a room at the Hotel Draugyste, one of the oldest hotels in Vilnius, Vitas introduced me to Mecys Laurinkus, the chief of the new Lithuanian intelligence service, and Audrius Butkevicius, the new minister of defense. Laurinkus, or “Max,” as we came to call him, was a lawyer in his mid-30s chosen by the president to head the civilian service. Stocky and perennially cheerful, Max almost always had a smile on his face. Behind the smile, however, was an unshakable commitment to Lithuanian freedom. Max was born to an imprisoned mother in a Soviet labor camp. His family had fought against the Soviet occupation all their lives. Max would later be replaced, but he remained active in parliament, and our paths were to cross again a few years later when he was reappointed chief of the Lithuanian service and I was named to take over Bearden’s division.

Butkevicius was only 31 years old the day I met him. Short and wiry with a thin moustache, the minister looked more like a student protester than a top government official. Like Laurinkus, Butkevicius’ roots were in the dissident movement. Before independence he had been a clandestine organizer for Sajudis; his heritage also included military figures. His ancestors had fought in the Napoleonic Wars, and his grandfather had been a colonel in the Lithuanian Army in the 1930s. He was a psychotherapist by training, but he was also a skilled mime. Butkevicius was a fervent supporter of close ties with the West and a strong minister, but in 1997 he would be convicted and jailed briefly for accepting bribes.

I told the two men that I had been sent by the CIA leadership to welcome Lithuania into the family of democracies. Most of all, we were prepared to help Lithuania build a strong intelligence service for its defense, one based on democratic principles and the rule of law.

Laurinkus and Butkevicius were immediately receptive, but both confessed to knowing little about intelligence. Laurinkus, who spoke some English and had visited friends in Massachusetts several times in the recent past, showed me two paperbacks. “This is all I know about intelligence. They are my guides but I think we need more,” he laughed nervously.

Neither book would make CIA’s recommended reading list. One was *CIA Diary* by Philip Agee, an exposé by an Agency-officer-turned-traitor who cooperated with Cuban intelligence to reveal the identities of CIA officers. The other was *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* by John Marks and Victor Marchetti, a harsh critique of the Agency published in 1974. Max had bought both in a Boston bookstore after learning he would be tapped to

run the nation's spy service.

Suppressing sarcastic remarks about the books, I told Laurinkus and Butkevicius that we could do better. I promised that, once details were worked out, Milt Bearden would come to Vilnius to discuss cooperation and training assistance. I said he would bring experts who would remain in Vilnius to develop our relationship. From its experience in Eastern Europe, the CIA had already designed appropriate training programs and dispatched attorneys to outline the laws and regulations governing intelligence collection and parliamentary oversight in the United States and other Western democracies.

I invited Laurinkus and Butkevicius to dinner at my hotel that night. I also invited a number of their colleagues who were equally eager—the excitement they exuded about their independence was palpable—yet inexperienced in the intelligence game. They were enthusiastic about learning the job from the CIA. Thanks to the wildly fluctuating ruble, an artificial exchange rate for US currency allowed me to host the entire leadership of the Lithuanian intelligence service for about nine US dollars. We feasted on a tasty, but cholesterol-laden, native dish called *cepelinai*, or zeppelins, balloon-shaped clumps of dough stuffed with meat, curd cheese and mushrooms, and wrapped in a layer of bacon strips, just to add another dash of grease.

## — 6 —

The next day, before an appointment with Laurinkus at the *Seimas*, the Lithuanian parliament, I took an early morning stroll around the city center to get a flavor of life in a country tasting freedom after years of oppression. Surprisingly, there was little evidence in downtown Vilnius of the turmoil affecting the Soviet Union. Shops were open and well-stocked.

bureaucrats hustled to work, and young women strolled with their baby carriages through Lukiskiu Park.

There, however, in the center of the park, stood the most visible symbol of Lithuanian independence: a leaden base upon which a statue or monument had once stood. Anyone who has traveled in any corner of the Soviet Union would have immediately realized what was missing. Vladimir Lenin, founder of Soviet communism, was deified in hundreds of cities throughout the USSR by towering statues, busts, and paintings. Now conspicuous by its absence, Lenin's statue had been removed from the center of Vilnius just after the coup in Moscow collapsed, its vacant base serving to remind Soviets that their hegemony over Lithuania was finished.

As I walked on through downtown streets, I noticed other, more subtle, changes. Typical Soviet government red signs with the ponderously long names of state agencies or enterprises were gone, replaced by shorter titles in Lithuanian. The heavy metal plaques embossed with the Soviet hammer and sickle that had adorned the entrances to these buildings had also been removed, as the Lithuanians had moved quickly to strip their capital of traces of the communist regime. When I asked Lithuanians about the dramatic events in Moscow, many were blasé. "Coup or no coup, the Soviets were finished here," they told me. "Now it's up to the rest of the world to realize that."

The scene that day at the Seimas was different. The parliament building was ringed by Lithuanian troops and tanks. Every avenue from the city was blocked by checkpoints and steel tank barricades, and hundreds of sandbags were piled high around the building itself, as if the country was still in a state of siege. Some Lithuanians told me it was all largely for show; Lithuania wanted to ensure that Western media footage would convey to the world that the Soviets still threatened the country's symbol of independence. Others, however, truly believed Soviet hardliners might yet launch an attack in a desperate effort to preserve their rapidly waning power.

Beyond the checkpoints and near the entrance to the Seimas, I saw scenes common to any legislative body in the West: small groups of deputies were huddled outside the Parliament, some in heated discussion; protesters from the Polish minority in Lithuania held



Polish minority in Lithuania held placards and chanted about their abused rights; and senior citizens stood quietly with signs complaining about inadequate pensions.

Once inside, I found a modern and almost spotlessly clean interior, with gleaming hallways and brightly colored Scandinavian furniture.

Laurinkus ushered me to the visitors gallery. Although I understood no Lithuanian, I could see that these were no Soviet-style proceedings,

with ponderous speeches and unanimous approvals of pre-designated outcomes. Debate was spirited, and legislators clearly disagreed with each other. Apart from the sandbags and barricades outside, this seemed like a normal democracy at work.



— 7 —

Later in the afternoon, Laurinkus introduced me to new Lithuanian Vice President Karol Motieka, who would sponsor Bearden's trip to Vilnius. Tall, thin, and soft-spoken, Motieka had the courtly manners of East European nobility. More than that, Motieka articulated rare virtues in post-Cold War politics: forgiveness and reconciliation. After years of repression, many in the former Soviet Bloc wanted to exact revenge on countrymen who had collaborated with the communists. New governments in Eastern Europe had already begun digging through the archives of communist security services to unmask thousands of informers. Whether the informants had cooperated with the communists out of ideological sympathy or the need to survive was irrelevant. Former dissidents now controlling governments wanted to ensure these collaborators were unmasked and never permitted to occupy any government post. Motieka realized that such bloodletting would only sharpen divisions in Lithuania and stir up emotions damaging to the country's democratic aspirations. He preferred locking the files away forever and moving on as one nation.

Motieka proved to be a perfect host and constantly checked after my

every need, although I told him I was fine and he had better things to do as vice president. He insisted I use his office whenever I needed to contact my colleagues in Warsaw. Before the days of laptop computers and e-mail, my only communication was through open phone lines to Warsaw, which would then relay my reports to CIA headquarters. Sometimes it was even difficult to get through to Warsaw, but the vice president's phones almost always worked. My reports were fairly anodyne, since I had to double-talk the information that mainly concerned planning for Bearden's visit.

Sitting alone in the vice president's office was surrealistic for a CIA officer who had spent his entire career combating the Soviet Union. If I had been alone just months before in the office of the vice president of a Soviet republic, I would have thought I had struck an intelligence motherlode. As I sat behind Motieka's desk, documents strewn about, my only purpose was to phone Warsaw. If I had any interest in the documents, I could probably have just asked Motieka about them anyway.

One of the major issues I had to resolve regarding Bearden's trip was his transport into Vilnius. Milt, ever with a flair for the dramatic, preferred a triumphant arrival on an executive jet. Like the visa issue, there were conflicting reports about whether the Soviets or Lithuanians controlled air space over Vilnius. The arrival of a plane, unannounced to the Soviets, some feared, might result in a shutdown order. Since the local Soviet and the Lithuanian governments were not enjoying the best of relationships, I could never obtain accurate information from my Vilnius contacts. Considering the consequences, I decided to err on the side of caution and advised Bearden to make the bumpy overland trip from Poland instead.

## — 8 —

The day after I met Motieka, he brought me to what had been the headquarters of the KGB in the center of Vilnius. Protesters in Vilnius had stormed the building in August 1991 and driven the occupants out, destroying the Soviet's most feared domestic instrument of power.

Even vacant, the building served as a lightning rod for Lithuanians' rage against the Soviets. Its gruesome history dated back to 1899 when it was built as a czarist courthouse. The KGB's predecessor, the NKVD, made the building its local headquarters when Stalin occupied Lithuania in 1940. During the Nazi occupation that followed, the Gestapo used the building until 1944, when the Soviet Army swept through Lithuania and reinstalled the NKVD. One of the building's most famous inmates was former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who was arrested in Vilnius in 1940 and detained at the headquarters before transfer to another prison. Local historians estimate that during the Stalinist era about 15,000 Lithuanians passed through the NKVD headquarters and about 700 were executed there for anti-Soviet activities. After the Stalinist years and until the Lithuanians drove the KGB out in August 1991, thousands more were jailed and tortured there.

The condition of this structure was perhaps the starkest sign of the end of Soviet power over Lithuania. Just inside the entrance stood a massive alabaster bust of Lenin that had been turned around to face a wall. Motieka and I walked through the building. Equipment of all types were scattered around the hallways, as were burlap sacks stuffed with shredded documents. KGB offices were littered with overturned safes and piles of documents and red file folders. Inside the safes were charred remnants of burned documents, among them crinkled papers that had survived as KGB officers fled the premises. Cords from secure telephones had been ripped from their moorings in the walls, and equipment had been bashed with hammers in desperate, last-minute attempts to destroy technical secrets as an angry crowd swelled outside. In one small office a large portrait of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the dreaded "Iron Felix," founder of the Cheka, the mother of Soviet intelligence services, was propped up in a corner, repeatedly slashed almost beyond recognition by someone's knife.

On the following day Motieka insisted I accompany him to Kaunas, a city about an hour west of Vilnius, where he would take formal possession of the local KGB building from officials of the now defunct Lithuanian KGB. I balked at first. If the KGB in Moscow learned of my presence at the event, they would not only learn of CIA's new relationship with Lithuania but would consider my presence at this humiliation an insult. Besides, I argued, CIA presence, if revealed, might even worry some Lithuanian citizens concerned that the country was substituting one big brother for another.

In the end, Motieka was unmoved, but he promised not to acknowledge

my presence to anyone. When I indicated I didn't know Lithuanian, he laughed. "You can pretend to be one of my relatives from the US if anyone asks. Believe me, no one will notice." After the declaration of independence, many Americans of Lithuanian descent traveled to Vilnius to help the country establish democracy and were working in government offices. One Lithuanian-American, Valdas Adamkus, a former officer in the US Environmental Protection Agency, would become president in 1998. So Motieka's hastily devised story seemed plausible, if somewhat stretched.

The session was stiff, formal, and, thankfully, brief. No one gave me a second look as I sat in a corner of the room alongside somber KGB officials, who would have been shocked to learn the CIA was in their midst. Motieka glanced at me from time to time during the proceedings, a wry smile on his face. He clearly relished the fact that the CIA could witness this moment of triumph over the KGB.

As I climbed into the backseat of Motieka's car for the return trip to Vilnius, his driver muttered something to him in Lithuanian. Motieka said the driver told him that President Landsbergis was trying to reach him. Told the president was out for a half-hour, Motieka decided to start back without calling from Kaunas. On the outskirts of the city, he directed the driver to pull over and stop the car. I was stunned as I watched the vice president get out of the car by a phone booth, fumble in his pocket for change with one hand while waving with the other to people on the street who recognized him. He fished out a coin, stepped up to the phone, and began dialing the president.

After Motieka resumed our drive, I explained that in America we had something called "car phones," which could be used to make calls directly from an automobile. Motieka was shocked. "Really? Do you think it's possible to get something like that here?" I knew little about car phones but promised my gracious host that, if it were technically possible, the CIA would get him one.

Bearden was to arrive in two days, bringing with him a delegation that would remain behind to work with the Lithuanian service. The timing was perfect. We had just learned that President Bush would announce official

recognition of Lithuanian sovereignty on 2 September 1991 and that Secretary of State Baker would travel to Vilnius on the president's behalf.

I told Motieka that we wanted to separate the secretary of state's public visit to Vilnius from Bearden's low-profile one. Since there was no US embassy in Vilnius yet, I also asked Motieka about a facility in which our officers could live and work without drawing attention. Within a day the vice president arranged our move into a comfortable and spacious dacha outside the city in a secure and secluded area once reserved for communist party dignitaries. The irony of supplanting communist party tenants with CIA officers was not lost on anyone, and the villa set a precedent for arrangements in other outposts of the former Soviet empire.

Bearden and his team arrived as planned in a motorcade of large vans stocked with luggage, communications equipment and, of course, goodies to remind one of home, such as American snacks and videos. This time the border crossing was arranged without a hitch since, not long after my arrival, the few remaining Soviet border guards had given up checking for visas, as Lithuanians had increasingly exploited post-coup chaos in Moscow to wrest away Soviet control over even minor governmental functions.

I rushed the team to its new quarters outside Vilnius. Communications were quickly set up, and Bearden penned the first official CIA message to Headquarters, advising of the team's safe arrival. I briefly outlined the next day's meetings for Milt and let the team get some sleep before what promised to be a landmark day in CIA history.

Motieka was actually nervous about the meetings with Bearden and wanted to ensure personally that every detail was carefully arranged. I tried to convince him that CIA officers were an informal lot and accustomed to living in far less comfortable conditions than the villa he had graciously arranged. Mustering all the diplomatic tact I could, I told Motieka, "Look, you have plenty to do as a vice president. You really should delegate a lot of this to your subordinates, or let me try to arrange some of the work myself."

Yet again I failed. Bearden and his delegation, dressed in their best dark suits, left with me the following morning for our first official meeting. With Laurinkus and Butkevicius we hammered out the details of our initial cooperation between services. Our hosts then took us to meet the vice president. Motieka told Bearden that he had gone to the dacha that

morning with clean sheets and blankets just to be sure his guests were comfortable. He told us that Bearden's "valet" had been very appreciative and friendly. We looked at each other, puzzled, until one of our delegation said under his breath, "He must mean Bob. We left him behind at the villa." Bob was SE's support chief, who had come along to make sure that the logistics and other support required would be in place for the team to function after Bearden and I returned home. Bob had to endure good-natured ribbing from Bearden and others for months as the monicker was spread around Headquarters.

We celebrated our new friendship that night at a banquet I organized for Motieka and the top officials of the intelligence service and defense ministry. The setting was perfect, a private room in the Stikliai Restaurant, which is housed in a restored 17th century building in the heart of the city's old town. At the time it was considered Vilnius' finest restaurant. As I watched Bearden and Motieka stand and raise their glasses to toast the future, I could see that the Cold War was, indeed, finally coming to an end.

## — 10 —

We had only one event remaining before Bearden and I left Vilnius. It was to prove the most dramatic and emotional of my stay in Lithuania. Motieka arranged a tour of KGB Headquarters for Bearden. Only this time the visit would include a stop in the jail cells in the building's dungeon, which I had not seen during my first visit. Our guide in the dungeon was the new chairman of the Parliament's National Security Committee. A short, balding man, with lines of suffering etched in his face, he appeared to be in his mid-70s. We were surprised to learn that he was almost 20 years younger than that. His premature aging was the result of the 36 years he had spent in Soviet labor camps.

The tour was a grisly one as our guide showed us cells designed for torture. In one of them, prisoners were forced to stand hours on end on a slight incline built into the wall in order to avoid standing on a floor flooded with water. Tired and helpless prisoners would fall into the water nearly frozen by winter air that had been allowed to blow in from an open window. The empty cells still seemed faintly to echo the screams of tortured prisoners. The chairman showed us a cell in which he had spent six years. He told us that despite this kind of treatment, most dissidents never lost heart and devised methods to communicate with each other and with the outside world. As an example, he showed us tiny scraps of paper he had saved on which he had neatly written messages in script so infinitesimally small that we could barely decipher the letters.

We stopped in front of one cell where, unlike the others, the walls were completely lined with burlap. The chairman explained that some prisoners became so desperate that they gave up hope and attempted suicide by running head first into the concrete walls until they died. Since the KGB didn't want their victims dying before they were fully interrogated, the jailers padded the walls of some cells to keep prisoners from using this suicidal practice. The padded cells also served the secondary purpose of muffling the screams of tortured and beaten prisoners.

The chairman invited me to step inside the cell. I immediately felt a tightness in my chest, a momentary inability to breathe. I could not imagine the horror of spending a minute in the cell, let alone years. I couldn't stand it more than a few seconds and quickly retreated into the corridor.

The KGB headquarters is now the Museum of Genocide Victims, a reminder of man's inhumanity to man. The museum is the only one of its kind in the former Soviet Union. Some guides, like the committee chairman who led us through the dungeons, are former inmates. During the brief moment I spent in the cell, I felt certain that my career in CIA, dedicated to fighting the kind of brutality that took place in there, was not in vain. I was positive then that when I signed on in 1980, I had made the right decision.

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