

Lithuania's Struggle against Soviet Occupation 1944-1953

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"I still believe that the struggle I led for nine years would bring its results"

Final words by Lithuanian General Jonas Demaitis in the KGB Court, Moscow 1954.

The repression of the population in Lithuania started on the first day of the Soviet occupation on 15th June 1940 and continued until the 31st of August 1993 when the Soviet-Russian Army finally returned home. The Soviet authorities carried out deportations, mass killings, imprisonment, and sovietification of the Lithuanian people and Soviet colonists were settled in Lithuania.

Soviet-oriented historians have tried to "justify" the mass deportations by referring to Lithuanian partisan activity, but in fact the deportations were largely

directed against the so-called "enemies of the people" of which a majority had never been partisans¹. The Soviets deported whole families; infants, children, women and elderly to Siberia. Altogether the Soviets deported 12 percent of the population². A rough estimate is that during the period 1940-1990 Lithuania lost one third of its population due to war, destruction and repression, as well as to emigration and deportations - a total equal to about one million citizens.

Following the secret 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between the Soviet Un-

ion and Germany the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania on 15 June 1940 and formally annexed it on the 3 August 1940. The Lithuanian nation never agreed to occupation or subjugation. The people of Lithuania resisted in all possible ways, and struggled to win back their freedom and independence. Despite the repression, underground resistance organizations formed, and a mass revolt took place on 23-27 June 1941 following the German attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. The revolt briefly liberated the largest part of the territory of Lithuania that was occupied by the Soviets, and re-established the independent Republic of Lithuania that formed a Provisional Government. Molotov, then Soviet Minister of Foreign

Affairs, condemned Lithuania and Lithuanians in Radio Moscow for the revolt.

German occupation of Lithuania followed from 1941 to 1944. The occupational regime of Germany was also based on extreme violence and repression, and mass exterminations of the population were carried out. The new occupation of the Lithuania as well as repression and terror stimulated a natural necessity to resist the occupant and violator. The defense was primarily aimed at the re-establishment of the independent Lithuanian State. The Lithuanian Freedom Army (LFA) was founded in December 1941, and its first headquarters were established in Vilnius on the initiative of Lieutenant Kazys Veverskis. It must be pointed out that LFA was first of all a military organization that preferred to restore Lithuanian independence by the use of armed force against the Germans, and it was not a political organisation.

As the war progressed the German retreat began. When the front was still rather far away, Lithuanians hoped that Western countries would stop the Soviet

army at the Lithuanian border, and few realized that incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union was to come. Hopes for renewed freedom were raised by the Atlantic Charter, which was proclaimed on 8 August 1941 by Churchill and Roosevelt. This agreement laid out the general principles for the basis of peace after Germany's defeat. It underlined the right of every nation to restore independence, which had been taken away by aggressors during the war. Thus Lithuanians fought against the Germans and then the Soviets, and waited for a war between the West and the Soviet Union. At the end of World War II in the West, Lithuania was the first Baltic State to start fighting trying to defend the free world from communism.

Lithuania met the second Soviet occupation unprepared and disorganized. Because of the experience from the first Soviet occupation, there was much determination to fight, but there were no battle plans or outlines and, most importantly, there was no political or military leadership³. Some leaders of the anti-Soviet and anti-Nazi resistance had been put

in German camps and prisons, and many higher rank officers and patriotic officers had been sent to Siberia or were executed during the first Soviet occupation. Other officers, fearful of the Red terror, had escaped to the West. The Lithuanian anti-Soviet partisan movement began in earnest the summer of 1944 and reached its peak in the spring of 1945, but at the same time Soviet repression grew stronger. Lithuanians were terrorized, raped, shot, imprisoned and deported to Siberia. Almost all of the Lithuanian army's high-ranking officers, who might have been expected to organize resistance, had fled into exile. Besides, before the Second World War there was no teaching of non-conventional war fighting in the Lithuanian Army Military Academy and NCO school, and especially the older officers, trained in conventional warfare, found it difficult to adapt. The Lithuanian writer Algirdas Julius Greimas gave a sarcastic but accurate description of the psychological drama, which he himself experienced - "*I saw that those officers of ours who pretended to be members of the resistance were*

*shit. It's possible to trust lieutenants and captains, but not colonels"*⁴.

The entire resistance struggle can be conditionally divided into three periods:

***First period:
Summer 1944 to spring 1946***

During this time, the resistance groups were established spontaneously. Officers and NCOs of the former Lithuanian army mostly led these groups, but only few officers and NCOs had survived two occupations. The resistance fighters acted in battalion or company level units, mostly during daytime, and used regular Army tactics. More than half of the estimated 30 thousand partisans who fell in battle, died during the first fighting period. The struggle in this period was very bloody. Partisans had units from battalion to company size, but they did not have higher-ranking officers to co-ordinate the effort, and many had little experience in warfare. There is no statistic of casualties on either side and they will probably never be known, but an informed guess on the

total number of losses of Lithuanians partisans could be about than 30 thousand. As the partisans could chose time and place for the engagements the Soviet side suffered perhaps more than 80 thousand casualties⁵.

The Soviet government brought two NKVD (later MGB and KGB) divisions, four Border regiments, and recruited about seven thousand local army helpers, so-called "stribai", for use against the partisans. When needed other regular army units including air force and artillery were brought in to Lithuania. M.A. Suslov, the main ideologist of communism at this time and a member of the Soviet Politburo, came to Lithuania assigned with the special task of putting down the Lithuanian resistance-movement. It is an indication of the seriousness of the problem he faced, that he said - "*There will be a Lithuania, but without Lithuanians*"⁶.

The Soviets employed up to about 100.000 soldiers against the Lithuanian partisans.

The frontline units used against the partisans were the 2nd and 4th NKVD divisions. The 4th "General Vetrov" divi-

sion was transferred to Lithuania after fighting in the Northern Caucasus and Crimea, and was especially cruel. It eradicated some villages and their inhabitants in the Dzukija region of Lithuania during Christmas of 1944. The NKVD soldiers lived almost as prisoners, and were often short of food and clothes. Frequently, they fought without officers, but even together with officers the NKVD soldiers were allowed to rape, rob and kill non-combatant Lithuanians. During the whole resistance period NKVD workers handled captured resistance fighters and civilian people in a very brutal way. Trying to intimidate others, the fighters and often also innocent civilian people were brutally tortured. Killed Lithuanians were disgraced, clothes were removed from corpses, ears and noses were cut, and five-cornered stars were carved on their breasts.

***Second period:
Spring 1946 to the end of 1949***

As the Soviets expanded their control, the partisans split into much smaller

groups of approximately from 5 to 15 partisans, and fundamentally changed their tactics. They spent the daylight hours in well-camouflaged bunkers and mostly carried out combat operations at night, fighting in often very well planned ambushes. The independent groups were gradually subordinated to a district, and began to concern themselves with the eventual consolidation of all partisan forces and support the creation of a united leadership. But only in February 1949 was this process completed. The widespread armed resistance partially became an organized military structure. Most partisan units based their activity on military regulations, "statutes", drafted by themselves, wore military uniforms or at least distinctive signs, carried arms in public, and issued decrees for the fighters as well as for the civilian population. The partisans' military action and propaganda hindered the establishment of administrative institutions of occupation authorities in rural districts, and disturbed the organization of the formal Soviet elections to the bodies of the occupational authorities. The partisans also assisted in the efforts to

boycott mobilization to the occupational army, fought collaborators, impeded the collectivization, and resisted the colonization of the country and the nationalization of private property, and thus deferred the general demoralization of the population. The partisans published more than 70 periodicals and non-periodical newspapers. Many of the published pamphlets tried to inform the population of the international situation and to maintain the national Lithuanian identity. During this period partisans many times succeeded in breaking the Soviet "Iron Curtain" and send representatives to the West to ask for help against the Soviet occupation. One example of a Partisans' plea to supporters in the free world, which clearly illustrates the despair and hopelessness of the situation, read:

"Lithuanian partisans have understood very well that alone they could not resist bolshevism. But not all of us agreed that we could go like animals to the slaughterhouse. We believed without a doubt in the victory of truth and in the conscience of the Western world. Courageously we stood in an uneven fight, having no doubt that the Free World, which shows off its ideals

of freedom, will not let bolshevism - the shame of civilization - spread out and dominate the Baltic States and even Eastern Europe... We believed in promises, but we were deceived... We believed that by fighting we would be able to exist for a few years with our armed forces and the iron will of the Lithuanian nation... But it went the other way. Nations who fought for their freedom were left hopelessly alone... Thanks gentlemen! Through your indecision and delay bolshevism has made terrible wounds to the Lithuanian nation. Communism destroyed part of the nation by deportations to Siberia and another part was put into jails for a slow death. Against the partisans the Soviet NKVD used means of torture never before known in the world: the soles of feet were burnt, the flesh underneath the fingernails was pricked, fingernails were pulled off, arms and legs were broken, sex organs were damaged, the skin peeled off the body..."

Partisans' message to Western politicians⁷.

A consolidation of all partisan forces was achieved only in February 1949 when all the leaders of Freedom Fighters throughout Lithuania had a secret meeting. The Freedom Fighters created a unified council by uniting into the LLKS (Lithuanian Freedom Fighting Move-

ment), which would coordinate the political and military activities of the underground movement. The leaders of the Freedom Fighters formulated and approved the rules and regulations, some partisan field manuals, and a criminal code to the fighters and populations. They accepted an advanced doctrine for tactics of resistance and worked to improve ties with supporters in the West. The Freedom Fighters meeting approved a Supreme Council, and selected General Jonas Pėmaisitis as chairman. All members of this Council died in battle or were shot in jails.

Third period: 1950 to 1953

The resistance movement gradually declined during this period. The activity of the KGB agents and KGB shock groups was increasing, and the incidents of treason were growing in number⁸. KGB shock troops disguised as partisans killed many civilian people in an attempt to discredit the Freedom Fighters. The Soviet authorities refused to recognize the partisans as freedom fighters and declared that they were simply bandits who robbed and

killed peace-loving citizens. Soviet propaganda varied this concept of banditry, capitalists, landowners and high-ranking officials of the Smetona (last Lithuanian President) regime⁹. However, such assertions were refuted simply by the fact that hardly a tenth of the freedom fighters could be called representatives of the “exploiting classes”. The partisan movement was most widespread in Dzukija, one of the poorest regions of Lithuania¹⁰.

Individual partisan groups and sole partisans continued the struggle for a few more years. The last active partisan Antanas Kraujelis perished in the struggle on 17 March 1965. The partisan struggle went on record in Lithuanian history as a war for the right of national independence. It is uncertain whether this struggle was responsible for the fact that fewer Soviet citizens came to settle down in Lithuania than in Latvia and Estonia, where the partisan movement was much weaker¹¹.

Although the armed struggle was suppressed, the resistance of the Lithuanian population against the occupants continued. It simply took other forms: underground organizations were founded con-

stantly, prohibited literature was disseminated, cultural resistance took place, and dissident movement for human and civil rights grew until the Lithuanian people finally succeeded in regaining their independence as a free democratic nation in 1991.

¹ J.P. Kedys, 1994. Terorizuo jama ir naikinama Lietuva 1938-1991. [*Lithuania under destruction and terrorisation 1938-1991*]. “Ryto” spaustu vė, Klaipėda. p. 409.

² See annex A and B. Arvydas Anučas k as, 1996. Lietuvių tautos sovietinis naikinimas 1940-1958 metais. [*Soviets destruction of the Lithuanian Nation 1940-1958*]. “Mintis”. Vilnius. pp.446-447. (Original in Russian).

³ Editor Saulius Pukas, 1999. “Lithuania. Past, Culture, Present”. Baltos Lankos, Lithuania. p.202.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ J.P. Kedys, 1994. p. 408.

⁶ Arvydas Anučas k as, 1996. p. 408.

⁷ J.P. Kedys, 1994. p. 202.

⁸ See annex B. “MVD works results from 15 July 1944 to 25 October 1953 and Partisan war in the Lithuania in Numbers July 1944-October 1953.” Quoted from Arvydas Anučas k as, 1996. pp.446-447.

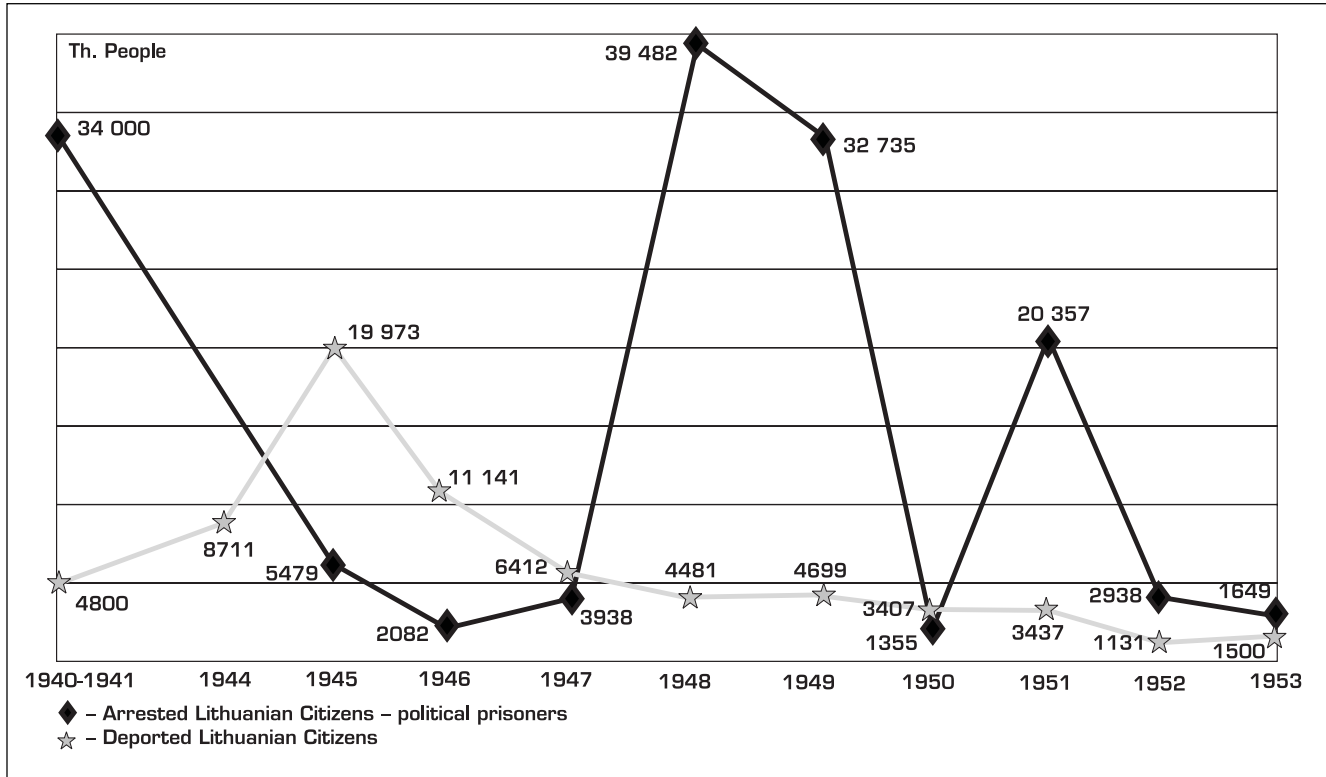
⁹ *Ibid.*, p.203.

¹⁰ J.P.Kedys, 1994. p.408.

¹¹ J.P.Kedys, 1994. p. 203.

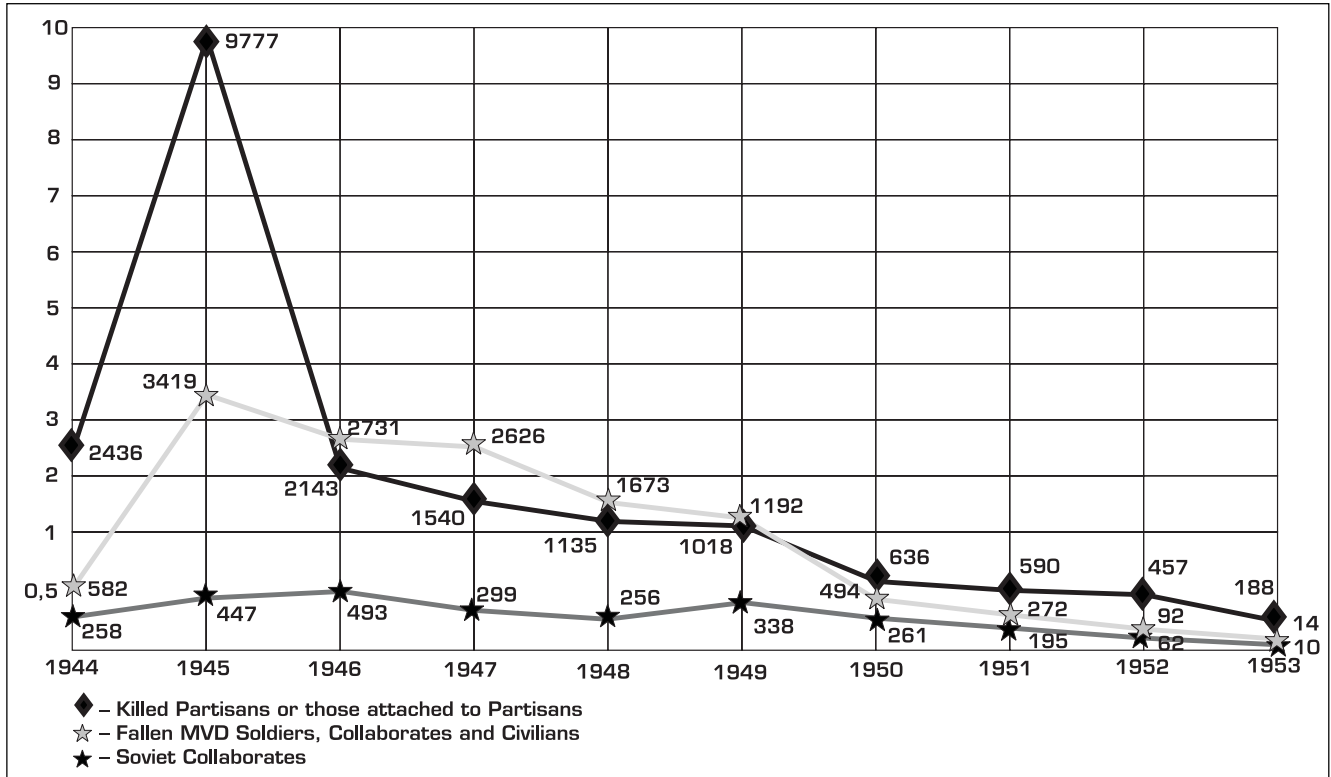
Annex A

THE LITHUANIAN NATION IN 1940-1941 AND 1944-1953 MGB (KGB) STATISTICAL INFORMATION



Annex B

PARTISAN WAR IN LITHUANIA IN FIGURES JULY 1944–1953 MGB (KGB) STATISTICAL INFORMATION



Annex C

MVD (NKGB) work results from 15 July 1944 to 25 October 1953 (Translated from Russian)

Eliminated	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	Total
Underground Command Centers	—	7	2	1	2	2	1	1	—	1	17
Regional and District Staffs	5	31	15	5	12	16	8	3	3	5	103
Total number of Armed Nationalists (Guerrilla)	4515	17524	5199	3041	2473	2186	1044	1138	632	354	38106
From this:											
Killed	2436	9777	2143	1540	1135	1192	635	590	457	188	20093
Arrested	2079	7747	3056	1501	1338	994	409	548	175	116	17963
Legalized Armed Nationalists	285	36272	1055	708	176	51	18	17	16	6	38604
Nationalist Organizations and Groups	166	819	500	363	339	440	262	224	89	53	3255
Total number of arrested	4162	19973	10760	6416	4481	4699	3407	3396	1131	951	59376
From this: Members of Nationalist Organizations and underground signalers	316	4382	3676	1610	1086	1218	1077	943	337	205	14850
Armed Nationalist supporters	329	3083	1986	2145	1112	1274	821	791	354	364	12259
Total number of Deported : People	—	4479	2082	3938	39482	32735	761	20357	2203	—	106037
ffffdddddddd Families	—	1204	501	1022	11233	9633	189	5136	312	—	29230
From this: Kulak Families	—	437	—	602	8228	7886	173	4188	217	—	21731
Nationalist Families (answer from terror acts)	—	767	501	420	3005	1747	16	948	95	—	7499
Number of Armed Nationalists terror acts	854	3324	2354	1572	823	560	285	187	93	63	10115
Killed in these acts	582	3419	2731	2626	1673	1018	494	272	92	14	12922
From this: Soviet Collaborates	253	447	493	299	256	122	83	52	17	—	2022
Fallen MVD soldiers	93	725	273	155	118	98	50	44	35	5	1596
Confiscated: Cannons	4	4	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	9
Anti-tank Guns	10	10	9	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	31
Mortars	—	15	15	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	32
Grenade launchers (Panzerfaust)	—	4	4	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	10
Machine guns	395	1225	501	312	208	176	61	76	48	12	3014
Automatic rifles	606	2245	1166	794	523	522	291	273	190	77	6687 *
Rifles	4884	9596	3959	1695	1090	984	498	487	316	108	23617 *
Pistols	516	1832	1678	1275	1001	1069	480	587	437	170	9045 *
Mines	459	1403	1592	66	8	63	2	12	14	3	3622 *
Hand grenades	3196	5845	2743	1509	862	716	314	207	192	47	15631 *
Various ammunitions	620618	1427565	716180	405396	186166	213545	173169	118025	49367	13118	3943063
Explosives (kg)	—	504,3	337,5	75,4	74	147,2	—	—	8,4	3	1149,8
Typewriters and copymachines	2	132	78	92	54	97	37	27	40	18	577

Head of the Lithuanian SSR MVD 4-th Department Maj. P. Raslan, 25 October 1953. *Arithmetical mistake in the original.