CHAPTER 24

With General Musteikis and into the Diplomatic “Swamp”

Defense Minister Kazys Musteikis not only supported Smetona in the government meeting, but he also decided to accompany him through the border with Germany. Musteikis became a soldier in 1915 when he finished the Oranienbaum (near St. Petersburg) officers’ school. He then fought on the German front and was wounded. When Lithuanian soldiers began to rally in Russia, he was an adjutant in a separate Lithuanian battalion in Rovno. Upon returning to Lithuania in 1918 he entered the army as a volunteer, for several years headed an armored car battalion, and participated in battles with the Polish army. In 1928 he finished the higher trade school in Vienna, later served in the army, was an inspector in the military school and a lecturer in courses for higher officers. In 1932 he finished the general staff academy and was designated chief of the I. division of the Lithuanian army’s general staff. In 1934 he was temporarily chief of the General Staff. In 1934–1938 he headed the military school, and from 1938 on he was Defense Minister.

When Musteikis entered Mironas’s cabinet as Defense Minister, he already knew that Raštikis was urging the merger of the posts of minister and head of the army and that he would be taking over Raštikis’s duties. Soon Raštikis demanded that the war council be convened to consider a new project for the leadership of the army. He offered amendments that the army leader should be the supreme commander of the entire army, although according to the existing constitution the Defense Minister was such, and Raštikis’s proposals would leave the minister only the functions of supplying the army. Raštikis went on to demand that the army chief participate with a full voice in cabinet of ministers meetings, although according to the 1938 constitution the army chief was not to participate in government meetings. Musteikis refused to submit such a proposal to the government. His relations with Raštikis were rather tense, and Musteikis understood that he had to depend on President Smetona, whom he characterized as “simple, considerate, and good.”

When the government resigned in the morning of June 15, the members of the government then departed the prezidentūra. In supporting Smetona’s call to resist with arms, Musteikis, knowing Moscow’s accusations against Lithuanian officials, understood that after the “heads” of Povilaitis and Skučas, his would be the next “head” that the Soviets demanded. He decided to cross
the German border together with Smetona. Musteikis did not write in his memoirs whether he knew that in the early morning the Soviets had attacked several Lithuanian border police posts, disarmed policemen, taking them into Soviet territory, and had killed the chief of the Uta border post A. Barauskas.

At about 10 a.m., still waiting for the Soviet response, Smetona began to prepare to leave. He showed his son Julius how and what to pack into suitcases; he directed the prezidentūra’s servants. He called his wife in Užulėnis to tell her to travel toward Germany. He later explained his departure, as president of the state, in the following way, again speaking of himself in the third person:

Let us remember that he [the president – ae] had sworn to maintain Lithuania’s sovereignty. If he agreed to any conditions and circumstances, surrendered it to anyone, that would be the equivalent of treason, destroying his own personality and heaping dishonor on his nation. Remaining at his duties, without defending himself, he could damage and harm Lithuania more than anyone else. Having him in their power, the rulers of Moscow would be able to use his tortured self for all kinds of violence. Knowing the Bolsheviks’ morality, or immorality, one could imagine how they would act. The whole world knew how Moscow’s leaders could force