

Ukraine: A Personal Memory



by Gary Fouse

As I watch the events unfold in Ukraine, I can't help recalling 1994 when I made two trips to that country as a member of DEA's International Training team to conduct a regional drug enforcement seminar in Kiev for drug control police from each of the former Soviet republics.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, the former Soviet republics witnessed a sharp increase in drug trafficking through their territories and asked the US, through the State Department, for assistance in the form of training. Since my last post of duty with DEA before retiring was International Training from 1993-1995, I was there at a time when our teams were being sent to many of the former republics to advise and train their drug cops. In that role, I had the occasion to visit Latvia, Georgia, and Ukraine. After retirement, in 1997, I went to Moscow as a contract hire to assist DEA's International Training team put on a seminar in Russia. Altogether, it was an incredible experience.

In April 1994, I traveled to Kiev to conduct advance preparations for a seminar scheduled for May-June, a period of two weeks. As team coordinator for this seminar, it was my job to arrange hotel accommodations, a seminar site, simultaneous interpreters, and other logistical arrangements. In Kiev, I was assisted by officers from the Ukrainian police from the Interior Ministry, the US Embassy, and the DEA county attaché in Vienna. (There was no DEA office in Ukraine, and liaison was handled by our DEA office in Vienna. The country attaché from Vienna was a Ukrainian-American who spoke Ukrainian fluently.)

During the few days I spent in Kiev, I was shown great hospitality by my Ukrainian counterparts. Of course, much of that hospitality came in the form of vodka, but I digress.

Then in late May, I returned to Kiev with my fellow team members, and we put on a 2-week course of instruction. The students were composed of two cops from each of the 15 former Soviet republics along with 7-8 Ukrainian cops. The hotel we stayed at and where we conducted the school was called the Prolisok, a resort-type establishment that had been used to house several Olympic athletes during the Moscow Olympics. In the evenings, everybody would gather in the hotel restaurant/bar, and naturally, the vodka flowed, but again, I digress. The Cold War seemed like a distant memory. I remember meeting a young Ukrainian army officer who had fought in Afghanistan. He had stopped by our hotel to say hello. I told him I had been a US Army military policeman in West Germany during the 1960s (during the Vietnam war/Cold War, certainly no comparison between my military service and his), and I invited him to drink with us. He said that he was on duty, but would try and come back later when he was off duty. He wasn't able to make it back, but I was so impressed with this young combat veteran and his professionalism.

Over the weekend in the middle of the school, the Ukrainian police arranged a boat trip down the Dnieper River, which

flowed through Kiev, to the town of Kaniv, which was the home of Ukraine's national hero, the dissident poet, writer, and artist, Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861). We visited the Shevchenko memorial, where he is buried, and my DEA colleague from Vienna and I shared the honor of laying a wreath on Shevchenko's grave. When I say Shevchenko was a dissident, I mean that he opposed the rule of tsarist Russia over Ukraine. For that, he was imprisoned.

There was another site I visited in Ukraine, actually during my advance trip. I had requested the police to show me Babi Yar, the infamous ravine on the outskirts of the city where, during the German occupation in World War 2, over 30,000 Jews were murdered by the Germans.

All these memories are coming back to me now as Ukraine faces a Russian invasion. I think about the counterparts that I worked with, ate with, and drank with, and I worry about their common fate. I also think back about Taras Shevchenko and why he is Ukraine's national hero.

My prayers are with the people of Ukraine in this hour.