Ex-Soviet Officer Jailed for '91 Raid

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VILNIUS, Lithuania — A former member of a Soviet OMON unit was found guilty of murder and was sentenced to life in prison for his role in the killings of seven Lithuanian border guards in 1991.

Konstantin Mikhailov is the first person to be tried and convicted for involvement in the pre-dawn raid on a Lithuanian border checkpoint that occurred as Soviet forces tried to crush the Baltic republic's quest for independence.

The Vilnius Regional Court on Wednesday also ordered Mikhailov, a Latvian citizen, to pay 2.2 million litas ($1 million) in compensation to Lithuania.

He declared his innocence and is likely to appeal the ruling.

Like its Baltic neighbors, Lithuania set up checkpoints manned by unarmed guards after declaring independence in the waning months of the Soviet Union. Soviet authorities viewed the border posts as illegal.

In one of the bloodiest assaults on the rebellious republic, seven border guards were shot

to death and one was wounded as OMON commandos from the Soviet Interior Ministry raided the Medininkai checkpoint on the border of Lithuania and Belarus in July 1991.

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