Dear readers,

This magazine is the English version of selected articles published in the pages of the review Paměť a dějiny (Memory and History), which is issued by the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes. It is almost two years since I last wrote an introduction to these articles. At that time my words had an obvious theme: 25 years had elapsed since the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. It was an opportunity to reflect on where we had got to from that fateful moment and what we actually know now about a recent past that continues to influence us greatly to this day.

It is curious that now – two years later – the question of “where have we have got to” is perhaps even more pressing. Naturally I don’t need to lecture the readers of this magazine on the fact that the importance of reflecting on the non-democratic regimes in our recent history (which is the mission of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and our partners in other post-Communist countries) is precisely that it helps us to identify all of the threats democracy faces. After all, questions pertinent in the 20th century have not ceased to be topical: Why has democracy reached a crisis in many European states? What led citizens to start losing faith? Where did such a great tolerance of violence come from? What is behind many people’s tendency toward authoritarian systems of government?

I do not wish to be the bearer of bad tidings. However, in today’s unstable Europe, in which xenophobia and anti-Semitism are again on the rise and extremists of various stripes are daring to do what they wouldn’t have had the courage to do 15 years ago, we may be surprised how important the results of our research could prove.

This year also brings a noteworthy anniversary: It is 80 years since the birth of Václav Havel – a thinker who with extraordinary accuracy named the various ills of our society and of Western civilisation in general, both in the days of a divided Europe and subsequently. In doing so he invariably irritated, nay angered, many. In cooperation with the Václav Havel Library and the Czech Centres, we decided to commemorate his legacy with an exhibition entitled Václav Havel - Politics and Conscience, which has been travelling to various places in the Czech Republic and around the world. It is not an historical analysis; other, more appropriate genres may serve that purpose. Rather it is an intimate exhibition at which, via 26 panels, visitors can encounter famous and lesser known ideas from Havel’s texts and public speeches. Accompanying them are photos that both feature Havel and bring those concepts up to date, underlining the urgency of his calls. Judging by the reactions – enthusiastic and spite-filled – they speak to many today with surprising force.

“If Europe wants it can do something else, more modest yet more beneficial: through the model of its own being, it can serve as an example that many diverse peoples can work together in peace without losing any part of their identity,” says Havel. “It can demonstrate that it is possible to live to-

gerther in peace with other cultural worlds without a person or a state having to renounce themselves and their truth in the process.” Meaningful words for today’s world, which is starting to become volatile and inflamed once again.

The oft-repeated “accent on human rights”, which for us today, paradoxically, is a kind of hot potato, was in Václav Havel’s case reinforced by personal experience – by knowledge of what it means to live in an undemocratic country and to be a prisoner of conscience. Havel knew well what the experience of two undemocratic regimes had done to Czech society and what a harmful mark it had left.

“Not only is it a moral responsibility, it is also in the vital interests of everyone who lives in democratic or free conditions, not to be indifferent to the fate of people who do not enjoy the same good fortune and to offer a wide spectrum of help to those, who have the courage, even in unfree conditions to behave freely and under the rule of lies to serve truth. It is thus the natural duty of democratic governments to know about the true state of affairs in such countries and to speak about it openly at home in the intentional field and in meetings with representatives of all countries no matter how powerful they may be, where there are reasons for concern.”

We could add more quotations from Havel’s thinking like this, one after the other. Hopefully our exhibition will also help make it clear that Havel’s philosophy and legacy do not remain in the grip of the moribund past.

Of course, that should apply generally to the history of the 20th century: that history is still very much alive. Studying it still has something to tell us about the various problems of the world in which we live. I hope that the articles contained in this issue will convince you of that. I wish you an interesting and inspiring read.

Sincerely

Zdeněk Hazdra, Director
ARTICLES AND STUDIES
Refugee Cemetery, Lemnos island, summer 1920
Photo: Reproduction Russkiy Lemnos
behind the iron curtain

The fate of Russian émigrés in Czechoslovakia

Between the two world wars, a large community of Russian émigrés that had been forced to leave their homeland and flee the Bolshevik terror lived in Czechoslovakia. The young state offered them a background and support. However, that all changed after the end of WWI. In 1045 many Czechoslovak Russians met their tragic fate personified by members of the Soviet secret police who came to arrest them.

ANASTASIE KOPŘIVOVÁ

In the early 1920s, as part of so-called Action Russe (RPA), the young Czechoslovak Republic accepted several thousand Russian émigrés who fled their home country after the October Revolution and the defeat of the White Armed Forces. They were mostly young men and boys who fought in WWI as well as in the civil war. After the retreat of the White (Volunteer) Army in Southern Russia, its inevitable defeat was to be expected. The decimated army was pushed out to the coast of the Black Sea and withdrew into port towns such as Yevtapiy, Yalta, Kerch, Sevastopol and Feodosiya. From there, the army was evacuated with the help of the British and French, allies of tsarist Russia during WWI, to territories in the Mediterranean under the protection of the two countries.

The evacuation was carried out from 11 to 14 November 1920. In just three days, a total of about 150,000 people were evacuated from the ports on the Black Sea. They were not only soldiers but also employees of military and civilian hospitals, clergymen, teachers and students of military (cadet) schools. They were also joined by representatives of opposition political movements, members of provisional governments, journalists and writers, university professors, teaching staff at grammar schools and colleges and their family members. The last ship called General Kornilov with P.N. Wrangel, commander-in-chief of the vanquished army, on board set sail from the port of Sevastopol on 14 November. The White movement in Southern Russia was defeated.

The refugees spent the first winter in makeshift wooden huts or in tents where contagious diseases such as typhus, malaria, Spanish flu and tuberculosis spread fast. Warfare injuries did not heal well and feelings of depression and hopelessness were not easy to overcome. Accommodation, subsistence, clothing and basic medical care for such a large number of refugees was costly and difficult to administer. Help was organized by the International Committee of the Red Cross as well as humanitarian and religious organizations, individual wealthy sponsors and national governments, primarily the US government. Here we must mention the Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen, who was appointed the League of Nations’ High Commissioner for Refugees and who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his organizational and humanitarian work in 1922.

In 1921, all hope vanished concerning the soldiers’ possible return to the country and their involvement in the fight against the Bolsheviks. Therefore, it was decided that assistance would be provided to those who wished to return home, while the others would be offered asylum in countries willing to accept them and offer them work opportunities. Very few refugees decided to return to Russia. The rest of them opted for temporary emigration although they could not have imagined how long it would last in the end and that the majority of them would not live to see their homeland again.

National governments of individual states offered asylum to refugees based on their economic capacity and political situation. Most of them settled in Southern Europe in states like Bulgaria and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Similarity of the languages, including their written form (the Cyrillic alphabet), as well as the orthodox religion played a major role in selecting the country of asylum. King Alexander I of Yugoslavia attended military schooling in tsarist Russia and had a genuine human understanding for the refugees’ needs. Bulgaria felt grateful for Russia’s military involvement during the Russo-Turkish wars. Members of the Russian nobility and the majority of writers and artists left for France, where they mostly settled in Paris. A large colony of emigrants was created in Germany, particularly in Berlin.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND RUSSIAN REFUGEES

The Czechoslovak Republic was one
of the few countries which offered the refugees help organized by the state and financed from the state budget. Pursuant to the decision of 28 July 1921, file number 23912/1921, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czechoslovak Republic was charged with organizing and implementing the so-called Action Russe.

Czechoslovakia pledged to temporarily accept refugees on its territory and ensure:

Care for invalids, sick, elderly women unable to work, children not obliged to attend school, and those unable to work and sustain themselves;

Care for refugees able to work, i.e. provide them with suitable jobs, primarily in agriculture;

Care for refugees - intellectual workers, such as scientists, writers, journalists, artists, etc. who should be provided with permanent individual support allowing them to continue with their work;

Care for high school students and the youth in general;

Care for university students.6

The openness of the Czechoslovak society stemmed not only from the traditional rusophilia and slavophilia of the Czech National Revival and the support by influential legionaries circles but also from the idea that the consolidated country of the Soviets would someday heartily welcome young professionals educated in Europe. The largest portion of the funding was supposed to aim at points 4) and 5), i.e. at the opportunity to conclude suspended high-school and university education. The decrease in the Czech male population of productive age caused by WWI also played a part in the decision. The decline was most apparent in the country where wartime losses were felt most and where the workforce was lacking. These losses were to be temporarily replaced by Russian refugees able to work in accordance with point 3).

The action was originally planned for five years and was supposed to be terminated by 1928. The number of accepted refugees, including students, was expected to be 10,000, maximum 15,000 people. The level of material conditions Czechoslovakia offered to study applicants was magnanimous and exceeded those offered by any other country. In the first period, students could enjoy free lodging and catering, and were entitled to free basic clothing together with a number of other benefits (they were exempted from paying enrolment fees and fees for examinations, were entitled to discounted public transport, etc.). Later, this scheme was replaced by study grants which enabled students to cover these expenditures for themselves. Only students who fully dedicated themselves to their studies and took exams in due time were eligible for these benefits. Their study results were subject to scrutiny and unsuccessful students lost the right to state support.

The interest in studying in the ČSR exceeded all expectations and although the applicants had to attend strict interviews aimed at determining the level of their previous education and study predispositions, the number of applicants rose steeply and, in the end, it topped the planned financial quotas and possibilities of Prague-based universities. Consequently, Russian and Ukrainian students also studied in Brno, Bratislava, and Příbram where the University of Mining existed at that time6. The number of study and work applicants in the ČSR increased from the originally planned 5,000 to 15,000 in 1925 and new stringent requirements had
behind the iron curtain
to be adopted for issuance of entry visas.

The expected democratization in the USSR did not happen. The Soviet Union sealed its borders and was not interested in accepting the returning “class enemies”. The originally planned date of termination of the Action Russe was postponed from 1928 to 1938. The amount of state support dedicated for students gradually fell significantly. The management and financing of the Action Russe went from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czechoslovak Republic (émigrés ceased to be seen as foreigners temporarily residing in the country) to other ministries, primarily to the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment, Ministry of Social Care and Ministry of Public Work. The cooperation with the Czechoslovak Red Cross chaired by Alice Masaryková was important too. From 1921 to 1937, a total of 508,034,511 crowns was provided to the Action Russe from the state budget only.

Instead of temporary IDs issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czechoslovak Republic, Nansen passports were used. After they finished their studies at the end of the 1920s, students applied for jobs in the ČSR, including Subcarpathian Ruthenia, or left for other countries which were in need of young technicians and doctors. Graduates from Czechoslovak universities easily found good jobs in French colonies in Africa or in South America. Those who remained in the ČSR gradually adapted to the environment and many of them wished to acquire the right of domicile, which was a necessity when applying for Czechoslovak state citizenship.

Under point 3) of the Action Russe, excellent Russian specialists, university professors, scientists, technicians, writers, journalists, artists, etc. arrived in the ČSR. A number of them worked in Czechoslovak universities, as organizers of cultural life, in émigrés’ publishing houses and the press. These activities also received subsidies from the budget of the Czechoslovak state and corresponded to the importance the leading representatives of the ČSR ascribed to the elevation of the general level of education and enlightenment.

In this respect we must also mention the plans of the Czechoslovak politicians to turn Czechoslovakia into a centre of the Slavic world. All activities contributing to achieving this goal were guaranteed state support. Czechoslovak universities at that time welcomed students not only from the former Russian Empire, but also Poles, Lusatian Sorbs, Bulgarians and, most of all, Yugoslavs.

A number of specialized institutes, scientific societies, libraries, museums, choirs, theatre groups, and publishing houses were established under the RPA. All these activities enriched the scientific and cultural life in Czechoslovakia and helped to promote Czechoslovakia in Europe and overseas. In the times of a global economic crisis and of diminishing funds to support the Action Russe, a number of cultural and scientific activities had to be scrapped; however, the support of the major ones continued all through WWII until 1945.

As a result of the reduced state financial support, various clubs and organizations of the émigrés ceased to exist or their publishing activities were reduced in the 1930s. The support of children, invalids and individuals unable to work was least affected and also continued through to 1945. At the same time, several major émigrés’ scientific institutions continued to receive support and a Russian and a Ukrainian grammar school existed in Prague until 1945.

The late 1930s saw a second wave of Russian émigrés leaving the ČSR. In anticipation of the upcoming war, people who felt threatened by Germany’s political orientation and aggressive racist rhetoric were among the first to leave. Those who were unable to find adequate job positions in the Czech lands moved to Slovakia where, among sharpening anti-Czech sentiments, they took the jobs vacated by Czechs who were expelled from Slovakia.

WORLD WAR II

The war period was difficult for all people in Europe. It was especially trying for the Russian emigrant community to adopt a clear stance towards the war events. In March 1939 they had to come to terms with the unexpected act of signing of the treaty between the USSR and Germany, a treaty which allowed Germany to occupy Western Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg and France, and the Soviets to occupy Eastern Poland and the Baltic states by 1940. Another critical moment came when Germany breached the treaty and its army crossed the Soviet border. Various contradictory feelings which Russian émigrés were confronted with included: the natural love for all things Russian mixed with distrust in the USSR, the trust in the victory of the Russian (Soviet) arms and, towards the end of the war, pride in the Soviet military achievements mixed with worries concerning possible German or Soviet repressions. The positions changed throughout the
and summer camps could be organized which children of poor families could attend for free and gifts were prepared for all guests at Christmas and Easter parties.

During 1944 and in the spring of 1945, civilian transports passed through Prague fleeing the advancing front. They were citizens of Eastern Prussia, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia as well as Germans from the occupied territories of Belarus and Ukraine. The Orthodox Church actively offered help and provided them with accommodation, clothing, food, medicine and money. From them the members of the Russian and Ukrainian emigrant community learned about war sufferings as well as about what real life in the USSR was like. The news was terrifying and the refugees’ effort to get as far as possible from the reach of the Soviet power was desperate; however, not all trusted the news. Those who believed it started to fear for their future and decided to join the refugees. This constituted the third and last wave of émigrés leaving from the country which offered them assistance and protection. Later, it was believed that they were mainly the well-off and those who collaborated with the Germans and feared punishment. This, however, is a simplification. It was the well-informed who left, people without commitments (single or married without children, without elderly parents), those who had a strong instinct of self-preservation, those who were ready to leave everything behind and embrace a life of insecurity. It was easier to make this decision for those who had enough reliable contacts abroad (relatives, friends, professional contacts) and believed that with their help they would be able to build a new life somewhere in Europe or overseas. They left individually or in groups. Organized departures could not have been made without contacting the German authorities, which were responsible for the displacement of the German civilian population from the Protectorate to the West. The last refugees left Prague after the Red Army had entered the city and the members of Soviet security services had started operating there while rumours spread about members of the migrant community being arrested.

On the territory of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia remained those who refused to change their way of life due to their advanced age and who did not wish to walk away to uncertainty, as well as those who considered the ČSR, where they had lived for over 20 years, their home. Many of them lived in mixed Russian-Czech marriages and were granted Czechoslovak citizenship before the war. And primarily, these people did...
not feel in danger. What could happen to them, Czechoslovak citizens? A quarter century had passed since their participation in the civil war in their youth. Everybody believed that the victor of the war would be magnanimous, concerned with the attitude of the rest of the world and that a quarter century was a long enough period of limitation. The further development proved them all wrong and the consequences were tragic. The victorious Soviet Union did not forget a thing, did not forgive anybody, and was very little concerned with what the rest of the world was thinking, least of all the legal representatives of the ČSR.

“LIBERATION”

On the day the Soviet armies crossed the Czechoslovak eastern border, a wave of arrests, imprisonments and deportations of civilian population started. In Subcarpathian Ruthenia and Slovakia, arrests were of mass nature, whereas in Moravia and Bohemia they were usually selective, though well prepared and targeted.

Only a few written documents have remained from that period. They are stored in archives of the former Czechoslovak Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Office of the General Prosecutor. In the past twenty years, the civic association Oni byli první… (They were the first...), established by descendants of the abducted, has dedicated itself to collecting documents linked to the fate of the Russian émigrés. Vladimír Bystrov was the association’s main initiator and its unforgettable chairman. A so-called Partial Register was compiled, which included 215 names of the abducted. The list is not complete and is continually updated. The sources used for making the list included letters which the relatives of the abducted people wrote to the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry and other institutions asking for help. Basic data should be searched for in archives on the territory of the former USSR. It is extremely difficult to gain access to these sources, but a complete register will never be made without their assistance.

Personal memoirs of family members are an important source of information, which the members of the association recorded or received from them in writing (letters). The documents collected by the association were handed over to the National Archive of the Czech Republic and, after they are duly processed, they will be made available to researchers. The memoirs contain descriptions of how Czech people tried to defend their Russian friends, neighbours and colleagues as well as stories of how they reported on their place of residence. Such situations, unfortunately, also happened within the emigrant community. Certain names of persons considered informers and collaborators of the Soviet counter-espionage organization Smersh keep emerging from the memoirs.

According to the established dates of arrests it is possible to follow the advancement of the Soviet armies on a map. The first documented cases happened in February 1945 in Poprad and in Spišská Nová Ves, in April in Bratislava, on 3 May in Ostrava, on 9 May in Brno and from 11 May in Prague where arrests continued.
through May, including on Saturdays and Sundays.

The Partial Register of 215 people includes only three women. The majority of the detained were men born between 1896 and 1905. They were 13 to 22 years old at the time of the civil war and arrived in the ČSR at 18 to 25 years of age. Based on their young age it can be concluded that they were young privates or students at cadet schools who could not have held any high military ranks and could not have been responsible for acts they were accused of in 1945. Among the arrested were also several men who left Russia in their childhood or who were even born in emigration, outside Russia. Over half of the detained had Czechoslovak citizenship, 39 of the arrested were reported to have a Nansen passport or no citizenship is given. This implies that in the majority of cases they were Czechoslovak citizens, who, pursuant to both Czechoslovak and international laws, were not under the jurisdiction of Soviet bodies. As far as their level of education and position in the society is concerned they were mostly graduates from technical and natural science universities or from medical faculties. They were experienced specialists and the ČSR would miss their expertise in the years to follow.

According to what the relatives said, in most cases those were no common arrests. The victims were lured out of their homes or places of work on different pretexts (they were asked to read or translate something, explain or give directions). Families were assured they should not worry and that it would not take long. However, it took at least a decade and many never returned and their fate is unknown. The sentences mostly cited paragraph 58-4, Criminal Code of the RSFSR (uchastyiye v beloemigrantskikh formirovaniyakh i antisoovetskaya deyatelnost’, i.e. involvement in white-emigration activities and anti-Soviet acts), pursuant to which they were sentenced to ten years in “labour re-education camps”. The detainees were at the same time stripped of the right to contact their families and were not allowed any correspondence. Their families had no information whatsoever about their whereabouts during the period of their imprisonment and all inquiries they addressed to Soviet bodies remained unanswered. They lived for many years in uncertainty. Apart from mental suffering, this state also had significant economic consequences. Families lost their breadwinners and elderly retired women were not eligible for their husbands’ pensions as they were not able to provide a document proving their death. If the arrested lived to the end of their sentence, they returned to their families in 1955-1957. Of the people listed in the Partial Registry, only 60 came back.

POST-WAR PERIOD

Arrests of members of the Russian emigrant community were the beginning of the decline of the community as an independent body. The Russian nursery school and Ukrainian grammar school were closed and the Russian grammar school turned into a Soviet high school. Most of the books included in libraries were destroyed due to their “ideological defectiveness”.

Before the war, representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church belonged to the jurisdiction of the Patriarch and Metropolitan Yevlogiy, head of the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia based in Paris. In the summer of 1945, Metropolitan Yevlogiy believed it was the right thing to do to return the Orthodox Church abroad under the jurisdiction of the mother Orthodox Church in Moscow. By this voluntary act he actually transferred all clergy whose superior he had been until then under the authority of the Patriarch of Moscow. The popular Bishop Vladyka Sergiy worked in the ČSR for many years, assisted by his aide Archimandrite Isaakiy. The former was first relocated to Vienna, later to Berlin and finally to Kazan where he died in 1952. Archimandrite Isaakiy was arrested in May 1945 and deported to the USSR. After a short period in a labour camp he was released and continued as a priest in Alma-Ata and later in Yelets. He was not allowed to cross the borders of the USSR anymore and maintained a closely observed correspondence with his former parishioners in Prague. New priests sent to the ČSR from the USSR did not enjoy such popularity and, significantly, such trust as their predecessors used to have. Churchmen were concerned that apart from their mission as priests they might also have held other functions, incongruous with
faith. The church ceased to be a place of spiritual life, and confession without the necessary trust lost its purgative power.

Apart from school and church, another centre of Russian life were the four collective houses built by émigrés in the 1920s and 1930s in Prague. The oldest and best known of them, the so-called Professors’ House, was in the Bubeneč quarter (a double-house on Rooseveltova Street), two buildings were in the Dejvice quarter (on Jugoslávských partyzánní Street and a double-house on Koulova Street) and one building was in the Strašnice quarter (on Průběžná Street). Arrests were underway there too. The shared misfortune did not unite the tenants; on the contrary, it often resulted in mutual distrust. Families of the arrested people subconsciously suspected the families that were not affected of collaboration with the Soviets. Families not yet affected were living in uncertainty and endless expectation of possible arrests and fearfully avoided the affected families.

The coexistence in the collective houses did not last much longer. In the early 1950s, all existing independent housing cooperatives in the ČSR were united and most Russians had to move out of their buildings. They were then given other flats in accordance with the number of working members in a family, which were usually much smaller. Retired people were affected the most. They were often under pressure not only to move out of their flats, but to move out of Prague as they had no professional ties to the capital. Members of the Russian emigrant community, often widowers or bachelors, spent their last years in senior homes or in basement rooms, lost in an unknown, hostile environment.

After 1945 and after 1948 in particular, under ideological pressure, both Russian and Czechoslovak traditional clubs ceased to exist (Sokol and Junák, sport clubs, some political parties, religious and charitable organizations, etc.). The official interpretation of the importance of the Czechoslovak clubs, the First Republic and its leading representatives also underwent substantial changes. The newly-tabooed and scorned subjects also included the Action Russe and the Russian emigrant community as a whole.

NOTES

1 When using the adjective “Russian” in the text, this does not refer to the nationality but to citizenship of the Russian Empire, which was multinational. This is also how the Action Russe was designed, which was aimed at helping people fleeing the Russian Empire regardless of their nationality.

2 WWI saw two power blocks facing each other, the so-called Triple Entente (Great Britain, France, Russia) and the Dual Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary).

3 Pyotr Nikolayevich Wrangel (1877–1928), baron, Russian general, commander-in-chief of the armed forces in Southern Russia where he took over as the head of the Volunteer Army.

4 Fridtjof Nansen (1861–1930), Norwegian Arctic explorer, who laid the foundation of the scientific research of the Arctic. He was active in diplomacy, after WWI he represented Norway in the League of Nations and took care of the issues related to refugees from the former Russian Empire and Armenians fleeing the territory of Turkey.

5 Alexander I Karađorđević (1888–1934), the ruler of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – Yugoslavia from 1921 to 1934, when he was assassinated on a state visit to France.

6 Russo-Turkish wars 1828–1829 and 1877–1878 contributed to the liberation of the Balkan nations.


8 The right of domicile ruled the relationship between a municipality and its citizens and was a necessary prerequisite for acquiring state citizenship. It was signed into law on 3 December 1863 and remained effective until the end of WWII.


10 Nansen passports were international identity documents for Russian and Turkish citizens (Armenians) that allowed them to travel to states that had signed an agreement ensuing from the Conference of Geneva of 5 July 1922. They were accepted in all states with the exception of the USSR. The office issuing these passports was located in Prague in the Smíchov quarter at 1258 Švédská Street.

11 The right of domicile ruled the relationship between a municipality and its citizens and was a necessary prerequisite for acquiring state citizenship. It was signed into law on 3 December 1863 and remained effective until the end of WWII.


13 Vladimir Bystrov (1955–2010), journalist and publicist coming from a Czech-Russian family. Nikolai Vladimirovich Bystrov (1899–1987) was among the detained and was only able to return to his family in the ČSR after spending ten years in forced labour camps.


15 Smersh – a soviet counter-espionage organization (acronym of “Smert’ shpionam” – Death to spies), whose activities of the territory of the ČSR have recently been described in: Sinevirs’ky, N. (2014). Smersh. Rok v taboře nepřítelů. Prague: USTR.


A house in Bělská Street destroyed by a bomb after the air raid of 9 May 1945; in the background the tower of the Old Town Hall in Mladá Boleslav. Photo: Museum of the Mladá Boleslav Region.
History that’s still alive

Propaganda about Soviet air raids in May 1945

The bombing of Bohemian and Moravian cities and towns during World War II remains a hot topic. Most often recalled in this regard are US air raids on Prague on 14 February 1945 and on Pilsen on 25 April 1945, which usually spark emotional debates short on knowledge of the historical facts or archival documents. By contrast, Red Army air raids on the first day of peace, 9 May 1945, are neglected or misrepresented. The authors of various pieces have attributed the blame for these raids to the German Air Force. Unfortunately, Czech historiography has also adopted these propaganda-derived clichés.

MICHAL PŁAVICE

RED ARMY AIR RAIDS ON 9 MAY 1945

The main purpose of Red Army Air Force raids on 9 May 1945 was an attempt to stop retreating German troops. According to the instrument of surrender, from 00.01 am on 9 May 1945 Wehrmacht units were not allowed to move from their location at that moment. However, few members of the German Army or the troops of its allies wanted to become prisoners of the Red Army so they all tried hard to reach the American demarcation line and thus achieve desired capture by the US Army.

On Wednesday 9 May 1945, the airmen of the 2nd Air Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front were in action over Bohemia, the 5th Air Army of the 2nd Ukrainian Front were in action over Central Moravia and the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands, the 8th Air Army of the 4th Ukrainian Front were in action over Northeast Moravia and Silesia and the 17th Air Army of the 3rd Ukrainian Front were in action over Austria. The 2nd Air Army deployed the most aircraft.

The commander of the 2nd Air Army, General Stepan Akimovich Krasovsky, himself refers to the Soviet air raids of 9 May 1945 in his memoirs, indicating their number. However, he does not say why the airmen were in action on that day.

Similarly, with few exceptions, even the archival sources related to the combat operations do not indicate why the Red Army airmen attacked on Wednesday 9 May 1945. The reasons can only be found in two documents. The operational report of the 6th Guards Bomber Aviation Corps, signed by Chief of the Corps Staff, Major General Feofan Ivanovich Kachev, and Deputy Chief of Staff and Chief of the Operations and Reconnaissance Department, Guards Colonel Piotr Matveevich Ivchenkov, states that the Corps airmen bombed the army and equipment of the retreating enemy […] who did not comply with the instrument of surrender signed in Berlin and attempted to cross the river Elbe.

We find the same explanation in the summary of the 3rd Ground-Attack Aviation Corps, whose aircraft were deployed over the Liberec region and partly over Prague on 9 May 1945. The aircraft of the corps cooperated with the units of the 52nd and 28th armies in pursuing and destroying enemy soldiers in the Liberec area and south of it who did not comply with the instrument of surrender.

Not all Red Army Air Force attacks in the Czech lands have been sufficiently mapped. Mladá Boleslav, where the greatest number of people died, became their tragic symbol, but Soviet planes also attacked other locations in North and Central Bohemia, as well as Zdírec nad Doubravou and Krucemburk in Moravia. It is estimated that up to 1,500 civilians were killed during the raids on 8 and 9 May 1945, though this figure needs to be verified by deeper research. The number of deaths is likely to be even higher.

A certain overview is provided by operational summaries of the 2nd Air
Army and its subordinate units dated 9 May 1945. Aircraft of the 6th Guards Bomber Aviation Corps attacked in the area of Mělník, Liběchov, Mělnické Vtelno, Byšice, Roudnice nad Labem, Litoměřice, Dubá, Úštěk and Zahrádky in the Česká Lípa region; navigators of the 4th Bomber Aviation Corps had in their sights Mladá Boleslav, Litoměřice, Třebíč, Zámostí-Brodek, Vrchovany, Dubá and Mělník; combat airmen of the 1st Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Corps dropped bombs and used on-board weaponry to carry out attacks in the area of Mělnické Vtelno, Řepín, Nebužely, Čítov, Spomyšl, Brozánky, Mělník, Mělnická Vrutice, Líblice and Byšice; and pilots and aerial gunners of the 3rd Ground-Attack Aviation Corps attacked enemy units in the area of Liberec – Jablonec nad Nisou.

PROPAGANDA SURROUNDING US AIR FORCE RAIDS

The main watchword of most articles on the Allied air raids published in the Communist press was that they were no longer justified and that their task was to destroy industrial plants to prevent their use by post-war Czechoslovakia, or that the aircraft deliberately bombed the civilian neighbourhoods of cities and towns. In the initial post-war years discussions in this spirit mainly concerned the ČKD plant in Vysocany and Pilsen’s Škoda works. The bombing of the West Bohemian factory in particular is still an issue for debate to this day. The authors of articles point out that production in these enterprises at the end of the war was negligible and bombing them was therefore pointless. Ten days before the outbreak of the Prague Uprising, 14 days before the liberation and the end of the war, at the moment when American troops stood 70 km from Pilsen, the most brutal attack was carried out on Pilsen’s Škoda. There is nobody in this country who would not understand why these crimes happened. Could the destroyed factories deliver something to Hitler’s army? They could not, and they were no longer producing anything for it. The Anglo-American imperialists [sic] aimed to damage Czechoslovak industry, make our country dependent on American “assistance”, on political diktat, reduce our country to rubble, and then offer with one finger and simultaneously take with both hands.

That was the point of the air raids on Prague, Pilsen, Zlín, Brno, Kralupy and many other towns, wrote Adolf Hradecký in Rudé právo in March 1950.

In April 1950, Gustav Rada gave another distorted explanation of the events at the end of the war: The American imperialists, however, in no way sought to weaken Hitler’s potential. They consistently used World War II to build and strengthen their political and economic positions. They also wanted to seize Czechoslovakia. Although our country had already suffered enough under the Munich diktat and the prolonged occupation, they needed to make it even more tractable. They tried to destroy the core of our economy – heavy industry. Therefore in the last weeks of the war, under the pretext of “assistance”, they destroyed our heavy industry – Škoda.
behind the iron curtain

Českomoravská and large plants in Brno. They wanted to undermine and weaken the foundations of the newly-forming and liberated Czechoslovakia. In this context, we must point out that the last time the US Air Force bombed the Moravian metropolis was on 20 November 1944 (if we do not take into account an unplanned raid on 19 December 1944, which did not cause great damage). The fact is that the April air raids on Brno were carried out exclusively by the planes of the 5th Air Army and the 17th Air Army of the Red Army.

During celebrations of the 10th anniversary of the end of WW II the authors of propaganda articles in Rudé právo made the first references to a raid on Prague on 14 February 1945. One of the writers, for example, incorrectly stated that the US bombers were sent from a base in Forli, Italy. In fact, these were American bombers from the 8th Air Force sent from bases in Great Britain. Due to the then state of historical research, we cannot reproach the author; however, we should pay attention to his subsequent words, which were in the spirit of Cold War rhetoric: And so when the Americans were proceeding calmly and safely, and the German troops surrendered to them over the telephone, when the Soviet Army was still fighting hard with SS divisions, Prague was burning after a tragic bombing...

Ten years after the war it was also claimed that the Allies deliberately did not bomb military plants during the conflict. Time also correctly answered the question of why the Americans left the war industry in Kralupy – and not only in Kralupy, also in Pilsen, Prague and other towns – almost unscathed during the war. They enabled the fascists to make the most of it in the fight against the Soviet Union. It was not until the end of the war that was to be liberated by the Soviet Army. It was then, before cannons on the frontlines had died away, that they started to prepare a new war, wrote another author.

At an ideological conference to mark the 15th anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia, the speakers did not address the question of Allied bombing or the interpretation of the events of the last days of the war at all. The main theme of their papers was to highlight the progress, especially in the economy, achieved by the country during this period. Otto Šik only briefly mentioned that in the country’s industry the majority of war investments were destroyed by British and American air raids at the end of the war, as well as by the Nazis themselves during their retreat, taking a part to Austria and Germany.

SOVIET AIR RAIDS IN THE PRESS

In Czech newspapers and books, the Red Army raids of 8 and 9 May 1945 were hardly dealt with at all, with authors making only marginal references to them. An exception was the bombing of Roudnice nad Labem, which was described shortly after the war by Kamila Moštáková-Bohdanová in her book of memoirs of WWII and participa-

A destroyed factory hall of ASAP in Mladá Boleslav (now Škoda Mladá Boleslav) after the Red Army air raid of 9 May 1945

Photo: Museum of the Mladá Boleslav Region
ALLIED AIR RAIDS ON BOHEMIA AND MORAVIA FROM 1940 TO 1945

The first Royal Air Force bombers appeared over Bohemia in January 1940. Between then and March 1940 they carried out several flights over Pilsen and Prague. In April 1940 one French Air Force bomber flew over Prague. However, it did not drop bombs but propaganda leaflets. The first attempts at bombing Pilsen’s Škoda were made by the Royal Air Force in the autumn of 1940; however, they were not successful. In 1941 and 1942 Pilsen also escaped almost unscathed. The factory complex only reported the first serious damage after a raid carried out during the night of May 13–14 1943.

Although she did not elaborate on the noise they made in recent months, didn’t they warn people? How much ants? Why didn’t sirens wail, why? Why? A surrender has been signed, hasn’t it? There is peace. Why then? Detonations came from what was it? Detonations came from the Red Army. They dropped their guns and huddled into ditches and wherever they could. They escaped in cars, on bicycles with two-wheeled carts and any other way they could.

Shortly before ten o’clock, aircraft appeared over the town. Mladá Boleslav’s inhabitants watched them and even waved. They believed that these were “our” soldiers. There was an atmosphere of peace everywhere. But what was it? Detonations came from all sides. Strong, deafening blows and massive pressure in the air instantly engulfed the entire town. People were terribly surprised. There were whistles and hisses of falling bombs and shooting from weapons mounted on aircraft. There was confusion. The electric lights were out.

Men, women and children desperately searched for explanations, which they soon received. Mladá Boleslav has been bombed by German fascist airmen. There were nine attack planes accompanied by two fighters. The planes were not marked. The raid was carried out in four waves, from a height of 2,000–2,500 meters, and the fighters showered the town with bullets from
behind the iron curtain

machine guns [...] After an investigation it was found that the attackers wanted to destroy the entire town. A total of 700 bombs were dropped on Mladá Boleslav that day.

The number of losses was huge: 200 dead and a large number of injured people. Those killed included newborns, mothers, daughters and sons, young and old men. 20

A section of the town’s population is still convinced that Mladá Boleslav was bombed by German planes without national symbols. It should be noted that German pilots tried to escape with all operational aircraft that had some fuel as early as Tuesday 8 May 1945, in the afternoon and evening, to the zone occupied by the US Army. Aircraft that for various reasons were unable to fly were destroyed by the Germans at airfields. 21

During celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the end of WWII, a half-page article appeared in a supplement to Rudé právo focusing on First Lieutenant I. I. Grigoriev of the 96th Ground-Attack Aviation Regiment, a combat airman who died on 9 May 1945 over the territory of Bohemia while fulfilling his mission and who was posthumously awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union. 22

What is striking about the article is that censors allowed its publication, given that it states that Red Army aircraft carried out an attack on 9 May 1945, i.e., on the first day of peace. Maybe it had to do with the fact that its author was Russian. According to the article, six Ilyushin Il-2 attack aircraft, under the command of First Lieutenant Grigoriev, accompanied by Lavochkin La-7 fighters, commanded by twice Hero of the Soviet Union Captain Vitaly Ivanovich Popkov, attacked an unspecified bridge
Over the Vltava River, which was defended by Ferdinand self-propelled guns and Tiger tanks. The article confirms the deployment of the Red Army aircraft – BF on 9 May 1945. However, it is not absolutely true historically. Most data is confirmed by materials from Russian archives, including the names of comrades in arms and commanders of air regiments, but not by the most important sources. First Lieutenant Ivan Ivanovich Grigoriev flew in the 93rd Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Regiment of the 5th Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Division of the 2nd Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Corps and really was killed in a combat flight, but that happened on 8 May 1945 in the area of Cottbus, Lusatia. He was posthumously awarded the Golden Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union on 27 June 1945. It should be noted that on 9 May 1945 the 2nd Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Corps only sent out six fighters from the 11th Fighter Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Division to the Louny – Mělník – Mladá Boleslav area to carry out reconnaissance. Unlike its sister corps, i.e., the 1st Guards Corps and 3rd Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Corps, which attacked ground targets in the Mělník and Liberec regions, its warplanes were not even in the air. This article may spark questions over how it could have been published, given that it contained information harmful to Communist propaganda – on 9 May 1945, on the first day of peace, Red Army aircraft could not possibly have attacked any targets! For example, a similar article published in May 1985 in Rudé právo dedicated to the days of May in the Mělník region, and which also mentioned the participation of the Polish Army in the liberation, does not say anything about several air raids on the town and its surroundings on 9 May 1945.

On the other hand, we know that Soviet historical literature and memoirs could state even in the 1960s that the Red Army aircraft in the liberation, does not say anything about several air raids on the town and its surroundings on 9 May 1945.

A confession from the Soviet side – V. V. Barantchikov’s article “Two hours before victory” from Haló sobota, 9 May 1975

Photo: Author’s archive
Division of the 2nd Air Army, Hero of the Soviet Union First Lieutenant Ivan Grigoryevich Drachenko, a member of the 140th Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Regiment of the 8th Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Division of the 1st Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Corps of the 2nd Air Army, bomber pilot, Hero of the Soviet Union, Captain Nikolai Ivanovich Gapeyonomok of the 81st Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Regiment of the 1st Guards Bomber Aviation Division, and twice Hero of the Soviet Union Captain Talgat Yakubekovich Begeldinov.

In his memoirs, commander of the 2nd Air Army Krasovskiy spoke highly of the work of commander of the 1st Guards Bomber Aviation Division Colonel Fyodor Ivanovich Dobish, commander of the 8th Guards Bomber Aviation Division Colonel Guri Vasilyevich Gribakin, and, naturally, commander of the 1st Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Corps (8th and 9th Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Divisions) Lieutenant General Vasily Georgievich Ryazanov (twice Hero of the Soviet Union) during the attacks on 9 May 1945. With regard to direct participants, Krasovskiy commended, for example, twice Heroes of the Soviet Union Captain Talgat Yakubekovich Begeldinov of the 144th Guards Ground-Attack Regiment and Captain Pavel Artemyevich Plotnikov of the 81st Guards Bomber Aviation Regiment, as well as Heroes of the Soviet Union Captain Nikolai Georgiyevich Stolyarov of the 141st Guards Ground-Attack Regiment, First Lieutenant Nikolai Naumovich Kirtok of the 140th Guards Ground-Attack Regiment and First Lieutenant Fyodor Petrovich Serbin of the 80th Guards Bomber Regiment. Particular appreciation from several quarters was earned by Alexei Arsentyevich Rogozhin of the 142nd Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Regiment.

The direct order of Marshal Konev, under which the Soviet airmen took off on 9 May 1945 to carry out the
combat mission, is mentioned, for example, by Chief of Staff of the 142nd Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Regiment of the 8th Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Division of the 1st Guards Ground-Attack Aviation Corps, Lieutenant Colonel Dzambulat Soslambekovich Urtayev, who learned about the surrender of Germany around 3 am on 9 May. However, as early as 5 am the commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front, Marshal Ivan Konev, called directly the divisional staff and gave the aforementioned order to immediately send airmen into the air to prevent German soldiers and Vlasovites from retreating to the west. Konev was quite specific – he named the targets north of Prague that were to be bombed. Soon after, the first formation of Ilyushin Il-2 aircraft took off from an airfield in Senftenberg, Lusatia, under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Guards Lieutenant Alexei Arsenyevich Rogozhin.

As can be seen, unlike in the case of Czech historiography, the Soviets never had a problem admitting to the combat operations of 9 May 1945. It comes as a surprise, therefore, that even the pro-regime historian Zdeněk Šmoldas briefly states in one paragraph of his book that on 9 May 1945 the 2nd Air Army carried out active combat until the last moment. On that day, the air units completed 1,320 combat sorties. A. Golubev, an airman of the 9th Guards Aviation Division, and his number [designation of a pilot who flew behind the leader of the formation and covered him – author’s note] Kudinov downed an enemy junkers near Prague. A group of Il-2 aircraft under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union Captain V. A. Rogozhin attacked Hitler’s columns and their supporters – Vlasovites – fighting their way through to the west.

Czech historiography has yet to conduct a deeper analysis of air operations on the first day of peace. An obstacle faced by historians is the poor availability of collections administered by the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation in Podolsk, near Moscow, as well as the lack of reliable archival resources of Czech origin. In May 1945 few people put events down immediately or with minimum delay. Even gendarmerie station books, which are generally an excellent source for the study of WWII, do not help us. Due to the May uprising, most of them do not cover the period from 5 to 9 May 1945, and if records were made, this was done later. We also need to be aware that none of the uninitiated knew who was bombing the territory of Bohemia and Moravia and why. It is therefore not surprising that people blamed the Germans. This belief was adopted by newspaper articles and historical publications. There was probably no CPC Central Committee recommendation on how to deal with the subject. Although pro-regime historians knew about the operations of the Red Army Air Force on 9 May 1945, they never openly stated who had actually bombed Bohemian and Moravian cities, towns and villages on that day and what the motive was. By contrast, Soviet historiography saw no reason to conceal Soviet airmen’s raids on the first day of peace, 9 May 1945; they were, and still are, considered a standard part of military operations.

The article could not have been written without the selfless help of Sylva Městecká and Jiří Filip.
15. Před deseti lety …


1. The Central Archive of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (TsAMO), f. (collection) 302, op. (register) 4196, d. (document) 104, l. (sheets) 496–497, Operational summary No. 129, Staff of the 2nd Air Army Machenau, 22.00 hrs on 9 May [19]45; ibid., f. 34, op. 4775, d. 83, Operational summary No. 0129, Staff of the 5th Air Army, 9 May 1945, 22.00 hrs.


2. The Central Archive of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (TsAMO), f. (collection) 302, op. (register) 4196, d. (document) 104, l. (sheets) 496–497, Operational summary No. 129, Staff of the 2nd Air Army Machenau, 22.00 hrs on 9 May [19]45; ibid., f. 34, op. 4775, d. 83, Operational summary No. 0129, Staff of the 5th Air Army, 9 May 1945, 22.00 hrs.


4. Feofan Ivanovich Kachev (1895–1974), Air Force Major General. He served in the Red Army from May 1919. In September 1939, as Chief of Staff of the 4th Guards Bomber Aviation Corps, he participated in the occupation of Western Ukraine and later in the Winter War. From February 1944, Chief of Staff of the 6th Guards Bomber Aviation Corps; from February 1945, charged with its temporary command. He entered the reserve in December 1955 and then again 2nd Air Army. He ended his military service as commander of the Air Force Academy from 1956 to 1968.


8. TsAMO, f. 302, op. 4196, d. 104, l. 486–491, Operational summary No. 129, Staff of the 2nd Air Army Machenau, 22.00 hrs on 9 May [19]45; ibid., f. 34, op. 4775, d. 233, Operational summary No. 0129, Staff of the 5th Air Army, 9 May 1945, 24.00 hrs.


Barantchikov (1975), 3.

Barantchikov, V. V. (1975). Dvě hodiny před vítězstvím.

Pavel Artemyevich Plotnikov (1920–2000), Air Force Major General. He served in the Red Army from 1938. In 1960, he completed the General Staff Academy. From 1966 to 1980, he worked as inspector general of naval aviation, and from 1980 to 1989, he lectured at military colleges. He entered the reserve in April 1989. In addition to various decorations, he was named an honorary citizen of the City of Prague.

Barantchikov (1975), 3, 4.

TsAMO, f. 302, p. 4196, d. 104, l. 481-491, Operational summary No. 128, Staff of the 2nd Air Army Machenau, 2.00 hrs on 9 May [1945] and, Operational summary No. 129, Staff of the 2nd Air Army Machenau, 22.00 hrs on 9 May [1945]; ibid., f. 33, op. 11458, d. 768, List of names of irretrievable losses of the personnel of the 5th Guards Assault Aviation Zaporozhye Red Banner Division in the period from 1 to 10 May 1945; ibid., f. 33, op. 799776, d. 12, List of decorations of Ivan Ivanovich Grigoriev, and f. 20507, op. 1, d. 49, l. 138, Operational summary No. 129, Staff of the 2nd Guards Assault Aviation Corps Vetscha, 23.00 hrs on 9 May [1945].


Mělník after raids by Soviet aircraft, 9 May 1945.

Photo: SRA Litoměřice
Twenty-four-year-old Sergeant Alois Dvořák being welcomed by his colleagues from No. 310 Squadron after a successful return from combat. He died on 24 September 1941.

Photo: Military Central Archives – Military Historical Archives (MCA – MHA)
We fight to rebuild

Airmen’s contribution to recognition of the government in exile

In the turbulent summer of 1940, the Czechoslovak airmen were among the greatest assets of the foreign resistance movement. A shocking defeat of France and the loneliness of Great Britain affirmed their privileged position. What was highlighted in the difficult negotiations with the British side was the strength of the air force, as well as the success of fighter pilots in the Battle of France. Recognition of the Czechoslovak provisional government could be described as a diplomatic miracle, thanks to a significant contribution by the aviation staff.

LADISLAV KUDRNA

BLOODY FOREIGNERS

The journey of Czechoslovak soldiers to the British Isles was dramatic. After the occupation of the Czech lands and departure abroad, none of the Czechoslovaks foresaw the catastrophic scenario that came true in June 1940. The capitulation of Paris should have logically increased the value of the aviation staff for the British. The opposite was true. For a long time, her Majesty’s Government showed no interest in the Czechoslovak troops, including airmen.

Even during June 1940 the leading representatives of the Air Ministry still warned against such a “folly” as integration of airmen from Eastern and Central Europe into the structures of the Royal Air Force. They pointed to inexperience, cultural differences and, last but not least, the language barrier. However, one of the factors was also an officially unconfessed feeling of superiority and a racist motive.

In the context of the “bloody foreigners” later performance, Davidson’s argumentation against the service of Polish pilots within the Bomber Command sounds funny. The British group captain argued that their individuality and temperament were not compatible with deployment in such a complex machine as the bomber.

The refugees arrived in the British Isles at the worst possible time. The spy hysteria was just culminating in the country, and poor English could lead not only to a bloody nose, but also to arrest.

On 18 June 1940, Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for War (War Secretary for short), proposed to the war cabinet a preferential evacuation of the Polish forces before the Czechoslovak forces. The same view was shared by Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax and Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General John Dill. However, two days later Winston Churchill ended any debate regarding the selection of evacuated troops from the French coast. This was a significant turn of the new Prime Minister.

It was just one month earlier that he had himself proposed a more thorough check of any emigrants who found refuge in Britain. The domestic communists and fascists, as well as all Italians, Dutch, Belgians and Czechs, were to end up in internment camps. The reason was a possible infiltration by German spies. However, at the end of June, when an onslaught of 60,000 foreigners from occupied Europe was expected, Churchill radically changed his mind. The illogical turn, at first glance, had its logical background in the development of the war situation.

Although the majority of the British Expeditionary Force was evacuated, their weapons remained on the coast at Dunkirk. It was clear that

behind the iron curtain
be carefully sorted first. The events that occurred in the Cholmondeley makeshift camp, where Czechoslovak soldiers were transported from France after the evacuation, supported similar views.

While in France the 1st Czechoslovak division consisted of 10,530 men; in Britain it was only 3,274 soldiers. Most of the men, mainly of Slovak nationality, remained in France, where they had their families and jobs. In July 1940, a severe crisis broke out in Cholmondeley. A total of 535 dissatisfied soldiers, often former members of International Brigades, left the army to be interned. The British viewed the remnants of the division with considerable contempt.

At the end of May 1940, intelligence services proposed to issue a decree prohibiting employment of enemy foreigners in British homes, placing Czechs in the same category as Germans and Austrians. Although Czechs were crossed out in the official version, in March 1942 the ban appeared at one of the bases where members of No. 312 Czechoslovak Fighter Squadron served. The airmen were outraged, because at that time they had fought and died alongside British pilots for almost two years.

During the first half of 1940, there was an evident effort of the Interior Ministry to get rid of as many Czechoslovak refugees as possible, including proposals that they should be sent to Palestine, which suffered from labour shortage, where they were to find employment in establishing new settlements.

**BREAKING POINT**

Both President Edvard Beneš and the British knew that the Czechoslovak military units couldn’t play a substantial role in planning the Allied operations. On the other hand, their political potential, particularly with regard to the airmen, was considerable. It is also necessary to point out Moravec’s intelligence section, whose services were greatly appreciated by the British.

On the French coast, several thousand soldiers were waiting for evacuation with, technically, no one to command them or, more precisely, to take responsibility for them. This was the problem dealt with by Halifax at the cabinet meeting on 27 June 1940. In his key speech, he openly stated that the Czechoslovak staff would have to be taken care of, regardless of whether Beneš received any recognition. Halifax was of the opinion that it would be much easier to incorporate him in the Allied sphere of influence. Moreover, it was obvious that the upcoming Battle of Britain would have a completely different character from the current course of the war. Contrary to the legends handed down, the British possessed a sufficient number of aircraft. However, they lacked pilots.

Therefore, the Czechs and the Poles, earlier underestimated, could achieve more than just tilt the scales in favour of war fortune. From June to August 1940, 932 from a total of 1,000 Czechoslovak airmen who were in France at the time of the surrender were evacuated to Great Britain. This wasn’t a negligible number of professionals, of whom about 12 percent had valuable battle experience. During the war, the capacity of the Czechoslovak air force oscillated around 1,480 men.

We don’t know whether Halifax’s speech was influenced by the Prime Minister or prepared with the Prime Minister’s full knowledge. In any case, it was a courageous decision of the man who at the end of May 1940 finally lost the fight for a major influence in the government. There is nothing to suggest that if Halifax, who openly admitted that Great Britain had been defeated and the only solution was to find a peaceful compromise, had been appointed Prime Minister instead of Churchill, the nation wouldn’t have followed him.

Halifax definitely didn’t sympathize with the policy of the Third Reich, but he was still convinced that the best way was to continue the traditional policy of maintaining a balance of
behind the iron curtain

The British society still had vivid memories of the horrors of the Great War. The whole country was relieved after Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain returned from Munich. The desire for peace wasn’t confined to the ancestral nobility and politicians. Halifax enjoyed considerable support not only in conservative circles, while Churchill was considered a warmonger and adventurer. However, the development of war events agreed with the dour "bulldog", bringing him to the very pinnacle of power and popularity.

On 3 July 1940, the war cabinet approved the proposed recognition of the provisional Czechoslovak government in exile without protests. Halifax communicated this to Beneš in writing on 21 July. Three days later, Churchill officially announced it in the House of Commons. That night the British radio played the Czecho-Slovak national anthem for the first time, and the information was also brought by the press.

As is well known, this important step didn’t mean that Great Britain undertook to recognize any borders in Central Europe; Beneš’s theory of political and legal continuity of the Czecho-Slovak Republic and,

Above - The nose of a Wellington used by No. 313 Squadron

The Portreath airfield, where No. 313 Squadron operated from August to December 1941
Photo: MCA - MHA

IN NOVEMBER 1938, the British government determined which countries were strategically important and which, in the interest of Great Britain, could receive wartime assistance, including modern aircraft. It was a modified (mutatis mutandis, as is literally written in the British document) German policy which, already before the war, obliged some states by supplying modern weapons. The European countries that were important for Britain - in both political and military terms - included Belgium and the Netherlands, due to the fact that in the event of their occupation by Nazi Germany the British Isles would have been immediately threatened; Portugal, for control of the access to the Strait of Gibraltar and strategically convenient location of the Azores, whose possible use would greatly facilitate the role of Britain in the war; Greece and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, for control of the Mediterranean Sea; and Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, for control of the access to the Dardanelles and thus also to the Black Sea, and Romania also for its rich oil reserves. With regard to the European countries that the report dealt with, Hungary had no significance for the British. Czechoslovakia wasn’t even mentioned in the list of the countries. The authors of the report also noted that such support in no way means favourable loans or reductions in the prices of war materials without further cabinet meetings.

Cf. TNA Kew, Cabinet Office collection (CAB) 24/281, Relative strategic importance of countries requiring arms from the United Kingdom. Printed for the Committee of Imperial Defence, November 1938.
last but not least, jurisdiction over members of the Czechoslovak armed forces and civilians wasn’t accepted either. Compared with other exiled governments, no ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary was assigned to and received from the Beneš government. Robert Bruce Lockhart only held (from 12 August 1940) the office of diplomatic representative. This procedure allowed that the British didn’t have to consult military and political matters with him if they weren’t directly related to the Czechoslovaks. Nevertheless, the recognition was successfully used in the field of propaganda. Great Britain could present itself as a power supported by exiled governments of a number of occupied European countries.

Edvard Beneš and his associates often pointed to the quality of the Czechoslovak air force, but the fact remains that for the British the Polish forces played a greater role – both in the air and on the ground. While the number of Czechoslovak soldiers who landed in England during the summer of 1940 was 4,000, there were 14,000 Poles. British distrust of the Czechoslovaks was also strengthened by the pre-Munich policy directed towards Moscow, the strength of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and, last but not least, the leadership of some Czech and Slovak (political) refugees who found refuge on the British soil. British distrust of the Czechoslovaks also rose because the government had taken a propaganda post: Jan Masaryk witnessed that awkward moment in June and July, 1940, were the last, and I went with them as a drover in a great hunt.6

Edvard Beneš inseparably joined his diplomatic initiative with the military side of the matter. The aim was the same from the beginning: recognition of the Czechoslovak government. In his memoirs, he directly stated the following: Thus when the historic Battle of Britain began [...] , our airmen could already play an important part in the fight against the common enemy, [...] The arrival of Czechoslovak military forces in Great Britain gave to these conversations a new and firmer legal and practical basis. At the same time, however, he didn’t miss a description of the deep crisis that hit the land forces: For me, these moments in June and July, 1940, were rather critical and painful. I was just negotiating for the recognition of our Government and some of our newly-arrived soldiers were manifesting these moral and psychological symptoms?7

Happily, the overwhelming majority of the others soon showed their good qualities, and the airmen, without exception, behaved well, and participated immediately after their arrival in preparations for the Battle of Britain.8

As the supreme commander of the Czechoslovak army, he emphasized in his first army command (on 24 July 1940) a historically significant moment of the second resistance movement (recognition of the provisional government), cohesiveness of the military resistance movement (which, however, was going through a severe crisis), fighting for the suffering nation, and the airmen’s accomplishments. He literally said that one of the main reasons for govern-

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**SIR ROBERT HAMILTON BRUCE LOCKHART (1887-1970)**, a British journalist, writer, secret agent and diplomat. He joined the diplomatic service in 1911. From 1914 to 1917/1918, he worked in Moscow. He was sentenced to death for a conspiracy against the Bolshevik regime, but he was exchanged for Maxim Litvinov, a Soviet representative in Britain who had been arrested. As a business attaché, Lockhart worked in Prague (1919-1923), where he established many friendships. His book Memoirs of a British Agent, Putnam, London 1932, brought him world fame. After the outbreak of war, he accepted an offer to work for the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office. As a liaison officer with a Czechoslovak emigration, he was active in its favour. After completion of the mission in the Czechoslovak government (autumn 1941), he led the Political Warfare Executive. After the war, he returned to writing, lectures and work in radio (in BBC, he broadcast each week to Czechoslovakia for over ten years).
ment recognition was the fact that the Czechoslovak army was standing on the battlefields.32

On the day of the second anniversary of the Munich Agreement, Winston Churchill was speaking about the airmen in Czech broadcasting on BBC with appreciation: Here in Britain we have welcomed with pride and gratitude your soldiers and airmen who have come by daring escapes to take part with ever-increasing success in that battle for Britain which is also the battle for Czechoslovakia.33

Thanks to the airmen’s achievements in the Battle of Britain, the British politicians considered them the best promoters of the Czechoslovak matter.34 Beneš wanted to return to the question of provisional status of his government already in the summer of 1940. Lockhart discouraged him from such actions, because the timing wasn’t ideal in his opinion. The Battle of Britain was entering a critical phase, and many officials from the Central Department (the Czechoslovaks fell in this section of the Foreign Office) didn’t regard Beneš with favour. For example, William Strang35 said to Lockhart indignantly that he was fed up with Beneš; doesn’t he realize that the next forty-

No. 312 Czechoslovak Fighter Squadron, Redhill-Surrey, Sergeant František Mareš, DFM, after returning from Dieppe on 19 August 1942
Photo: Ladislav Sitonský
eight hours will decide the fate of the entire British Empire?\textsuperscript{16}

However, events showed that the timing of the political offensive was good. The Czechoslovak airmen achieved an outstanding reputation in the battle, increasing the prestige of the foreign resistance movement. Based on subsequent military agreements, the Czechoslovak land and air forces were involved in the British war effort. The turning moments on the battlefields of the Second World War then helped to effect recovery of Czechoslovakia within the pre-war borders. Without the defeat of France, the Czechoslovak provisional government wouldn’t have been recognized, and without the Soviet Union entering the war, the ultimate recognition from 18 July 1941 wouldn’t have had its final form. On the other hand, it is necessary to emphasize the permanent diplomatic initiative of Edvard Beneš and his supporters. In order to press such an ambitious programme, it was essential to show to the Allies that the Czechoslovak government weren’t generals without an army.

The President spoke highly of the airmen. When I was with him on 20 November 1940, he told me that they had shot down 50 Germans\textsuperscript{17} and that they were our greatest resistance asset.\textsuperscript{18} State Minister Ladislav Feierařík’s plain record was expanded by the fighter Josef Hanuš, a member of No. 310 Squadron: On 18 October 1940 our Foreign Minister Masaryk was here with some English marshal and one more old fogy. He promised to come again soon, asking Major Hess the following question: “And shall I bring this blockhead with me?” And he pointed to the English marshal. Of course, nobody could help laughing, and Honza then, as far as I could understand, putter up the English bloke. The most beautiful part was his quick departure and the words: “Yeah, you guys, you’re the only thing we have here. We civilians suck. So God help you. Good luck!” And he left.\textsuperscript{19}

President Beneš emotionally remarked the following about the airmen: I know well and I emphasize that my return to homeland is largely the result of dedication and conscientious work of our airmen, begun in 1939 in France, which they so successfully continued in Great Britain from 1940.\textsuperscript{20}

I dare say that the Czechoslovak airmen had the same importance for the foreign resistance movement in the hot summer of 1940 as the legions in Russia in 1918.

Despite public proclamations, the operational airmen had a nagging feeling that they were expendable, just like the generation before them in trench warfare. As first-line soldiers they expected to get the best possible food. In reality, they were almost on the same rations as civilians. When not flying, they survived on thawed fish of unidentified flavour, dried eggs and sausages. In addition, the airfields were poorly equipped: It seems that I fell hard into slurry, as this station could be called. Even its name corresponds to it. Wigsley, yuck! Pig farm would fit more, although I suspect that a lot of pigs might be offended for being associated with this place. The station is for no reason very large. If I didn’t have a bicycle, I doubt that I could cope with the endless marching through the streets. Eating is horrible, both the food and the room where people eat. We normally stand half an hour in a queue before we sit down, and then we wait for food. Washrooms, that’s a few dozen dirty wash basins and two sets of showers, one inch dipped in mud and water.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{SURVIVING BRITISH CLICHÉS}

Anglo-Saxon literature still confronts us with a lot of nonsense and prejudice faced by our ancestors seventy-four years ago. The reason for similar missteps is ignorance of the language and the environment. I will only give a few examples to illustrate the situation.

The Czech fighters’ achievements in the Battle of France seem suspicious, or even unlikely, to the Anglo-Saxon authors, especially compared to the relatively low losses\textsuperscript{22} (the British aerospace expeditionary forces
behind the iron curtain

suffered heavy losses). Furthermore, they claim, for example, that the famous Josef František left his homeland after its occupation in 1938 (!) or, more precisely, as one of the few he used his Avia to fly to Poland, and that on his way he even fired at the advancing German convoys. However, on 15 March 1939, there was not only non-aviation weather and the first German didn’t aircraft appear in Khely until the next day, but František didn’t leave his country until 13 June 1939. Elsewhere, we can read that he already achieved his first aerial victories in Poland using outdated aviation technology, to which he later added eleven kills in the Battle of France.

Pre-war Czechoslovakia allegedly only had a relatively short air tradition, because the air force didn’t come into existence until 1929. The officers of No. 310 Squadron reportedly wanted to execute (!) an unnamed sergeant who damaged his plane in an accident: The Czechs were completely and utterly undisciplined. [...] The young ones were very frightened of their commanding officer. Once, early on, one of these lads crashed a Hurricane in landing. The undercarriage buckled up. They quickly had a court martial among themselves and they were going to shoot him behind the hangar.

Major Alexander Hess, commander of No. 310 Squadron, reportedly informed the British air-traffic controller that he twice flew over the crew of Dornier Do 17 which he forced to land and wanted to kill them with the on-board machine guns of his Hurricane, but eventually he changed his mind. It seemed unnecessary to him. He also added a verbal comment that he behaved like a freaking Brit. Hess’s memoirs slightly modify the British version: Two men from the crew quickly emerge from the wreckage of what was Dornier before noon, and there are two others lying on the ground. Maybe dead, maybe wounded. Approaching them nose-dive, I watch the confused behaviour and helplessness over the ruins of betrayed invincibility in the crosshair – helplessness of defeat, the possibility of which was not allowed to be admitted by their megalomania. [...] I look right into their faces through the crosshair of my guns, directly into their slug eyes. [...] There was nothing of that German pride and muscle-flexing in that look ... they just raised their hands – and I was not able to pull the trigger.

Poles and Czechs are often depicted as cruel avengers, not having the slightest mercy. However, hatred wasn’t limited to any nationality or fighting side. Nineteen-year-old Flying Officer Geoffrey Wellum described the fights over southern England in the following emotional way: Coupled with fear, I now also feel a sense of anger. What right has this German to fly his snotty little aeroplane over our England and try to kill me? Who invited him? Just because he’s stupid enough to believe his bloody Führer and his master-race-dominating-the-world crap, he flies for his wretched Fatherland and tries to impose typical Teutonic bullying on
Notwithstanding the foregoing, the English airmen reportedly had understanding for the alleged violent behaviour of Czechs and Slovaks, whom they loved and admired: Thank God they’re on our side! Staying on top of things, British historians write about the problems of Major George Blackwood, a British co-commander of No. 310 Squadron who could hardly keep a tight rein on his aggressive and independent-minded young Czech pilots who were always trying to go off to the centre of fighting in the south on their own “in search of prey”. However, the reality was somewhat less romantic. Neither the pilots’ diaries nor the squadron’s chronicle mention similar activities. On the contrary, the fighters proceeded in a coordinated manner, according to the instructions from the country and the commanding officers. Also, the often emphasized argument of youth is untenable in the light of the facts. During the Battle of Britain, Alexander Hess was 42 years old. He was probably the oldest operational fighter pilot in the Royal Air Force. Lieutenant Stanislav Pešfar from the same squadron was 27 years old, while the age of the English fighters was around nineteen or twenty.

Prejudice wasn’t connected only with the Czechoslovaks. Franciszek Kornicki, a member of the legendary No. 303 Squadron, recalled that he and his colleagues had a feeling that they were a nuisance. He directly said that for the others they were a disgrace to the armed forces. Captain John Kent fell into depression when he learned that he was transferred to a Polish squadron. Colonel Stanley Vincent, commander of the base where No. 303 Squadron operated, didn’t believe that his soldiers could do so well. He charged the intelligence officer to verify all kills reported by them. However, he didn’t want to wait for the result and, on 11 September 1940, he flew into action after No. 303 Squadron. What he saw took his breath away. The Poles didn’t make things up, but shot down the German aircraft as they stated in their reports. It should be added that both officers quickly changed their initial, sceptical attitude towards the members of the squadron. After the end of the Battle of Britain, Kent received with great displeasure the order to join No. 92 Squadron, convinced that he was leaving the best air team in the world.

I want you to understand. We’re English. Our country is very flat, and our sky is always grey, cloudy, with very little sun shine. We have insular thinking, our horizon is bounded by the shores of our island, and there is nothing but sea beyond those shores.
behind the iron curtain

Roger Makins, a high official of the Foreign Ministry, wrote down on 21 June 1940:

This is the motto of No. 310 Squadron, a Czechoslovak-manned fighter squadron of the Royal Air Force.

NOTES

1. This is the motto of No. 310 Squadron, a Czechoslovak-manned fighter squadron of the Royal Air Force.

2. Roger Makins, a high official of the Foreign Ministry, wrote down on 21 June 1940:


5. This is the name that British filmmakers used in the eponymous documentary series which showed that the “bloody foreigners” risked their lives for the British Empire from the very beginning. One of the parts dealt with the Polish airmen (marginally, it also mentions the famous Josef Frantíšek, serving in No. 303 Polish Fighter Squadron). I would like to thank my colleague Mgr. Juraj Kalina for drawing my attention to this part. Bloody Foreigners. Untold Battle of Britain, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptq1C3DuNyE (quoted as of 15 May 2014).


7. Group Captain Alexander Davidson (1894–1971), a pre-war British military attaché in Warsaw. In 1939, as part of his duties, he attended a meeting in London with Polish representatives requesting Hurricane and Spitfire fighters. The situation at the front prevented deliveries of modern aviation equipment. For more information on his service, see Air of Authority – A History of RAF Organisation, Air Vice Marshal Sir Alexander Davidson (05106), http://www.rafweb.org/Biographies/Davidson.htm (quoted as of 15 May 2014).

8. The National Archives London (TNA), Air Ministry collection (AIR) 2/7916, 25 May 1940.

9. The Czechoslovak co-commander of No. 310 Squadron, Major Alexander Hess, experienced hot moments after his downing in the Battle of Britain: There is an English militiaman standing above me with a grim face and, with a hateful look, showing me the hunting rifle he’s putting – with the finger on the trigger – on my chest. If I had just moved my index finger, my adventures would have come to the last paragraph. Hess, A. (2001). Byl jsem o bible o Anglii. Českoslovenští stíhači v RAF. Prague: Naše vojko, 16–17.

10. Czechoslovak, in fact, but the British long spoke and wrote only about Czechs.


14. TNA, Foreign Office (FO) collection 371/24365, C 1419, 26 January 1940.


16. Ibid., 159-160 (translator’s note: back translation from Czech).

17. A total of 1,285 airmen (both executive and ground staff) went abroad, which was approximately 25 to 30 per cent of the pre-war Czechoslovak air force’s capacity. Kudrna, L. (2010). Odhodlání bojovat. Vlastenectví československých letců v průběhu druhé světové války na pozadí válečných a politických událostí. Prague: Naše vojko, 24.


19. The maximum war capacity was 1,521 men (as of 15 February 1943). Ibid., sign. Inspectorate of the Czechoslovak Air Force, 108/ CI-2ab/8/32, secret and confidential correspondence, č. j. 3164.


23. British insistence on the name “Czecho-Slovakia” clearly showed that the pre-Munich arrangement wasn’t on the agenda. Lockhart (1948), 128 (translator’s note: back translation from Czech).

24. But I protested. In 1918 I was appointed a British agent with the unrecognized Bolshevik government. Once in a lifetime was enough. Lockhart (1948), 128 (translator’s note: back translation from Czech).

25. Originally, Lockhart’s official title was “British agent”: But I protested. In 1918 I was appointed a British agent with the unrecognized Bolshevick government. Once in a lifetime was enough. Lockhart (1948), 128 (translator’s note: back translation from Czech).


27. Originally, Lockhart’s official title was “British agent”:


29. Beneš (2008), 113 and 115 (translator’s note: quoted according to the English translation, 104 and 106).

30. Beneš visited Cholmondeley on 26 July 1940.

31. Beneš (2008), 130 (translator’s note: quoted according to the English translation, 120–121).
33 Beneš (2008), 125 (translator’s note: quoted according to the English translation, 117).
35 Sir William Strang (1893–1978), a career official of the Foreign Office. He entered the diplomatic service in 1919. He accompanied Prime Minister Chamberlain to Berchtesgaden, Godesberg and Munich. He is the author of several books on British history and diplomacy. Both cultural and class differences were frequently revealed in negotiations with representatives of exiled governments. The representatives of the Foreign Office had the best British schools, came from a fairly narrowly defined social class, and attempted to achieve a semblance of a “casual” superiority. In contrast, the Czechoslovak exile movement only had a handful of politicians of the Beneš format. They were mostly secondary pre-war politicians, which was also reflected in their unqualified focus on domestic, regional issues.
36 Bungay (2007), 82 (translator’s note: back translation from Czech).
37 In fact, it was almost 60 German planes.
43 It should be noted that this legend first appeared in the Czech environment. See Ing. Hofman’s memory, Letectví a kosmonautika, 1988, No. 20, 3.
44 Hough, R. – Denis, R. (2007). The Battle of Britain. The Jubilee History. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books Ltd., 186. In fact, he didn’t (and couldn’t) achieve any aerial victories in Poland (he operated unarmed training RWD 8 aircraft; in one of the risky events, he was shot down by German anti-aircraft defence on 20 September 1939). As regards France, the victories cannot be traced or, more precisely, they are not confirmed by the French side. Moreover, it is clear that it was only in England that he flew a fighter plane that had a retractable landing gear. On 8 August 1940, during retraining for Hurricanes, he landed on the “belly”, because he forgot to lower the landing gear. Kudrna, L. (2009). Eso bitvy o Británii. Trochu jiný pohled na českého stíhače Josefa Františka. Fakta & svědectví, No. 12, 30–33.
46 In fact, the German bomber was shot down.
48 It was a Dornier belonging to the group of KG 3 squadron. All four members of the crew were captured. Two German airmen were injured in the fight, and one of them, shooter Bock, died from his injuries three days later. Ražič, J. (1999). Na nebi hrdého Albionu. Válečný deník československých letců ve službách britského letectva 1940–1945. 1. část (1940). Prague: ARES, 254.
52 Ibid., 230.
53 Bloody Foreigners. Untold Battle of Britain.
Vatican Radio transmitter at Santa Maria di Galeria, northwest of Rome

Photo: Archive of Vatican Radio
behind the iron curtain

The beginnings of VR’s Czechoslovak section

On his first official visit to Rome in February 1947 the archbishop of Prague Josef Beran urged Pope Pius XII in a private audience to add Czech and Slovak services to Vatican Radio’s broadcasts. He emphasised forebodings of persecution of the church sparked by threatening signs in the country’s political life. The pope acceded and a test broadcast was carried out in April 1947 at the launch of celebrations of the jubilee of St. Vojtěch (Adalbert). Fr. Josef Olšr SJ prepared the programme with Nepomuk seminarians. It began with the St. Vojtěch choral “Lord, have mercy on us”. After an introduction on the importance of Christianity and our saints for the nation and cultural life of our nations and on the meaning of the celebrations of the martyr’s death of St. Vojtěch, there was a reading of Pius XII’s apostolic letter “Nono ac dimidio a S. Adalberti obitu exeunte saeculo...”, sent to the Czechoslovak episcopate. At the end the Nepomuk seminarians choir sang the papal hymn.

Hear this, all you peoples; listen, all who live in this world

The broadcasts of the Czech section of Vatican Radio

In October 1940 Cardinal Domenico Tardini noted an observation from discussions with foreign diplomats regarding the activities of Vatican Radio: Even when broadcasts are blocked in one country, they can be heard in others. It is enough when they reach one place for them to then reach everywhere.

STANISLAVA VODIČKOVÁ

From the start of 1929 Pope Pius XI’s vision for a Vatican Radio that would deliver the Christian message to the furthest corners of the world began to be fulfilled. Four days after the signing of the Lateran Treaties Pius XI received in a private audience Guglielmo Marconi, one of the inventors of radio and the holder of a Nobel Prize for physics, tasking him with the creation of an autonomous Vatican City State radio station. The prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Matters, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, Marconi and the first director general of the station, Fr. Giuseppe Gianfranceschi SJ collaborated on the planning and implementation of the project. To serve the station, the “Marconi House”, which featured a transmitter, was built in the Vatican gardens. The pope first spoke across the airwaves of Vatican Radio (VR) on Thursday 12 February 1939. His address launched a revolutionary chapter in the history of religious communication. Initial VR broadcasts were in Latin only, though in time other languages were added: French (1931), Spanish (1934), German and English (1937), Polish (1938), Hungarian and Ukrainian (1939), Portuguese and Lithuanian (1940), Italian (1945), and Romanian, Croatian, Czech and Slovak (1947).

During WWII the “neutral” Vatican Radio faced pressure from both sides: The German Embassy complained about real and imagined broadcasts, the Allies about the pope’s restraint. Despite criticisms from foreign diplomats, who made editors’ jobs more difficult, and the jamming of its signal and a ban on listening in Germany, the station soon found its feet and played an essential role in the conflict. A letter from a Polish woman who had had no word from her husband since the start of the war led to the creation in 1939 of the Ufficio Informazione del Vaticano service at the State Secretariat, which helped relatives find lost persons, soldiers and prisoners. On the pope’s orders the majority of broadcasting time was given over to this service, which mediated messages and relayed greetings to prisoners from their families.
The Czechoslovak section began regular broadcasts on Christmas Day of the same year under Fr. Václav Feřt SJ. The official launch began with Christmas reflections and excerpts from Pius XII’s Christmas message in Czech. That was followed by part of the encyclical *Optatissima Pax* and the broadcast closed with Czech and Slovak carols.

The Secretariat of State had originally ordered joint broadcasts for Czechs and Slovaks on two days a week but in the end broadcasts began right away on three days: Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 19:00. The duration was 14 minutes. The national principal was strictly enforced from the beginning, with Czech and Slovak alternating and the announcers switching after seven minutes.

On Mondays and Fridays the first 10 minutes was devoted to reflections or interviews on a topical issue in religious life. In the remaining four minutes news from the Catholic world was read in the two languages. Wednesdays were given over to a weekly overview of church news and current affairs. It soon became clear that the quarter-hour was insufficient so the Secretariat of State decided to extend broadcasting time to 30 minutes divided into two 15-minute shows.

The first permanent presenters on the Czechoslovak broadcasts were members of the Society of Jesus – the Czech Fr. Václav Feřt SJ and the Slovak Fr. Pavol Bajan SJ. The beginnings were not easy. None of the radio pioneers had voice training and all broadcasting was live, with no opportunity to pre-record. It was some years before a recorded programme went out, first on records and later on magnetic tape and cassettes, bringing to an end the stress of live broadcasting and the impossibility of making corrections. The broadcasting booths had been made for one person and it was difficult for two to fit. In addition, all of the editors had other work. Fr. Feřt SJ had since 1945 been spiritual of the Nepomuk seminary, where he was responsible for the seminarians’ spiritual guidance. Despite all the difficulties, enthusiasm reigned in the department, with Fr. Feřt SJ noting: Everybody was convinced of the immense significance of Czech and Slovak broadcasts for Catholics in Czechoslovakia. In 1947 the Ministry of Information was already in Communist hands and Catholic broadcasting on domestic radio was impossible. Despite all the difficulties, the work was done with enthusiasm, which helped to overcome all the hurdles.

**POST-FEBRUARY 1948 CHANGES IN BROADCASTS**

After their February 1948 takeover the Communists adopted a relatively conciliatory position toward the Catholic Church and did not preclude in advance the possibility of joint treaties. Their primary aim was to split the Czechoslovak College of Bishops from the Vatican and create a national church. This was also seen in their treatment of diplomats from the Holy See, who put a lot of energy into ensuring they were not excluded from negotiations on relations between church and state in Czechoslovakia and that, on the contrary, papal
diplomats had the main say, not local bishops.26

However, the efforts of chargé d’affaires Mons. Gennaro Verolino27 to raise negotiations to the level of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Secretariat of State proved fruitless. At the request of the Czechoslovak government Mons. Verolino was recalled from Prague and on 12 July 1949 secretary of the internunciature Fr. Ottavio de Liva28 became the Holy See’s temporary representative.

The tense relations between Czechoslovakia and the Vatican also left their mark on the work of Vatican Radio’s Czechoslovak section. The Secretariat of State responded to the situation following the Communist takeover when after nationalisation29 and centralisation the party controlled the entire media, thereby acquiring a monopoly on information and a platform for indoctrination, introducing daily broadcasts beginning at 15:00. However, there were also concerns that overly critical programming might become a pretext to breaking off fragile diplomatic ties, leading the Secretariat of State to introduce provisional censorship.

This greatly complicated the work of Fr. Fénta SJ. He was forced to prepare his daily programme, spanning three or four pages, translate it into Italian, then take it to the Secretariat of State to be approved by Fr. Corrado Bafile30, defend pointed formulations and sometimes have his texts censored before going to the studio in the Vatican gardens to broadcast the show.

A further change in broadcasting time occurred in February 1949: Czech broadcasts began at 18:45 with the Slovak programme following from 19:00 to 19:15. From the beginning national differences made themselves felt in the Czechoslovak department. According to then external editor Mons. Jaroslav Škarvada31, these were chiefly fanned by Slovakia’s former ambassador to the Holy See Karol Sidor32, a supporter of “separatist” views on reviving an independent Slovak state. At that time the director of Vatican Radio was a Spanish Jesuit33 and by some sixth sense he understrood our relations. So when there was a discussion about an ident, which was to separate the two languages, he said the best thing would be the sound of a cannon.34 On the urgings of the Slovak exile community the Czechoslovak section was in November 1949 divided into Czech and Slovak sections which from then on prepared their own separate broadcasts.

Despite all this discord, a degree of cooperation continued as it was expected that Czechoslovak listeners would tune in to both. The content of programmes was therefore coordinated to ensure the same subjects were not featured on one day. The broadcasts were based in large degree on the Radiogiornale bulletin published in Italian, from which editors from national sections selected information according to their importance for their target territory. Addresses by the pope, which Vati-

behind the iron curtain
can Radio received in advance, were a primary element of the broadcasts from the start.

**RESPONSES TO CHURCH PERSECUTION ON VR**

Harsh persecution of the Catholic Church began in Czechoslovakia from the middle of 1949 in connection with the atheisation of the country. The so-called church laws of October 1949 ushered in fundamental change. The most significant were a law on financial protection of churches and the establishment of a State Office for Church Affairs and a law on the diplomatic relations for decades. In a period of relative liberalisation: Fr. Petr Ovečka SJ (in glasses and beret) shows friends around Rome in 1966. To his left is Helena Lukasová, daughter of the famous Czech photographer.

The Vašat married couple are to his right.

*Photo: Jan Lukas*

The most significant were a law on the establishment of a State Office for Church Affairs and a law on the financial protection of churches and religious societies by the state. The so-called church laws of October 1949 ushered in fundamental change. The most significant were a law on the establishment of a State Office for Church Affairs and a law on the financial protection of churches and religious societies by the state. The laws did away with the autonomy of the Catholic Church as guaranteed by the Modus vivendi and placed it under state control. On 16 March 1950 the Communist government declared Ottavio de Liva persona non grata and amid a huge propaganda campaign forced him to quit Czechoslovakia within three days. His replacement was not granted an entry visa, which effectively meant the interruption of diplomatic relations for decades.

An extensive amnesty declared in 1960 took in the majority of priests and monks. The paradox is that this was just at the time a large trial of Jesuits was taking place. A year later it was the turn of the Redemptorists. The church responded to the brief liberalisation in 1968 with a burst of activity; this ended with normalisation, when everything returned to how it had been before. An operation entitled “Reduction” was launched against church activities in 1979 and other anti-church operations followed. The so-called illegal activities of orders were monitored and prosecuted: Operation “Whirlpool” was launched against the Franciscans in 1983, operation “Shadow” against the Jesuits the next year and subsequently operation “Concert” against the Salesians.

The editors of the Czech section of VR responded to all of these events. In the wake of the expulsion of the secretary of the Prague internunciature de Liva provisional censorship was evidently lifted and responsibility for the impact of broadcasts was transferred in full to the editors-in-chief of national sections. Diplomats from the Secretariat of State’s Eastern European section would only recommend an appropriate approach in sensitive cases and did not issue directives.

The exhausting, tension-filled work took its toll on Fr. Peřt SJ, who after roughly a year at the section suffered a nervous collapse. Colleague Fr. Alois Kofínok SJ filled in for him but the department didn’t get a permanent editor-in-chief until 1953. This was Fr. Petr Ovečka SJ, who headed the department for 17 years.

In that period the flow of information from home dried up. Jesuit Superior Fr. P. František Šilhan SJ, who had supplied the department with reliable information, was imprisoned in March 1950. Another source of information was political refugees from Czechoslovakia. Editors had to handle information from them very sensitively when making it public so as not to reveal the sources; who had “leaked” the information could have been deduced from one careless word, leading to the arrest or at least persecution of their relatives and friends.

The golden rule for the entire period of broadcasting, tried and tested during WWII, was to work with agency reports and information from the foreign media that confirmed reports of church persecution from home; the editor could then refer to reports in renowned dailies and circulated by agencies or radio and television stations. This also helped avoid the inadvertent disclosure of sources.

Information also came from Czech expatriates working in the foreign media, in particular from Radio Free Europe religious programmes by Alexander Heidler, Karel Růžička, Friedrich Osuský, Felix Mikula and from Voice of America by Ivan Medek, etc.

Another popular source was the official Czechoslovak media. Editors entered into polemics with their reports, spotlighting willfully distorted information, fabricated reports and downright lies. Czech department editors scrutinised and commented...
OSTPOLITIK AND THE CZECH SECTION

The 1960s brought a number of conciliatory steps toward the Vatican on the part of the Soviet Union: In 1961 Nikita Khrushchev wished Pope John XXIII a happy 80th birthday; selected bishops from Eastern Bloc states were allowed to attend the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965); and in February 1963 Josyf Slipyj32, the Lviv metropolitan of the Greek Catholic Church, was released from the Gulag on condition that he go into exile. The pope recommended that his diplomats foster an atmosphere of trust, speak the truth in a way that did not cause offence and not lose patience.33 The Vatican’s new diplomacy, adapted to the demands of the age, was most visible in relations with Eastern Bloc states and was dubbed Ostpolitik.

Negotiations between the Czechoslovak state and the Holy See were renewed in May 1963. Vatican diplomacy was represented by the Holy See’s pro-secretary of state Mons. Agostino Casaroli34. Leading the Czechoslovak team was the head of department for ecclesiastical matters at the Ministry of Education and Culture, Karel Hrůza35, and Lieut. Col. Miroslav Košnar36, commander of the Third and from January 1964 the Second Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior. The Holy See entered the negotiations with demands for the resolution of regular diocesan administration and the release and reinstatement of interned bishops, including Archbishop Beran. The state’s aim was to gain as much as possible while ideally conceding nothing.

Broadcasts by the Czech section of Vatican Radio, which the Communist government branded an obstacle to the establishment of good church-state relations, were central to all the talks. In his memoirs, Casaroli wrote: Here too ostentatious politeness toward me but strong reservations regarding that which was hinted at or mentioned in a conversation the previous evening: the anti-Czechoslovakia campaign that since a particular time has customarily been waged by the radio station Vatican Radio, Czech and Slovak exile...37

Mons. Casaroli wished to hear the specific objections of the Communist government. The most significant accusations included the broadcasting of information about interned bishops and the priests and hundreds of lay persons who had been imprisoned, false discrimination against Catholics and their children in schools and this several months after the actual events in question with a clear aim: to denigrate the good name of the CSSR.38 The Communists called on the Vatican diplomats to have Fr. Ovečka SJ thrown out of Vatican Radio and barred from Rome, making further talks on church-state relations conditional on the fulfillment of these demands.

In 1970 the director of Vatican Radio received a directive from the Secretariat of State stating that Fr. Ovečka SJ must leave the section. In addition the Superior General of the Jesuits was ordered to expel him from Rome. However, Superior Fr. O’Neill SJ was defiant: What is the Secretariat of State to give me orders as to who I may or should have in our home? Fr. Ovečka is a Jesuit, he’s staying here, and that’s that!39

So Fr. Ovečka SJ remained in the home of the Jesuits. He began working as a librarian at the Historical Institute while also serving as a chaplain at the San Giovanni de Rossi parish. He had an office at the Nepomuk seminary where he worked as secretariat of the Christian Academy and headed the editorial department of Nový život. As editor-in-chief of the monthly (1957–2001) he regularly visited the Czech section of Vatican Radio on Wednesdays and Saturdays, picking up copies of reports or programs he drew on for news stories and reports in the magazine. On those visits he provided help to Fr. Josef Koláček SJ40, who was just starting out as an editor and presenter.41

The programme scheme changed at this time: Monday was given over to philosophy, theology and culture; Tuesday to catechesis of various age categories; Wednesday to papal addresses during general audiences; Thursday to information on currents of thought in individual countries; and Friday (from 1957) to the programmes of Cardinal Tomáš Špidlík.
Slovakia church life gradually began to develop, visible in Marian pilgrimages and a revival of the cult of national patron saints. Such pilgrimages were an expression not just of solidarity with the church community but also a demonstration of public opposition to the Communist authorities. Turning points included a festival at Velehard in July 1985 when 200,000 pilgrims whistled down official speakers representing the state; the declaration of a decade of spiritual renewal of the nation in November 1987; and the January 1987 petition drive Catholic initiatives to resolve the situation of citizens of faith, which in a short period was signed by around 550,000 people. The climax of church activities was the canonisation of St. Agnes of Bohemia at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome on 12 November 1989. Vatican Radio was present at all those events, accompanied by its listeners.

LISTENERSHIP

Naturally the letters that arrived at the Czech and Slovak departments were in the main written by Czechoslovakia who were in Rome while on their way to other missions passed through the station, as did those who were forbidden from returning home after 1948 and some who went into exile in the 1960s. Among external collaborators we find numerous significant figures in the exile Czech clerical community; alongside the aforementioned Jaroslav Skarvada and Cardinal Tomáš Špidlík these included: Karel Skalický, Jaroslav Polec, František Planner, Karel Vrána, Jesuits Karel Říha, Jiří Novotný, Petr Kolář, Josef Pazderka and Josef Čupr. Broadcasting would have been extremely difficult without their involvement.

THE PONTIFICATE OF JOHN PAUL II

In the wake of the installation of Pope John Paul II the Vatican’s Ostpolitik acquired the adjective “fierce”. The pontiff’s call for the courage to protect faith as one aspect of human rights spurred many Catholics to action and gave courage to official church representatives. In Czechoslovakia church life gradually began to develop, visible in Marian pilgrimages and a revival of the cult of national patron saints. Such pilgrimages were an expression not just of solidarity with the church community but also a demonstration of public opposition to the Communist authorities. Turning points included a festival at Velehard in July 1985 when 200,000 pilgrims whistled down official speakers representing the state; the declaration of a decade of spiritual renewal of the nation in November 1987; and the January 1987 petition drive Catholic initiatives to resolve the situation of citizens of faith, which in a short period was signed by around 550,000 people. The climax of church activities was the canonisation of St. Agnes of Bohemia at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome on 12 November 1989. Vatican Radio was present at all those events, accompanied by its listeners.

LISTENERSHIP

Naturally the letters that arrived at the Czech and Slovak departments were in the main written by Czechoslovak listeners for whom the religious broadcasting was an important connection to the worldwide church. In view of the censorship of mail, writing directly to the station was not advisable. Letters and postcards were addressed to the Nepomuk seminary. Correspondents for the most part sent them from places to which Czechoslovak citizens were permitted to travel on holiday or work trips: East Germany, Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, etc. Reaction from home chiefly helped develop programmes and subjects that met with listeners’ interest.
Listenership was not monitored as closely then as it is today and Vatican Radio acted on the conviction that an independent source of information was important to society, and not only behind the Iron Curtain. In addition it was essentially impossible to acquire data for accurate empirical research in a closed society, and not only because VR figured on a list of Czechoslovakia’s “enemies”.

It was attempted in the 1980s by Radio Free Europe, which, using the quantitative method, carried out several internal surveys of the listenership of foreign radio stations. One question in the questionnaire asked tourists from Czechoslovakia whether they tuned in to Vatican Radio. The responses provided them with approximate data on listenership; in the case of Vatican Radio the number of listeners was put at around 600,000.18

Senior state representatives too wished to ascertain the approximate number of citizens who tuned in to the “seditious station” and to learn about their preferences among foreign radio stations. They assigned the task to the Institute for Public Opinion Research, which produced information on the structure of listeners of Western radio stations in the CSSR, several indicators of listenership of those stations and the views of the public on foreign broadcasts. The researchers did not just interpret the data gathered but also compared them with the results of a similar survey carried out in 1978, so it was demonstrated that while in 1978 10 percent of the population followed a foreign radio station (respondents most frequently mentioned the BBC, Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Deutschland Funk and Vatican Radio) at least once a week, four years later it was 24 percent, meaning around 2.9 million persons. A total of 36 percent of citizens had tuned into a foreign station. Frequent listening (i.e., daily or almost daily, in some cases 1 to 3x weekly) of a foreign radio station increased in comparison to 1978 in all socio-demographic groups, though most among respondents with university education.19

Also noteworthy were the motives people gave for listening to foreign stations: the supplementing and comparison of information, learning about the other side’s views and more objective, true information.20 Reliably estimating today the number of listeners Vatican Radio had is extremely difficult. However, we can state with certainty that its broadcasts were always a controversial subject in talks between representatives of the Communist state and the Holy See. In his memoirs, Mons. Casaroli makes repeated reference to the significance the Communists gave VR broadcasts and how they “stuck in their craw”. This suggests that the station’s listener numbers were not insignificant.

BROADCASTS FROM ROME AND THE STB

Vatican Radio predominantly employed Jesuits, making it virtually impossible for the Czechoslovak State Security (StB) to infiltrate it and acquire detailed information about the station. However in the 1970s and 1980s it did use a number of “verified” clerics who on work trips to Rome made contact with the Czech and Slovak sections and on their return collaborated with the Communist security services. The StB also recruited atheists who they trained and then allowed to make “illegal” trips to Rome, where their mission was to enter the seminary and infiltrate the exile clerical community.

Illustrating this are the cases of Karel Simandl21, Jindřich Holeček22 and Jozef Král23. According to Ministry of the Interior archives they posed as “seminarian volunteers” and got into the Czech and Slovak sections of VR, where they helped prepare programmes while also fulfilling their StB mission.

The main body of existing agency reports on the activities of Vatican Radio from the collection of the 1st Directorate of the National Security Corps stem from the 1970s and 1980s and detailed research into them is still in the initial phase. The preserved reports chiefly focus on the daily work of the editors at both sections. The StB obtained the most information from meetings with their secret collaborator Jozef Král, an editor in the Slovak department. It suggests that the section chiefly prepared news from the bulletins of Radiogior-nali, while liturgical and theological texts were provided by collaborators among the clerical exile community. The department regularly receives bulletins from Radio Free Europe and the Catholic agencies KATH PRESS, ANSA,
FRANCE PRESSE and KIPA. Král informed the StB about security measures at the entrance to the building, the location of both sections at the central building on Piazza Pia and customs surrounding visits by guests to the stations premises. The Slovak section is on the first floor, right beside the Czech one. The Polish and Hungarian ones are opposite. From the corridor individual nationalities are marked by cards. Broadcasting studios, where programmes are recorded, are located on the fourth floor.

The StB paid great attention to cooperation between Vatican Radio and Radio Free Europe. It therefore tasked “Magnus” (Král) to look into the suspicion that RFE bulletins were also to be found at VR’s central documentation centre, which would evidently have proven close cooperation between the stations.

Naturally the focus of attention was on the broadcasts themselves and their composition. The Czech evening show was broadcast daily from 19:30 and repeated at 5:15 in the morning. Slovak broadcasts followed those 15-minute programmes. In 1985, for instance, the programme featured information on the pope’s activities (pastoral visits, general and private audiences, the publication of major documents and encyclicals), from the life of the Catholic Church (sessions of senior Catholic bodies, congresses, various meetings) and on important events in the worldwide Catholic Church on the life of the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia.

The reaction to programmes that editors targeted at young listeners unsettled the StB. The response to a survey initiated by Karel Simandl in 1978 also attracted attention. Fr. Koláček SJ remarked of it: One time we prepared a campaign asking listeners to send us postcards from individual places of pilgrimage. A large number of them reached us and we used them to create a statistical overview, that they listen to us, go on pilgrimages, how many people and from where.

Today we will probably never learn whether it was Simandl’s idea or a task from the StB officer overseeing him. In his report on the matter “Jab” stated that of around 350 responses 80 were signed. The section sent those listeners a diploma with the pope’s signature. He also referred to the reaction of Vatican Radio management to the innovative campaign: The general executive of VR even praised the programme as novel and enterprising. In reaction to the broadcast many letters reached VR from the CSSR, either signed or written under a fictitious symbol. The department then reacts to all responses.

Both sections built on the success of the survey and continued with various listeners’ competitions and quizzes. According to the Slovak department, around 5,000 responses came from Slovakia alone to one quiz. The StB tried to obtain the addresses of all listeners who replied to these surveys. However, they ran into a problem at the Czech section: Breaking with the normal custom, the superior [Fr. Josef Koláček SJ] does not live at the order’s building on Via dei Penitenzieri, like all the other Jesuits from VR, as he has a flat within the Vatican City. There he keeps all work materials, including a filing cabinet providing an overview of correspondence from listeners from the CSSR.

While Fr. P. Koláček SJ kept all confidential materials at home where secret collaborators of the Czechoslovak intelligence couldn’t get at them, most of the letters with return addresses sent to the Slovak section were either shredded or ended up in a filing cabinet at the department. It was believed to contain around 150 addresses, of which 10 were of interest to the StB: In any case the source (“Magnus”) had the chance to obtain them, even though he had to go through the entire filing cabinet because they are only ordered alphabetically.

A situational report of 24 May 1985 bore the further disquieting information that the Czech section of VR was acquiring reports on the situation of the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia not only from foreign news agencies but is also receiving up-to-date information whose channels, despite efforts, has not been possible to identify.

On the basis of the preserved archival materials it can be stated that the Communist intelligence’s targeting of Vatican Radio required a great deal of energy and financial resources. The intelligence that the spies of the Directorate of the National Security Corp managed to get their hands on was mainly used in official talks.
between Czechoslovakia and the Vatican. Those materials helped Czechoslovak representatives achieve considerable success in the diplomatic arena.

CONCLUSION

The persecution of the church in Czechoslovakia robbed Catholics of virtually all means of evangelising and connecting with the worldwide church. Through the entire period of Communist rule the Czech section of Vatican Radio did its best to fill that vacuum. Though other foreign stations also carried religious programming, in which they devoted attention to the Catholic Church as a key part of society (relaying for instance important liturgical celebrations, carrying reports on the persecution of the domestic church, etc.), they were unable in view of its very nature to compete with Vatican Radio and were not aiming to do so.

Vatican Radio still serves its function as “the pope’s station” today. After Fr. Koláček, who still helps out at the department, Fr. Milan Glaser SJ took charge. His team also comprises two editors, Johana Bronková and Jana Gruberová. The Czech department’s goal remains the same – the free, credible, reliable and effective profession of the message of Christianity. Since 2001 the Czech section has also had a website with an up-to-date archive of its shows.

In 2011 cooperation was agreed between the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and Vatican Radio allowing for the digitisation of the archive of the Czech section from the period 1950–1992. At the end of 2013 a presentation of the archive of broadcasts by Vatican Radio’s Czech department was launched on the Institute’s website, while this year an edition of selected documents relating to reactions to the persecution of the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia during the Communist regime is being prepared. Work is also underway on the publication of the Slovak part of the broadcast archive from 1949–1959. Making both archives public will allow interested parties to get to know past shows attesting to the uniqueness of this current of thought.

NOTES

1 Pius XI began his first Latin address to Vatican Radio listeners with the words of Psalm 49.
2 Ordained as a priest in 1912, Domenico Tardini (29 February 1888 – 30 June 1961) entered the Roman Curia. In December 1937 he became secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs. In 1952 he was appointed pro-secretary of state and six years later became secretary for extraordinary ecclesiastical affairs.
3 Archive of the Czech section of Vatican Radio (hereinafter only ARaV), Dějiny Vatikánského rozhlasu. Introduction. Typewritten copy, 5.
4 Pius XI (31 May 1857 – 10 February 1939), real name Ambrogio Damiano Achille Ratti, was the 25th pope, serving from 1922 to 1939. His writings included two key encyclicals condemning totalitarian regimes, Mit brennender Sorge (15 March 1937), which focused on Nazism, and Divini redemptoris (19 March 1937), targeting communism.
6 Marta Giuseppe Giovanni Eugenio Pacelli (a March 1876–9 October 1958) later served as Pope Pius XII from 1939–1958. Known as the pontiff who acknowledged the “moral value of democracy” and as a long-term opponent of communism. In 1949 he confirmed a decree excommunicating members of Communist parties from Catholic orders.
7 Fr. Giuseppe Gianfranceschi SJ (21 February 1975 – 9 July 1934), Italian priest and member of the Society of Jesus, rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University, chairman of the Pontifical Academy of Scientists, companion of Umberto Nobile on his 1939 expedition to the North Pole, first director general of VR.
8 SJ or SI – acronym for the Latin Societas Jesu/Jesu, referring to members of the Society of Jesus, commonly known as Jesuits or the Jesuit Order.
10 In 1948 VR broadcast in 18 languages, in December 1950 25 and in the 1960s 30. Today it broadcasts in 47 languages.
12 Vatican information office in operation 1939-1947.
13 In 1940 2,509 minutes were broadcast with 5,252 appeals, messages. [...] In the period 1940-1948 RAVAT broadcast 1,240,728 messages. See ARaV, Dějiny Vatikánského rozhlasu (History of Vatican Radio). Introduction, 5.
16 Josef Ohr SJ (9 January 1913 – 3 July 1984) entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus in 1929 and was ordained a priest 10 years later. He continued his studies at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, where he later worked as a professor.
The Pontifical College of St. John Nepomuk served from 1929 as a seminary for Czech and Slovak seminarians in Rome. After 1948 students from Czechoslovakia were barred from leaving for Rome while graduates were not allowed to return home.

Regular broadcasts were due to start on 22 December 1947; however, due to low wattage this was moved to Christmas Eve.

Škarvada, J. (2002). 

On 18 December 1947 Pope Pius XII issued the encyclical Optatissima Pax in which he called for peace between the nations and social reconciliation in society.

The Secretariat of State is the governing body of the Roman Curia (Holy See) and is chaired by a cardinal state secretary. It is divided into two sections, the Section for General Affairs and the Section for Relations with States. The first takes care of the pontiff’s daily agenda and the second is responsible for relations with governments and other subjects of international law. Both oversee official Church media: L’Osservatore Romano, Vatican Radio, publication of the Pontifical Yearbook and today also the Vatican Television Centre.

Škarvada, J. (2002). 

At that time the College of Bishops comprised: Prague archbishop Josef Beran, Olomouc archbishop Josef Karel Matocha, bishops Pavel Bajan SJ (1 December 1912 – 10 April 1978) entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus in 1930 and was ordained a priest on 24 August 1933. He became spiritual of the Nepomuk College in October 1945. From 1947 to 1953 he headed the Czechoslovak and later Czech section of VR. In 1954 he left for Montreal, where he set up a Czech mission. In 1958 he returned to Rome and again began working at VR’s Czech section. In 1970 he became vice-provincial of the Czech province for members living abroad.

On 28 December 1947 Pope Pius XII issued the encyclical Optatissima Pax in which he called for peace between the nations and social reconciliation in society.

In international law Modus vivendi is a type of treaty on coexistence between two state subjects. A treaty between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See was agreed in January 1928 and took effect on 2 February 1928. Modus vivendi allowed the exchange of diplomatic missions and ambassadors to be accredited to each other. It also allowed for trading, joint issues of stamps and visas, and the first flights to start on 22 December 1947; however, due to low wattage this was moved to Christmas Eve.

Karol Sidor (16 July 1901 – 20 October 1953) was a Slovak journalist and politician. From 1920 he worked for Hlinka's Slovak People's Party and on the editorial staff of Slovenský Noviny. He advocated for Slovak autonomy and was a leading ideologue of Slovak clerical nationalism. In 1938 he organised an armed unit of Hlinka's party’s guard, becoming its commander. From December 1938 to March 1939 he represented Slovakia in the Czech-Slovak government and from 11 to 14 March 1939 was prime minister of an autonomous Slovak government. In that function he rejected the declaration of the Slovak state, which he regarded as unconstitutional. After the declaration of the Slovak state by Jozef Tito on 14 March 1939 he first served as Minister of the Interior and was soon sent as ambassador to the Vatican. From 1939 he lived in exile, first in Italy and later in Canada. After February 1948 he set up and chaired the Slovak National Council abroad. In 1947 he was sentenced in his absence to 20 years in jail by a National Court.

Jaroslav Škarvada (14 September 1924 – 1 June 2010) was ordained on 12 March 1949. The Communist regime did not allow him to return home following his studies in Rome. In Italy he lectured in dogmatic theology at a seminary in Chieti and served as secretary to Cardinal Beran in 1965–1969. From 1968 he coordinated spiritual services for Czech expatriates. In December 1982 he was appointed titular bishop of Litomyšl, becoming consecrated as bishop on 6 January 1983. On 28 August 1991 he became a Prague auxiliary bishop. From 1991 to 2001 he was vicar-general of the Prague archdiocese, simultaneously serving (1993–2002) as the provost of the Metropolitan Chapter of Saints Vitus, Václav and Vojtěch in Prague.

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Fr. Filippo Soccorsi SJ was director of the station in 1934–1939.


After being ordained a priest in 1934 Ottavio de Liva (10 June 1911 – 23 August 1965) worked in the diplomatic services. He was expelled from Czechoslovakia in March 1950.


After being ordained a priest in 1936 Corrado Bafile (4 July 1903 – 3 February 2005) worked in the diplomatic services from 1939.

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He became an expert on relations with Eastern Europe.

As secretary of the nunciature in Hungary (1944) he helped save 30,000 Jews from deportation to the concentration camps. In February 1948 he replaced the sick nuncio Savento Ritter (24 January 1884 – 21 April 1951) in Prague. However, he was expelled from Czechoslovakia in November of that year.

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Operation "K" was carried out in two stages. The first began on the night of 13–14 April 1950, the second a week later. Units from the Ministry of the Interior, StB and People’s Militia jointly took part. They placed the members of the orders in the Želiv internment monastery. Novices and young monks were sent to auxiliary tank battalions. They transported the remainder of the monks, including the infirm and the elderly, to centralised monasteries in Osek, Králičky, Bohosudov, Hejnice and Broumov. The interned monks were placed there for an indefinite period, without court order, solely on the basis of a National Committees’ decision. They were subject to a harsh prison regime and the arbitrariness of individual camp commanders. For more see Vlček, V. (2004).

Research by PhDr. Jan Stříbrný has identified the number of people executed, tortured to death and killed as the result of interrogation and imprisonment in the period of the Communist regime. In total 54 members of religious orders died: 1 bishop, 2 canons, 33 diocesan priests, 16 monks and 2 nuns. For more see Coll. authors (2014), 100-101.


For more see Šilhan, F. (2001), 168–169. Karel Hrůza (1921–?) was a member of the Communist Party from 1945, original profession labourer. 1947–1949 secretary of the district party committee in Kolín, 1950–1953 head of the personnel department at the Ministry of Information, 1953–1956 head of the personnel department at the Ministry of Education and Culture, 1956–1968 and 1969–1971 head of the State Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs; six years later he became secretary. In 1965 he was made a bishop. As a leading figure in the Vatican’s diplomatic service he led talks between the Holy See and numerous countries. He played a key role in shaping the policies of Paul VI and John Paul II toward Eastern Bloc states. He served as secretary of state in 1979–1990. John Paul II promoted him to cardinal in 1979.


Miroslav Kolnár (5 January 1928 – 28 February 1973), original profession labourer, was a member of the Communist Party from 1945 and began working in party apparatus in 1948. In 1954-1957 he studied at the Party University under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR in Moscow. From 1963 he worked at the Ministry of the Interior as commander of the Third Directorate of the SNB (National Security Corps) and from 1 January 1964 as commander of the Second Directorate of the SNB. He requested to leave post on 31 March 1968 and was removed on 28 July 1968. From 1 February 1969 he served as deputy commander of the Central Directorate of the StB. During the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces he was a member of the steering staff and took part in repression of “counterrevolutionary elements” in the Czech lands. On 22 September 1969 he became deputy minister of the interior. He was removed from position on 31 August 1972. See Kalous, J. et al. (2005). Biografický šlovník představitelů ministerstva vnitra v letech 1948–1989. Ministr a jejich náměstci. Prague: ÚSTR, 96–97.


There were 1,752 respondents (aged 15 and over). See Poslechovost stvavých vysílaček Protestant. Nezávislý evangelický měsíčník, 2006, no. 6, [http://protestant.evangelnet.cz/poslechovost-stvavych-vysilacek (quoted as of 10 March 2014)].

Ibid.

Karel Simandl (born 14 August 1955) was recruited by the StB as an agent under the codename “Jab” on 1 July 1975. This followed a letter he wrote to the Ministry of the Interior expressing interest in cooperating with the CS intelligence service. The first task he completed was “uncovering” secret monastic studies in Prague and divinity studies in Brno. After being sent to Rome he successful graduated from the seminary and in 1982 was ordained a priest. In the following year his collaboration with the StB “deteriorated” and in April 1983 he submitted a letter to his handlers refusing to carry on the collaboration. However, after five years he renewed it under the codename “Aster”. He received financial and material payment for his work for the intelligence service. The last recorded meeting with him took place on 27 December 1989.

ABS, f. I. správa SNB, svazek r. č. 46448.

Jindřich Holeček OM (born 8 March 1954) a member of the Order of Minims (OM), religious name František of Paula, StB collaborator: category agent, codename “Čeřich” and later “Juan”. He studied archival science and history at Prague’s Charles University (1973–1978). After entering military service he was from September 1979 used as collaborator of the VKR (military counterintelligence): category confidant. In July 1980 he put his signature to collaboration with the StB and was deployed as a “convert” among the members of the underground church. His activities led to a raid on an “illegal” printer operated by Dominican nuns in Kadaň. In 1982 he was sent to study in Rome, tasked with infiltrating the clerical exile community. In 1984–1987 he studied philosophy and later theology at the Pontifical Lateran University. His studies were complicated by his expulsion from the Nepomuk seminary for disciplinary reasons in 1985. In order to continue his studies and work as an agent he joined the Order of Minims. He was ordained a priest in Brno in 1993. He received financial and material payment for his work for the intelligence service. The last recorded meeting between him and his case officer took place on 6 November 1989.

ABS, f. I. správa SNB, svazek r. č. 47468.

Josef Koláček SJ (born 1 September 1929) entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus in 1948. Under operation “K” he was arrested as an assistant labourer while secretly studying theology. In 1988 he left for Innsbruck, where he completed his theology studies. Since 1970 he has been living in Rome. From 1971 to 2001 he headed the Czech section of VR.

ABS, f. I. správa SNB, svazek r. č. 43904.

Ibid, svazek 172, krycí jméno Rádio Vatikán (Code name Vatican Radio), Příloha k záznamu ze schůzky s (Supplement to record of meeting with) A – MAGNUS, 15 August 1979 – vytištění (extract), 12.

AA, author’s interview with Fr. Josef Koláček SJ, 26 July 2012.

Jozef Král (born 9 August 1938) was recruited as an agent for the StB on 8 June 1958, codename “Magnus”, by the 3rd Department of the former Regional Directorate-Ministry of the Interior Nitra. He took part in the liquidation of a “secret lay apostolate” and caused the imprisonment of two members. After entering military service he became a collaborator of the VKR. After being demobilized (1960) he collaborated with the Ministry of the Interior in Prievidza and from May 1961 with the 1st Department of the Regional Directorate-Ministry of the Interior Banská Bystrica. He was assessed as an enterprising collaborator who conscientiously fulfilled all his handlers’ orders. In 1962 he was sent abroad as an agent of the Czechoslovak intelligence tasked with infiltrating the Vatican’s Czech clerical exile community. He was ordained a priest in Rome in February 1971. From 1977–2001 he was an assistant editor at VR’s Slovak section (1994–1995 editor-in-chief). In 1997 he headed pastoral care for young refugees. He had contacts with the Slovak clerical exile community. According to a collaboration assessment of 23 January 1989 he provided valuable operative information on the VR building and persons working there full-time and externally. He received financial and material payment from the intelligence service for his information. The last recorded meeting with him took place on 24 November 1989; he failed to arrive at the next one, set for 29 December 1989. ABS, f. I. správa SNB, svazek r. č. 43904.

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behind the iron curtain
At the border crossing in Petrovice, employees of the customs and passport control of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the German Democratic Republic carry out customs clearance of tourists together, says the contemporary text.

Photo: Czech News Agency / Libor Zavoral
TRAVELLLING FROM
THE CZECHOSLOVAK SOCIALIST
REPUBLIC AFTER 1969

From the autumn of 1969, the normalization regime tried to restrict its citizens’ travelling to the free world as much as possible. From a legislative perspective, Act No. 63/1965 Coll. of 18 June 1965, on travel documents, was still in force in Czechoslovakia. Although it provided citizens with a legal entitlement to travel documents to travel abroad, its Section 4 (1) (a) stipulated that the issue of travel documents may be refused if the trip was not in line with national interests. For the same reason, it was possible to take away the travel document that had been issued or to limit its territorial and time validity. The flexible formulation actually made it possible to refuse to issue a travel document or to take away a travel document from anyone at any time so, in practice, citizens did not have the right to travel abroad. Under the implementing decree of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 23 June 1965, in addition to the passport, citizens also needed a special exit permit the issue of which could be rejected for the same reasons as the issue of a passport.¹

Yet the passport policy was quite liberal until 1969: if there were no fundamental objections of a security nature against citizens (in terms of national security or general criminality), and if they presented a “foreign currency promise” of the Czechoslovak State Bank or an invitation of a person living abroad, they usually obtained the passport and exit permit. A major turning point came at the beginning of October 1969, in connection with the start of a strict course of normalization. At its session on 8 October, the Federal Government adopted Resolution No. 266, which meant the beginning of a new phase of significant restrictions. They were based on the joint proposal of the Federal Interior Minister Jan Pelnář and Foreign Affairs Minister Ján Marko, who was also joined by Prime Minister Oldřich Černík, a former supporter of reforms who sought a last-minute rescue by supporting the normalization policy. The concept of the document is entitled “Report on Emergency Measures Associated with Trips of Czechoslovak Citizens and Their Stay in Capitalist States and Trips of Foreigners to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic”. The introduction indicates that the text incorporates the proposals that emerged from the discussion at the Government session on 3 October. The measures envisaged immediate abolition of the already issued exit permits for any private trips except for trips to the countries of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), or possibly tourist trips to Asian socialist countries. Furthermore, within two weeks, the plan of business trips to capitalist countries and exchanges without foreign currency with these countries for the remainder of 1969 was to be revised. (Exchanges without foreign currency meant mutual visits agreed with the approval of the central authorities between institutions or organizations on a reciprocal basis. Their essence was that the foreign partner paid for the stay of the Czechoslovak participants, and the Czechoslovak institution then paid for the stay of the foreigner.) The already issued business exit permits for persons residing abroad were also to be invalidated by the end of the year. The relevant ministries and central bodies of social and interest organizations had to apply for new exit permits for their employees residing abroad, and they also had to demonstrate that their stay abroad was really necessary; otherwise the worker had to return to Czechoslovakia. In the future, private trips to capitalist states and Yugoslavia were to be permitted not more than once a year during the holiday leave and were to be limited to holidays organized by travel agencies, visits to close...
relatives (only those who were residing abroad with the approval of the Czechoslovak authorities), and trips based on the foreign currency promise issued by the Czechoslovak State Bank, for the issue of which, however, citizens did not have a legal right. Private trips for the purpose of employment or study were not to be permitted at all. In practice, this meant that such a trip could only take place as a business trip (based on a business exit permit), if the relevant ministry or, as the case may be, the Ministry of Education of the Czech or Slovak Republic requested it. The Government approved all the measures and, with the date of 9 October, issued them as two separate legal regulations that were published on the same day in the Collection of Laws and thus came into force.

3 The Government Decree No. 114/1969 Coll. had a fundamental and lasting importance, stipulating cases in which a trip to a foreign country was not in accordance with national interests and providing grounds for non-issuance or removal of a travel document: the trip was not in compliance with state interests if it was inconsistent with the protection of national security, internal order, public health or morals, as well as in the event of a trip: a) to a state with which the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic did not maintain diplomatic relations, b) to visit a citizen who resided abroad without the permission of the Czechoslovak authorities, c) of a citizen against whom enforcement was sought for failure to fulfil maintenance obligation or other commitments, d) of a citizen whose actions suggested an intention to remain abroad, e) which was not covered by foreign currency, f) without the foreign currency promise, except for trips to see relatives in the direct line of descent, to siblings and spouses, unless these were trips mentioned in categories a–d above.

Joint decree of the federal Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs No. 115/1969 Coll., on the validity of exit permits, had an immediate – as well as temporary (one-time) – importance. The exit permits marked as "tourism" (such permits could only be used for a trip as part of a specific collective holiday) were only valid until 1 January 1970. The validity of exit permits of persons who were abroad on the date of publication of the decree ended on 31 December 1969. In contrast, permanent exit permits to the CMEA states and one-time exit permits to Asian socialist countries remained valid. This meant expiration of validity of exit permits for private trips to Yugoslavia, as well as, for example, to Cuba or (theoretically) to Albania. The reason was simple: Czechoslovakia either did not have an agreement with these countries whereby they would not allow Czechoslovak citizens to travel to capitalist states without a special permit, or (in the case of Cuba)
it was impossible to travel to them otherwise than by transiting through such states. In the case of Yugoslavia, therefore, the expired permits included one-time annexes to ID cards that had already been issued, and these annexes ceased to be issued for this country. 

In addition to measures of an administrative nature, criminal law measures were also adopted. On 18 December 1969, the Federal Assembly approved Act No. 150/1969 Coll., on offences, which permanently incorporated some of the institutes and constituting facts of crimes into the Czechoslovak criminal law that had been originally introduced only temporarily (with validity until the end of 1969), after major demonstrations from 19 to 22 August 1969. The Offences Act stipulated (Section 5[d]) imprisonment of up to six months or a corrective action (i.e. deductions from salary in favour of the treasury) or a monetary fine of up to 5,000 Czechoslovak crowns for violation of the regulations on travel documents, especially for obtaining the exit permit fraudulently, for using incorrect or incomplete information, or for exceeding its territorial or temporal validity. The law came into force on 1 January 1970. 

All regulations on travel documents were summed up in the new joint decree of the Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs, No. 44/1970 Coll., on 13 April 1970. It stipulated the types of travel documents in detail, determining the procedure for their issue. Exit permits for passports were issued based on applications submitted to the regional administration of passports and visas of the Ministry of the Interior via the district department of passports and visas. The approval of the planned trip had to be confirmed directly on the applicant’s application by the employer, affirming that the applicant had no outstanding financial obligations to the state or socialist organizations, i.e. especially to the company in which they worked. If the applicant was not employed, the approval on the application was provided by the national committee having local competence. The approval of the district military administration was also required for men subject to compulsory military service, regardless of whether the person was a conscript, recruit or reservist. In addition to the stamped confirmed application, the applicant had to simultaneously submit to the district administration of passports and visas the foreign currency promise or an invitation by the immediate relatives legally living abroad. In the case of an organized holiday with a travel agency, applications for the issue of exit permits were confirmed directly by the travel agency. The decree allowed the Passport Service of the Ministry of the Interior to require the same documents also for the application for a passport, but this was not used in practice, because the passport, which remained in the possession of the person to whom it had been issued, without a one-time exit permit could only be used to travel to the CMEA countries (USSR, Mongolia, Poland, German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria), for which permanent exit permits were issued in the form of stamps simultaneously with the issue of the passport. With effect from 1 May 1972, the previously issued permanent exit permits to travel to these countries were abolished and replaced by a registration stamp in the form of a fee stamp on the first page of the passport. Exit permits for other countries ceased to take the form of a stamp in the passport and were replaced by a special insert to be used with the passport. 

Due to measures from 9 October 1969, the borders to the West were de facto closed for Czechoslovak citizens, because it was impossible to obtain an exit permit based on an invitation (except from close relatives living legally abroad), and the number of foreign currency promissaries provided by the Czechoslovak State Bank was very limited. Strict restrictions also applied to travelling to the West as part of organized tourism, i.e. through participation in a trip organized by a travel agency. Theoretically, this option could be used by every Czechoslovak citizen if there were no serious objections of a political, criminal or state-security nature against them which would allow passport and visa authorities to refuse to issue an exit permit. The practice, however, looked quite different: under business-political principles for the development of international tourism, adopted as Resolution of the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic No. 271 on 12 October 1972, it was especially forbidden to organize holidays in capitalist states shorter than a fortnight. Secondly, these holidays were only for company groups. In practice, this meant that their participants had to include at least three persons from the same factory, school or social organization, assuming, of course, that they were allowed to do so by these organizations. Why individuals were not permitted to participate in such holidays was not explained, but the underlying reason was certainly to prevent emigration, because based on the above procedure it was virtually impossible that the same holiday could be applied for by both spouses or by the whole family. Moreover, even tourist trips to Cuba, when the Czechoslovak Airlines aircraft had to land in Montreal, were considered as trips to capitalist states. The impossibility to apply for a holiday in the West individually did not affect pensioners and holidays in some developing countries (e.g. in Egypt), but only under the condition that flights to the destination did not have stopovers in any capitalist state. 

The ban also covered combined holidays in socialist and capitalist countries and transits through Yugoslavia as part of trips to Bulgaria and Romania, or through Austria as part of trips to Yugoslavia, which could be applied for by anyone. The only exception was allowed for collective tourist trips on Soviet ships in the Black Sea and in the Mediterranean, where it was allowed to disembark at ports on the Yugoslav Adriatic coast. Therapeutic holidays organized by the travel agencies Balnea and Slovaktherma could be applied for by individuals, but only if they had a recommendation from their doctor. In addition, Government Resolution No. 271/1972 reduced the possibility of travelling to the West.
stipulating that, in principle, such a trip could only be permitted once a year during holiday leave. Theoretically, foreign currency could be preferentially claimed by applicants who had not been to the capitalist states in the past three years, and internal political materials also repeatedly required that political and “class” criteria also be reflected in granting foreign currency promises to applicants. However, in 1977, the Federal Ministry of the Interior itself pointed out failure to ensure that these states are visited mainly by “ideologically firm citizens, convinced about the advantages of the socialist system”. The Federal Ministry of the Interior also “explained” the reasons for the situation: it was caused by organizations and schools that did not understand the political aspect of the issue, confirming the recommendation for the foreign currency promise, as well as the application for the issue of the exit permit, for everyone: In most cases, employers considered employees’ travelling as their private matter, and if employees have the necessary funds, employers see no reason why they should prevent them from taking such trips. The foreign currency promise was in fact a matter of downright corruption, and it was usually obtained by anyone who had contacts in the relevant position at the bank.

**EXPATRIATION**

Emigration as such – even to the so-called socialist states – was regarded as fundamentally undesirable by the Communist regime, because the state lost skilled workforce. Illegal emigration was a crime: under Section 109 (1) of the Criminal Code, any person who left the territory of the republic without permission was subject to imprisonment for 6 months to 5 years, a corrective action (i.e. a financial penalty) or forfeiture (confiscation of property). Similar punishment applied to those who went abroad legally, but did not return to the republic after the time allowed (Section 109 [2]).

The Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia sparked a new wave of emigration. From 21 to 28 August 1968, passport controls at the borders with Austria and the Federal Republic of Germany usually let people travelling abroad leave the republic without exit permits, sometimes even without any travel documents, although the situation was not the same everywhere. There were also cases of crossing the border outside border crossings, often based on passive or even active cooperation of Border Guard members who disagreed with the occupation. Whether the actual opening of the border was a result of chaos and lack of clear orders, or a purposeful activity of members of passport controls, or even the result of an internal order of the reformist Interior Minister Josef Pavel, cannot be said based on the preserved and accessible archival materials.

In connection with the signing of the so-called Moscow Protocol, which de facto legalized the occupation, control over the western border was restored at the turn of August and September. The number of emigrants, however, still remained high, because issuance of exit permits was liberal even after the occupation. Criminal proceedings under Section 109 (a) of the Criminal Code, on illegal departure from the republic, were not initiated against those who remained abroad after the expiry of their exit permits. On the contrary, embassies were given instructions to extend their exit permits in cases requiring special consideration. At the same time, however, there were the first attempts to stop the growing flow of emigrants. On 6 September 1968, the new First Secretary of the Communist Party of Slovakia Gustáv Husák made a speech at the session of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) and, referring to emigrants “hostile activities”, he demanded a drastic restriction of trips to the West and closure of the borders. He especially disliked the fact that many people held permanent exit permits to travel to capitalist states and they in fact often acted as connections between the new emigrants and the home environment. In this context, the future president delivered his oft-cited statement that the border is not a promenade. Husák was opposed by the majority of the members of the Presidium, so the proposal was not adopted straight away. However, two months later the situation looked different. The change was undoubtedly caused by dissatisfaction of the USSR with the process of normalization, which Brezhnev already stated in the negotiations in Moscow on 3 to 4 October 1968 and which was also reflected in Husák’s speech at the Presidium meeting held on the occasion of preparing the November meeting of the Central Committee of the CPC.

At the session held on 11 November 1968, the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic partially concurred with the view that it was necessary to significantly restrict movement across the borders and to toughen the stance on emigrants. Resolution No. 401 severely restricted trips abroad for the purpose of study or work, and its main objective was to prevent the free and essentially uncontrolled movement of persons with permanent exit permits across the western borders. On 12 November, the content of the resolution was embodied in joint decree of the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Foreign Affairs No. 147/1968 Coll., which came into force immediately on the date of publication, i.e. on 19 November.

After Gustáv Husák assumed office as the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPC (on 17 April 1969), the stance of the state authorities and Party bodies on emigration soon tightened. The issue of the relation to emigrants was dealt with by the Federal Government at its session on 22 May 1969. According to Resolution No. 104, those emigrants who would voluntarily return to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in three months were to be amnestied, or proper steps were to be taken in accordance with the applicable legislation. This amnesty was actually declared by President Ludvík Svoboda on 27 May and published under No. 59/1969 Coll. It related solely to the crime of illegal departure from the republic. Criminal proceedings were not to be initiated against persons.
who would return to the territory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic by 15 September 1969 or who would legalize their stay.

The amnesty failed to meet the expectations of Husák’s leadership, because only 565 of about 70,000 emigrants returned to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. For the vast majority of emigrants, the question of legalization of their stay also proved to be unrealistic, because the aforementioned resolution of the Federal Government, No. 286, of 8 October 1969 did not allow it: under Section III (c), expatriation was to only be allowed for the purpose of family reuniﬁcation (parents and minor children), marriage to a foreigner, expatriation of pensioners or in cases requiring special consideration. By the end of the 1970s, 86,534 from a total of 86,448 persons who, according to the findings of the State Security Service (StB), emigrated by 1971, were gradually sentenced. However, by penalizing illegal departure from the republic, Husák’s regime only proved its helplessness. Such persons were tried in absentia, and the judgement was therefore not enforceable. The steps against emigrants did not bring the treasury any substantial material gain in the form of confiscated property: emigrants had usually transferred it to other persons or sold it before going into exile.

Although closing the Czechoslovak borders in October 1969 reduced emigration, it did not stop it. For political reasons, travelling to Yugoslavia remained relatively unrestricted, and Yugoslavia was in the vast majority of cases an interchange station “on the way to freedom”. Unlike other Communist states, Yugoslavia did not prevent its citizens from travelling abroad or emigrating, and therefore it did not build any barriers and barbed wire fences at its borders with Austria and Italy. While other socialist states concluded multilateral agreements by which they pledged not to allow the citizens of other “brother countries” to cross their territories to the West if they did not have the necessary documents (without a Czechoslovak exit permit, Czechoslovak citizens were not allowed, for example, by the Bulgarian passport control to enter Turkey), Yugoslavia was not involved in these agreements, and its passport controls usually allowed Czechoslovak citizens – if they had a passport – to go to Austria and Italy without any problems.

THE FINAL DOCUMENT FROM HELSINKI

On 30 July 1975, the representatives of 35 states signed the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe Final Act in Helsinki. On behalf of Czechoslovakia, the act was signed by President Gustáv Husák. Article VII (8) of Part I committed all signatories to abide by the principles of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Human Rights. In the part of the agreement dealing with cooperation in humanitarian issues, the participating states committed themselves to further facilitating movement and contact between individuals and organizations. Specifically, this meant that family
reunification should be allowed, and travelling for personal and professional reasons should be facilitate-
ed.25 In 1976, with a delay of several years, Czechoslovakia formally set-
tled its obligations by ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which it acceded in 1968.26 The conclusions of the Helsinki Accords came formally into force for the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic on 23 March 1976. However, Czechoslovakia evidently did not ful-
fil its obligations that resulted from it. Primarily, the practice with regard to expatriation and freedom of movement was repeatedly criticized in the international arena, and the Helsinki Accords also began to be referred to by unsuccessful applicants for trips to the West and for expatriation. The Government addressed this issue on 26 August 1976. Under adopted Reso-
lution No. 218, Federal Interior Minis-
ter Jaromír Obzina was to submit to the Government, based on the agree-
ment with Foreign Minister Bohuslav Chňoupek, a report on the situation with travelling.

The material of the Federal Minis-
ty of the Interior, under Ref. No. SM/P-294/77, was not submitted to the Government until half a year later, on 21 March 1977.27 Coinciden-
tially, it was at a time when an oppo-
sition in the form of Charter 77 was established in Czechoslovakia, which also touched upon the freedom of travelling in its founding statement: Generally, Section 2 of Article 12 of the first covenant (i.e. on civil and human rights – author’s note) is violated, which guarantees citizens the right to freely leave their country.28 The material submitted by Obzina to the Government, however, claimed that everything was in perfect order. It only recommended amending certain provisions of Government Resolutions No. 268/1969 and No. 271/1972 as outdated. Yet the source report provided concrete figures which clearly showed that the number of trips of Czechoslovak citizens to the West was very low:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Trips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>51,659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>62,151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, these figures are mis-
leading, because they also include business trips. In 1975, for example, there were 43,395 trips at the invit-
ation of relatives, 38,998 foreign currency promise trips and 18,769 organized tourist trips. The rest was comprised of business trips. Although the number of trips was small and the selection was strict, the Federal Ministry of the Interior was not satis-
ified. It pointed out failure to ensure that these states are visited mainly by ideologically firm citizens, convinced about the advantages of the socialist system, and saw the flaw – as it did many times in the past – in employers who did not understand their respon-
sibility: Employers consider employees’ travelling as their private matter, and if employees have necessary funds, employers see no reason why they should prevent them from taking such trips. [...] The competent bodies of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, due to a large number of applicants for travel documents, cannot examine each appli-
cation in detail, and if there are no seri-
ous negative findings, they permit such trips. Expatriation is considered by the material as a fundamentally un-
desirable phenomenon, and therefore each case is considered separately.

The material states that from 1952 to 1974 a total of 71,808 applications for expatriation to capitalist states, mainly by citizens of German national-
ity, were granted. In 1974, 1,385 ap-
lications were granted and 310 were re-
jected; in 1975, 2,180 were granted and 1,397 were rejected.

The conclusion of the material of the Federal Ministry of the Interior is a mixture of cynicism, arrogance and insolence, because it states, in total contradiction with the facts, that the applicable regulation of iss-
ance of travel documents meets the commitments assumed by the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic by acceding to international treaties, as stated, for example, in connection with the ratifi-
cation of the International Covenant on Human Rights. The result of the source material of the Federal Minis-
try of the Interior was then discussed with Deputy Prime Minister Rudolf Rohlicek and it became the basis of Government Resolution No. 151 of 26 May 1977.29 The approved mate-
rial did not comply with the commit-
ments from Helsinki at all, and defini-
te not with the Covenant on Human Rights. In principle, it only repeated the principles contained in Government Resolution No. 271/1972, with only a slight easing in the fact that at the invitation of closest relatives both spouses could henceforth travel simultaneously and that it allowed private trips for medical purposes (with the approval of the Ministry of Health of the Czech or Slovak Republic), as well as the so-
called collection trips (trips in order to execute heritage, financial claims, etc.), trips associated with testimony at a foreign court (but only after the approval of the Ministry of Justice of one of the republics) and trips to meetings of international organiza-
tions of which the citizen – naturally, with the approval of the Czechoslovak authorities – was a member. Pen-
sioners were allowed to take more trips a year and for an unlimited time, which had been, however, enabled by Government Decree No. 216 of 26 Au-
 gust of the previous year.

The issue of travelling returned to the agenda on 8 November 1979, when the Federal Government dis-
cussed the change in political princi-
uples for controlling “foreign tourism” and, in some details, it liberalized its directives of 1972 with regard to orga-
nized tourism. The reasons were mainly economic: travel agencies had criticized the restriction under which only organized groups could partici-
pate in holidays, because it was often impossible to fill the holiday capac-
ity. Similarly, the prohibition of stop-
overs in capitalist states during trips to developing countries was problem-
atic: stopovers in “capitalist coun-	ries” were part of regular schedules of Czechoslovak Airlines, which was not willing to change them. Travel agencies did not organize so many holidays to be able to afford to order chartered flights from Czechoslovak Airlines. In addition, stopovers were generally needed for refuelling (e.g.
behind the iron curtain

in Montreal during trips to Cuba). Therefore, the new business and po-

tical principles only abolished holi-
days for company groups, and hence-
forth every individual could apply

for them. Stopovers and combined

holidays in socialist and capitalist
countries were also permitted (e.g.
holidays in Bulgaria with a trip to

Turkey, or holidays in the USSR with

a trip to Finland). During organized

holidays in Bulgaria and Romania, it

was possible to transit through Yugo-

slavia, but the ban on transit through

Austria when travelling to the SFR

Yugoslavia remained in force. Private

trips could, in exceptional cases, also

take place on the basis of citizens’
own foreign currency accounts if the
administration for property and for-
eign currency matters at the Czecho-
lovak State Bank allowed establish-
ment of a foreign currency account
(until 1987, establishment of foreign

currency accounts was usually not

allowed). On the other hand, it was

necessary to tighten the allocation
procedure of foreign currency conduct-
ed by the Czechoslovak State Bank by
applying the principles of the class-po-

tical approach.30

The issue of expatriation was not
discussed by the Party and Govern-
ment bodies in connection with the

Helsinki Accords separately, but the

finding that emigration would be a
permanent phenomenon eventually
led to a modification of the approach.

By Resolution of the Government of
the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic
No. 58 of 10 March 1977, directives
were adopted on the regulation of
legal relations of the Czechoslovak
Socialist Republic to citizens resid-
ing abroad without permission of
the Czechoslovak authorities.32 Their

essence consisted in the fact that if
Czechoslovak citizens lived abroad
for at least five years, they could ap-

ply for a modification of their legal

status. The condition was that they

were not involved in any political ac-
tions against the Communist regime,
or - to use the contemporary lan-
guage - “did not commit any offence
against the republic”. There were
basically three options to regulate
the legal relation: applicants could
return to Czechoslovakia, they could
apply for subsequent expatriation
or they could be released, at their

own request, from the Czechoslovak
state-citizen bond. The first option
was only used by a minimum number
of people, which could be expected
after the experience with the am-
nesties from 1969 and 1973. If a citi-
zen used the option of subsequent
expatriation, they received a valid
Czechoslovak passport indicating
that they permanently lived abroad.

If an emigrant renounced citizenship,
they were subject to visa regulations
applying to nationals of the country
whose citizenship they acquired.

The Czechoslovak citizenship of people
who were involved in actions against
the Czechoslovak regime was to be
withdrawn by administrative means.
Entry of such persons to the Czecho-
lovak territory was forbidden, re-
regardless of their citizenship of any other country, and even visits by their relatives from the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic were not permitted. The above directives applied in principle until the fall of the Communist regime. Only the provision on visits of emigrants was partially mitigated in 1980 by Government Resolution No. 340 of 23 October. Probably in connection with this, some older applications for pardon lodged in previous years were subsequently granted.

If an emigrant agreed with “regulation of relations”, the procedure was as follows: if they had been convicted for illegal departure from the republic in absentia or if criminal proceedings had been initiated against them in this case and none of the earlier amnesties applied to them, they first had to file a petition for pardon with the President of the Republic. If it was not willing to act as serfs buying freedom, they planned for forgiveness. For a considerable number of emigrants, the required amounts were too high, because after the inclusion of any additional charges for a passport or copies of documents, the sums exceeded USD 2,000. However, a large proportion of emigrants refused to pay any charges for expatriation, because they were not willing to act as serfs buying freedom. Such people preferred to accept the fact that they would have to stay abroad until the end of their life and would not see their homeland again.

According to the overview prepared by the Ministry of the Interior in early 1988, in connection with considerations on amending Section 109, a total of 172,655 people emigrated from Czechoslovakia from 1945 to 1987, including 25,350 in the period 1948–1951 and 70,130 in the period 1968–1969. After that the annual number of emigrants was around 5,000. In total, 47,025 people had their legal relations with Czechoslovakia regulated over the period of ten years (1977–1987). A total of 25,967 petitions for pardon were filed in this period, of which about 80% were granted, and the others were mostly rejected on the grounds that the applicant had not resided in a foreign country for five years, as required by the Government Resolution from 1977. The table shows the annual figures.

By contrast, emigration of ethnic Germans to the Federal Republic of Germany displayed a different development. On 11 December 1973, a treaty on normalization of relations between Czechoslovakia and the Federal Republic of Germany was signed in Prague. The treaty was accompanied by a letter of the Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs Walter Schell to his Czechoslovak counterpart, Bohuslav Chňoupek, stating agreement of both parties on the fact that in accordance with the laws and regulations in force in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, the relevant Czechoslovak authorities will be benevolent in considering any applications of Czechoslovak citizens who on the basis of their German nationality wish to emigrate to the Federal Republic of Germany. Furthermore, the letter stated that an agreement had been reached on the fact that the implementation of expatriation may be supervised by the German Red Cross. Chňoupek notified the letter, by which he agreed with the outcome of the negotiations on behalf of the Czechoslovak party.

The signed treaty was subject to ratification, and therefore it did not come into force until 19 July 1974.

The issue of expatriation of the rest of the Czech and Slovak Germans became part of the document “The Principles of the Long-Term Concept of Normalization of Relations Between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Federal Republic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of persons who emigrated illegally</th>
<th>Convicted under Section 109 of the Criminal Code</th>
<th>Number of petitions for pardon received</th>
<th>Number of petitions for pardon processed</th>
<th>Number of pardons granted</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>1,357</td>
<td>1,156</td>
<td>914</td>
<td>83.1</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>1,855</td>
<td>1,861</td>
<td>1,183</td>
<td>1,003</td>
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<td>4,137</td>
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<td>7,144</td>
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<td>1,889</td>
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<td>2,554</td>
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<td>1986</td>
<td>4,696</td>
<td>3,875</td>
<td>2,470</td>
<td>2,073</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>5,061</td>
<td>3,599</td>
<td>2,991</td>
<td>2,399</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of Germany”, which was discussed on 2 May 1974 by the Presidium of the Federal Government and on 24 May by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPC. As a rule, applications of Czechoslovak citizens of German nationality at retirement age and of persons close to this age, as well as applications for family reunification, were to be granted. In other cases, each application was to be considered separately, taking into account economic, political and security factors, especially in young mixed marriages. The above clearly shows that although the treaty did not even come into force, the Czechoslovak party already issued directives that circumvented, if not violated, its performance (in terms of expatriation of German nationals). It is not surprising that the procedure of Czechoslovak passport authorities soon became the target of criticism of the Czechoslovak Germans and their family members whose expatriation was refused. They then turned to the German Red Cross, which repeatedly interceded with the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs. What then became the subject of dispute was the interpretation of the text of Schell’s humanitarian letter. German authorities emphasized the promise that applications would be considered benevolently, which in their interpretation meant that expatriation would be allowed to anyone who applied for it, unless there was a truly serious obstacle. On the contrary, the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed the words “in accordance with the laws and regulations in force in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic”, which in practice meant that applications would be considered under the directives based on Government Resolution No. 266/1969 of 8 October 1969, on permitting trips abroad and expatriation, which in fact were strictly confidential and which were not known to the general public at all.

It was only in connection with the Final Act that the whole issue of expatriation of members of the German minority was included again in the agenda of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPC on 19 December 1975. As a basis for further decisions, a special report of the Federal Ministry of the Interior entitled “The Analysis and Proposal of Further Procedure of Permitting Expatriation of Czechoslovak Citizens of German Nationality to the FRG” was to be used. The report first presents several figures. In the period 1955–1974, expatriation of 78,909 citizens was permitted, of which a total of 64,000 expatriated to the FRG. Most people expatriated in the period 1963–1971, when applications of citizens of German nationality were considered benevolently, due to the resolutions of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPC of 6 May 1963 and of 22 February 1966. The subsequent procedure was strict, in accordance with Government Resolution No. 266/1969. The actual numbers of cases of permitted expatriation are given in the table. The report on expatriation of September 1975 states that a total of 258 applications for expatriation by Czechoslovak citizens were received, of which 122 to the FRG. A total of 213 applications were granted, of which one third to the FRG, and 66 applications of Czechoslovak citizens were rejected, of which 57 to the FRG. The applications were rejected mainly due to the fact that their objective was not family reunification. In September 1975, 35 citizens of German nationality were allowed to expatriate to the FRG, and from 1 January 1975 a total of 247 citizens of German nationality. In the same year, the passport authorities rejected a total of 27 applications of citizens of German nationality for expatriation to the FRG, especially due to mixed marriages of working age. In September 1975, a subsequent expatriation of 19 persons who had filed applications in the period 1973–1974 was granted. As of 30 September 1975, the passport authorities considered 675 applications for subsequent permission for expatriation filed in the period 1973–1974 and 1,146 applications filed from the beginning of 1975. The report finally stated that a number of potential applicants only registered with the German Red Cross, where they just came for...
information on the conditions and possibilities of expatriation, without filing an application afterwards. This – in the opinion of the Ministry of the Interior – leads to a significant distortion, because the German party, as the Ministry believed, automatically included the persons in the number of those whose expatriation was not permitted. Finally, the report noted that it was not necessary to change anything about the existing approach to the entire issue. In addition, for cases of permitted expatriation, the Ministry of the Interior recommended maximum shortening of the period after which an expatriate may still stay in Czechoslovakia. This requirement was justified by the fact that expatriates had a negative effect on other people around them. Therefore, the period for arrangement of personal matters before emigrating should, if possible, be limited to two months. Generally, this was not a problem when emigrants simultaneously applied for release from the state-citizen bond, because if their applications were granted, such emigrants automatically became foreigners and could therefore be expatriated after the specified period. What was worse (from the perspective of the Ministry of the Interior) was a situation where an emigrant kept their Czechoslovak citizenship, so expatriation was out of the question. In such cases, the Ministry of the Interior recommended that a period of time (usually two months again) be determined during which the permission for expatriation was valid. If the applicant did not leave the territory of Czechoslovakia within this period, the expatriation passport expired. That implied that if such a citizen still wanted to expatriate, they had to file a new application. However, the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPC did not hold the view that it was not necessary to change anything about the current circumstances. The matter undoubtedly had an international dimension, and pressure from Germany could not be ignored after Helsinki. The resolution of 19 December 1975 ordered the Federal Interior Minister Jaroslav Obzina to ensure that all applications for expatriation filed by German nationals should be considered by the Interior Ministry officials benevolently. Rejected applications were to be referred to a special committee composed of representatives of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of International Politics of the Central Committee of the CPC and the Czechoslovak Red Cross. This committee made final decisions on applications. Moreover, rejected applications from the period of 1974–1975 were to be considered again.

On the other hand, the role of the Final Act in emigration of political opponents of the regime is very unclear. Unlike ordinary citizens, emigration of political opponents was supported. In many cases, the opposition activists were even forced by the system of bullying and police repressions to file an application for expatriation, as evidenced by the well-known StB operation codenamed “Clearance” (Asanace). Expatriation of political opponents was carried out with the clear intention of the state to get rid of and for all of undesirable persons who should be prevented from returning to Czechoslovakia in the future. Therefore, if expatriates themselves did not apply for release from citizenship, they were usually sooner or later deprived of citizenship by the Ministry of the Interior.6 I was unable to find any directive or document relating to forcing citizens to emigrate in the former archives of the Central Committee of the CPC. The entire matter was obviously the responsibility of the Federal Ministry of the Interior. Furthermore, it was not possible to find the number of “voluntary” political emigrants, but it apparently ranged in the hundreds.8 This issue would require specific, detailed archival research.

CONCLUSION

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe Final Act had a minimum impact on the possibilities of Czechoslovak citizens to travel abroad or to expatriate. The regime did not meet and did not intend to meet the adopted commitments, and if it performed minor corrections of its passport and expatriation policy, it was only because it deemed such steps appropriate in a particular situation. The only positive change was related to the approval of the emigration of members of the German minority, but it should be borne in mind that this was due to the constant pressure of the Federal Republic of Germany. However, it was important that the Communist leadership had to deal with the problem. Non-compliance with commitments relating to the right to freely travel abroad and the right to expatriation created the possibility to criticize the regime and thus also the possibility to undermine the Communist system.

NOTES

5 Travel annexes to ID cards continued to be issued for short tourist trips to the CMEA countries.


The system worked as follows: the exit permit consisted of two cards marked as part A and part B, which contained identical information, and the stamp of the passports and visas authority that issued the permit. The passport control official stamped and took part A upon the exit, returning the stamped part B to the person travelling abroad. The person then had to produce this stamped part for the passport control of the CMEA states if they travelled through these states to the West or to Yugoslavia, otherwise they were not, based on a bilateral agreement, allowed to cross the border. Upon return to Czechoslovakia, part B of the exit permit was taken by the passport control at the border. The cards later allowed computer processing and were therefore used to provide an overview of who was abroad and whether they returned properly and on time. Exit permits were distinguished on the top edge by a horizontal coloured stripe: exit permits for private trips had a green stripe and, for tourist trips with collective tours, they had a “tourism” stamp (such an exit permit could not be used to travel individually). One-time exit permits for business purposes had a blue stripe. In principle, they were to be only issued for business passports and passport for business purposes, but they could also be issued for private passports. Permanent exit permits had a yellow stripe. They were issued solely for business purposes, usually for one year. Persons travelling abroad based on permanent exit permits had to produce part B in the second and every other trip to the passport control, but the company that applied for a permanent exit permit had to issue a double accompanying document also having part A and part B, which were handed over upon departure and return.

Under Section 3 (2) of Decree of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior No. 44/1970 Coll., it was expressly


Similarly, dinar foreign currency promises were issued for trips to Yugoslavia, although there were some differences. The Yugoslav new dinar (YND) was not fully convertible, and allocations of this currency came from clearing of mutual payments. Due to the fact that there was a balance in favour of Czechoslovakia in these payments, the Czechoslovak State Bank used sale of dinars to offset the amount owed by Yugoslavia to Czechoslovakia. Therefore, there were significantly more dinars available, and obtaining a foreign currency promise to travel to Yugoslavia was much easier. In addition, for political reasons, reliefs were established, and it was not usually necessary to obtain the approval of the employer, school or national committee for applications for a dinar foreign currency promise. Also, the foreign exchange margin was lower, usually 75%. For applications for an exit permit to travel to Yugoslavia, a criminal record certificate was not required later (unlike for trips to capitalist states).


Under Section 3 (o) of Decree of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior No. 44/1970 Coll., it was expressly stipulated that the information in the exit permit shall be decisive for use of a passport to travel abroad and to stay abroad. Section 15 (2) then gave the passport control authorities and consular offices the right to withhold a travel document. This was a new feature of normalization, and both of these “innovations” were directed against emigrants, whether real or potential. Based on this provision, under Section 109 (2) of the Criminal Code, the offence of illegal departure from the republic was committed by citizens not upon expiry of their passport (passports were issued for five years and remained in the possession of their holders throughout this period), but upon expiry of their exit permit. Moreover, if someone legally travelled abroad and then visited a country for which their exit permit did not apply, such a person committed no less than an offence. If there was any suspicion that the citizen intended to emigrate, they could have their passport and exit permit taken away right at the border, which happened in particular if the customs control official found a university diploma, an apprenticeship certificate or a school report. Persons who were abroad and applied for an extension of their exit permit at the Czechoslovak consulate risked a situation where their passport would be taken away and they would find themselves abroad without documents (which apparently, in the Interior Ministry’s view, was to force them to return to Czechoslovakia).

Under pressure from Moscow, Josef Pavel had to resign in late August and was replaced by Jan Pelnář, the previous chairman of the

West Bohemian Regional National Committee. We must realize, however, that the Border Guard was subordinated to the Ministry of National Defence in the period from 1968 to 1972.


The Collection of Laws of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Chapter 42 of 15 November 1968, 410. The decree introduced so-called border crossing cards, i.e. special forms where persons travelling abroad had to fill in their personal details, visited states and length of stay. Border crossing cards were handed over to passport control officials upon departure and upon return, and on that basis it was possible to rather quickly see in the central records who was currently residing abroad and for how long. Exit permits were only valid if they contained information as to which states, for how long and how many trips they could be used. Those that did not include the above information (i.e. permanent exit permits for trips to the West) lost validity. If the holder of such an exit permit was residing abroad on the date when the decree came into force, their exit permit became a one-time permit, i.e. upon return to Czechoslovakia they could no longer travel abroad without a new special permit.


Ibid., 28.

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Czechoslovak authorities tackled this problem in the 1980s by issuing special passports valid only for Yugoslavia. They used Article 3 of the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav agreement on abolition of visa obligation and facilitation of mutual tourism of 8 October 1964, according to which the parties to the agreement could introduce, apart from regular passports, other travel documents valid only to travel to the other state – see the agreement in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (AMFACR),ftenavia, microfilms of contracts, sign. [call number] 3779, microfilm No. 0159/80. The Yugoslav passport control did not allow holders of these special documents to go to the West. The passports had the overprint “valid only for the territory of the SFR” on page 1; special coloured passports were issued later (they were grey, while normal passports were green). However, the Yugoslav border was quite easily crossable even after that, and therefore the measure did not restrict emigration significantly.


The directives were published in the Central Journal, Chapter 4 of 1 July 1977.

Central Journal, Chapter 1 of 15 May 1981.

Under the decree of the Ministry of Finance on administrative charges of 20 December 1976, the fee for a residence permit abroad amounted to up to 10,000 Czechoslovak crowns, which at that time was definitely not a small sum, especially if we consider that the applicant had to pay the full amount when converted to the strongly overvalued currency, according to the official exchange rate (the fee was collected in Czechoslovak crowns only from those whose expatriation from Czechoslovakia was legally authorized). Cf. Decree No. 112/1976 Coll., Annex B, point 11. The Collection of Laws of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Chapter 32 of 24 December 1976, 812.

NA, f. Central Committee of the CPC, 66th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPC, 15 April 1968, č. j. [reference number] P 4565, point 3 – source material (annex). The proposal assumed decriminalization of illegal departure from the republic, which was to be considered only as an offence punishable by a fine of up to 20,000 Czechoslovak crowns in administrative proceedings. All emigrants, if they were not involved politically, were to be amnestied, and the already pronounced sentences were to be expunged under the current wording of Section 109 (1) and (2). Criminal prosecution only applied to organized people smuggling or coercion of illegal crossing of the border by violence or threat of violence. This amendment of Section 109 was finally not implemented until the November “Velvet Revolution” in 1989.


The letter was published as an annex to the text of the treaty – see The Collection of Laws of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Chapter 94 of 18 October 1974, 319. It can be mentioned as a certain curiosity that the FRG simultaneously undertook to be benevolent, in accordance with its legal regulations, in considering applications of FRG citizens of Czech and Slovak nationality for expatriation to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, and agreed that this should be supervised by the Czechoslovak Red Cross. It was probably a formal reciprocity embodied in a letter to the Czechoslovak request which, however, had no practical significance. First, there were no Czechs or Slovaks in the FRG (of course, except emigrants who did not desire to move to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic) and, second, the federal laws did not prevent any German citizen from moving anywhere, anytime.

NA, f. Central Committee of the CPC, 22/1, sv. 120, a. j. 120, 11th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPC, point 4.

Ibid., sv. 179, a. j. 181, P 11657, 17th meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPC, point 5.

Ibid., annex to č. j. SM/P-022a/75.

From 1969, granting and deprivation of citizenship were among the competences of the Ministries of the Interior of the two republics, because every Czechoslovak citizen had to be first a citizen of the Czech Republic or Slovak Republic. The Ministry of the Interior of the relevant republic could deprive a citizen of citizenship of the relevant republic if the citizen carried out hostile activity against the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Deprivation of citizenship automatically resulted in the loss of citizenship of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (Act of the Slovak National Council No. 206/1988 Coll., Act of the Czech National Council No. 35/1969 Coll., as amended). It is worth mentioning that the Czechoslovak Government continued to recognize the validity of the pre-war treaty between the Czechoslovak Republic and the United States of America on avoidance of dual citizenship. This meant that if a Czechoslovak citizen gained US citizenship, they automatically lost their Czechoslovak citizenship and thus also the citizenship of the Czech or Slovak Republic.

At the conference organized by the Warsaw University on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Gdansk Accords (31 August 1980) and the establishment of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity” (Warsaw, 20–21 June 2005), the former spokesman for Charter 77 Petruška Šustrová said that at least a hundred people had signed the Charter only to obtain permission from the police to emigrate from Czechoslovakia.
A passport and customs control at one of the Czechoslovak border crossings, a necessary ritual during each trip abroad.

Photo: Czech News Agency / Jiří Krulíš
Egon Bondy, Ivan M. Jirous
and Vratislav Brabenec, mid 1970s
Photo: Jaroslav Kukal
Underground and “under-the-ground”

The standpoints of the underground community in Czech society in the 1970s and 1980s and the specific values of the underground culture

The terms “underground” and “under-the-ground” have not been clearly defined in Czech culture so far. Traditionally, “underground” comprises the community which emerged in the early 1970s around the rock band The Plastic People of the Universe. This community, which later became part of the Czech dissent and to a great extent merged with the community around Charter 77, was composed of poets, musicians, artists as well as philosophers, essayists and samizdat publishers of various focus and political orientation.

MARTIN MACHOVEC

Let’s start with a few quotes linked to the question of what is and what is not “underground” in Czech, or also even world culture, and what misunderstanding may arise and prevail with regard to this term, with all its historical, literary and, in the broad sense, cultural connotations.

The first comes from I. M. Jirouš’s memoir Pravdivý příběh Plastic People (The True Story of the Plastic People). There is a rather humorous passage in which the author remembers how, in the early 70s, he tried to explain to the less bright members of the Plastic People the difference between “psychedelic” and “underground” music: I explained to them that psychedelic music is a matter of an artistic genre or style whereas underground is a spiritual attitude. As an example I named Lennon and The Beatles, who was underground, although The Beatles cannot be considered an underground band. Stefaník simplified this into the rule “underground is without fires”, which we later often quoted in our group.

The catchphrase “underground is without fires” was later used by Milan Hlavsa and Jan Pelc as a title of the publication of their interview about the fate of the Plastic People and the establishment and development of the Czech underground as such. The next quote is a statement which was made in a debate following another English lecture by the author at a textology conference at the University of Seattle in October 1997. After the author suggested a certain parallel between the early stage of the Czech underground culture, represented in the early 1950s primarily by Egon Bondy and other authors around the samizdat Edice Půlnoc, and the beginnings of the literature of the Beat Generation, in particular with respect to poems by Allen Ginsberg from the same period, Prof. David Greetham (City University of New York Graduate Center) made an authoritative comment saying Ginsberg is no underground, which had such a disarming effect on the lecturer that any potential polemics rather faded away.

The misunderstandings concerning what is and what is not underground primarily stem from the ambiguous meaning of the term, naturally with respect to its figural, metaphorical meaning. In the Anglo-American cultural sphere, the term “underground” will mostly refer to unofficial cultural events, or to publishing of texts using one’s own means, without any institutional backing, i.e. something quite similar to the samizdat in the former Soviet Bloc. In the field of popular music it originally, i.e. most likely already at the turn of the 50s and 60s, applied to deliberately non-commercial trends as an opposition to the requirements of show business, against the entertaining pop music that was popular with the consumerist society. And it is also very well known that in the latter meaning of the word this Anglicism made its way into the Czech culture in the late 1960s where it was confronted with its Czech equivalent, “podzemí” (translated as “under-the-ground” for the purpose of this text – translator’s note), which, however, does not have an identical meaning as the Czech word “podzemí” does not directly refer to the absolutely concrete “counter-cultural” sphere of the Anglo-American culture. And this very non-identity of the meaning
logically implies numerous misunderstandings, not only in English-Czech translations but also in attempted interpretations. For instance, how to explain in English that the university professors Jan Patočka and Václav Černý, after they had been forbidden to work in their respective university departments in the early 1970s, were still able to work "unofficially", in a "hidden" way, that is, in fact "under-the-ground" (though, probably not really illegally), but definitely did not belong to the "underground"? Professor Černý's sharp criticisms of the Czech cultural "underground" (or, better to say of what he himself understood under the name, as it is quite clear from his texts that he knew very little about what this term really referred to; however, this is rather irrelevant in the given context) show that he was well aware of the difference between the words "podzemí" and "underground" in the Czech language. Let's admit that the criticisms raised by Václav Černý, forgetting for the time being that his concept was faulty, were also partly true. If the intolerance of the totalitarian regimes chased intellectuals, scholars, leading minds away "under the ground", that did not mean they had to share aesthetic, ideological and value preferences with the audience of the underground, which indeed originally drew on the values of the cultural revolution initiated by the rock music sphere in the 1960s; a revolution which also radically transformed the entire lifestyle of those who were young in the 1960s. Naturally, this cultural revolution first started in the West, but soon it also arrived behind the iron curtain – to the great displeasure of the Soviet Kulturträger. So at the beginning of the 1960s a majority of the young people in the West (including also the absurd "Soviet Bloc", which became the "East" only in the wake of the bipolar political arrangement of the then world although a bigger part of it has always belonged to the "West" in terms of culture) went through a radical reassessment of values – while in most part this was not only due to the negation of values which had been "dominant" by then. And as we all know, it was the representatives of the anti-commercial "underground rock" who were most radical in this reassessment.

But where were the dismissed Czech university professors and where were the admirers of the music played by bands like The Velvet Underground, The Fugs, The Mothers of Invention, or Captain Beefheart's Magic Band?!

And still, the culture community of the Czech intellectuals forced to go "under the ground" and the Czech rockers living "underground" had a lot in common. The Czech underground oriented itself mainly to the revolt of American rock, the hippy movement, including the relatively popular communitarian way of life, in a broader perspective also to protest songs, the liberalism of the representatives of the rebellions at US universities in the 1960s, to the Afro-American culture and also the poetics of the Beat Generation. The cultural community of the Czech underground was also much inspired by, for instance, so-called poètes maudits, both French and Czech, existentialists like Boris Vian, anarchists, decadents and various intellectual solitary figures and "outcasts": the cultural genealogy of the Czech underground should also include František Gellner, Arthur Breisky, Jakub Deml, Ladislav Klima and even Karel Hynek Mácha, later also Bohumil Hrabal and his "tender barbarians" of the early 1950s.

And it is also well known that this curious cultural hybrid, which the Czech underground culture of the 1970s and 1980s surely was, was shaped based on a certain affiliation or even co-existence of a number of intellectuals and artists with the rock "primitives". In this respect, the role of Ivan Martin Jirous is absolutely unique. At the same time, though, the cultural values of the Czech underground of the 1970s were also largely affected by Jiří Němec, Egon Bondy, and last but not least, Václav Havel – the latter maybe "only" by being able to mediate these values to people from other unofficial groupings, by being able to rouse interest in them and in this way providing the underground poets, musicians and artists with a certain amount of feedback.

On the other hand, it must be said that the rocker rebels did indeed differ, even in their "underground edition" from their predecessors "under the ground". This difference lay in the fact that the core of the community was formed of people with no formal education, often with no high-school diplomas, let alone university degrees, and that the "rock'n'roll revolution" was a "revolt of the barbarians", no longer very tender or holy, rather than being a result of some intellectual, ideological-aesthetic discourse. These rocker "primitives" also formed the core of the Czech underground community, at least in the early half of the 1970s when it crystallized, was formed and slowly started to realize its own existence as a community sui generis. And it was these people who gave it the energy and who were the bearers of the underground ethos.

The abovementioned, however, only seemingly contradicts Jirous's definition of the underground as a result of a certain spiritual approach to life because such an approach might have been shared without reflection, wordlessly, spontaneously: matters of artistic orientation, expression, specific preferences were marginal – this can be demonstrated, for instance, by the diversity not only of the underground music of the period (musical experiments close to minimalism and concrete music of Zajíček and the DG 307 band, the art rock with touches of free-jazz by The Plastic People, or simple musical "traditional" of Karásek, to give just a few examples), but also of the underground literature (see, for instance, the first four underground anthologies from the mid-1970s, which shall be discussed later on).

Defining the underground in this way may also help establish a demarcation line between, firstly, this specific Czech community and the communities "under the ground", which held similarly negative views of the majority society anywhere and anytime in history (regardless also of whether this was or was not under totalitarian regimes), and secondly, between the underground community and those who simply went with
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the flow, for whom underground was a fashionable thing in a sense that it was “in” to be “anti”.

The Czech underground, thus, cannot be simply reduced to primitive rock music. Two more delimitations are needed in this respect.

A/ It is a fact that the Czech underground community consisted, primarily at the beginning, mostly of rock musicians and their friends – that is, originally the fans of The Plastic People of the Universe and before that of The Primitives Group and Knížák’s Aktual – and that it was thanks to this community and its “rockers’ revolt” that underground proved to be unusually and unexpectedly resistant in the following years. However, very soon different artists and intellectuals that later significantly enriched the Czech underground culture started to exercise their influence over the community. We can claim that the new quality, which was an attribute of the Czech underground culture, emerged as a result of the extraordinary cooperation of the “rock primitives” on the one hand and the artists and intellectuals on the other. This was quite a unique phenomenon and not only in Czechoslovakia of that time – the worlds of the dissident intellectuals and of the rock “long-haired freaks” usually did not blend. In this way, the underground gradually ceased to be just a showcase of some sort of a provocative (pseudo)art, or this or that music trend, but under the pressure of the totalitarian regime it started to also absorb impulses from previously alien domains. In the context of the upcoming “normalization era” with its idiotic intolerance and effort to sooner or later criminalize all that was beyond its control, and which at the same time from the early 1970s seemed like a permanent, constant phenomenon, the Czech underground community was first marginalized in society and later the normalization regime strived to make its future existence altogether impossible. On the other hand, though, mainly under the influence of I. M. Jirous and E. Bondy, the group started to perceive itself as an alternative community and a cultural scene, as an underground both “an sich” and “für sich”, not just a “counter-culture” of a kind but as a “second culture” that aims to be fully independent of the “first culture”, which was continuously and systematically brought to uniform by the totalitarian regime.

However, we also need to note that such radical, even extremist ambitions could not in fact be accomplished, particularly after the Czech underground community was partly (never wholly) incorporated into the wider collective of Charter 77 in the year 1977, the main “regulation” of
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Chapter 77, as is well known, was to open a discussion “with the power” on a strictly legal platform. B/ The spiritual attitude and values of the Czech underground (primarily those which were typical for the ambition to create a truly independent “second culture”) also need to be contrasted against various sectarian, millenarian religious opinions and attitudes which may show certain similarities when compared cursorily, primarily when we realize how varied the sectarian movement is in the period of the so-called New Age.

When studied from the psychological perspective, the attitudes held by the Czech underground might be seen as some sort of a panic, an escapist solution when brought face-to-face with the incomprehensibility and extensive complexity of the so-called modern technical civilization, a side effect of which – at least in the Christian world – is also mass secularization.

Perhaps we could also agree with certain similarities detected between the underground culture and some negativist sectarian cults, at least in the way they renounce the “evil world” and deliberately resort to living in a “parallel” or even “illegal” world. More similarities can be found concerning the presence of the chiliast, nihilist, self-destructive attitudes – as a manifestation of the deepest resignation to publicly combat the horrors of today’s world.

I must repeat that these similarities are merely external and that on the inside the Czech underground community was structured in a distinctly different manner. For one, it totally lacked an indispensable charismatic religious leader and a structure of strict subordination, there was no analogy to the “chosen ones” who would allegedly survive the upcoming apocalypse. And last but not least, as a rule, sectarian fanatics are not interested in art, literature and music: all this is part of the “sinful world” which is doomed.

In order to underline the difference, allow me one more parallel. On the one hand, there is a certain similarity between the radicalism of the Czech underground and the original leftist radicalism of the anarchists, or leftist aspirations which have not yet been deformed by being incorporated into political structures; on the other hand, there is a similarity between the different militant sectarian religious cults with extreme-right movements. Also here we must not be misguided by the potential identical exterior traits. The original, genuine left pursued goals which were totally different from those of the extreme right – and that is also why it has never succeeded in achieving them.

Thus, the radical attitudes of such an internally diversified community as was the Czech underground in the 1970s can be appreciated and adequately interpreted only bearing in mind the period when the community was established and existed. And only then can we truly understand how special it was among the different contemporary, and to a certain extent similar movements, labelled as “counter-cultural”, “anti-commercial”, “alternative” in the West or “dissident” and “parallel” in Czechoslovakia of that time. It was a specific mixture of radicalized rock revolt of the 1960s, the avant-garde, experimental art schools of the period including performances, happenings, land art and of course also pop art, together with residues of freethinking intellectual fermentation in Czechoslovakia in those years.

The underground in the 1970s was also strongly influenced by the literary work of Egon Bondy, which he had been creating “under the ground” since the late 1940s, and was open to both Christians and Marxists (of a purely anti-partisan, anti-Soviet breed); the underground was a safe haven for feminists and environmentalists, pacifists and admirers of the US Army, rock’n’roll and folk musicians, teetotallers and junkies, artists and experimental poets, samizdat publishers, followers of oriental religions and philosophies – and from time to time, naturally, StB agents could also be encountered there. When, after a few years, the underground community to a certain extent merged with the Charter 77 movement (which inadvertently proves the absurdity of any potential suspicion that the community had inclinations towards some sort of a sectarian quietism), it also started to be influenced by Václav Havel, primarily by his concepts of “non-political politics” and the “power of the powerless” (although a possibility also exists that Havel was in his concepts influenced by his intense interest in the culture of the underground). It was a pluralistic community, open and striving to maintain and further develop the unalienated, authentic values, both generally human and artistic, under extremely unfavourable conditions in a country where a totalitarian regime was reinstated, which in fact continued in the Stalinist tradition.

Twenty years of existence of this specifically Czechoslovak community, which can justifiably be called the underground, introduced examples of almost all cultural and artistic trends specific to the alternative culture in the Western world of the period – and maybe sometimes generated some extras, something which was totally unique.

The main phases of its development and the leading ideas of the underground prior to its becoming part of the Charter 77 community were best summarized by I. M. Jírovs and Egon Bondy. At the end of his “manifesto” Zpráva o třetím českom hudebním obrození (The Report on the Third Czech Musical Revival) he says, among other things:

The word underground has been used many times and the term second culture at least twice. To conclude, we should clarify what it refers to. The underground is not linked to any specific artistic movement or style although, for instance, in music it is mostly represented by rock music. The underground is a spiritual position held by intellectuals and artists who intentionally take up a critical stance towards the world they are living in. It is a declaration of war to the establishment, the existing political system. It is a movement which works primarily through artistic means but whose representatives realize that art is not and should not be the ultimate goal of artistic efforts. And a few lines below: It is a common and sad thing in the West, where the underground was theoretically formed
and established as a movement in the early 1960s, that some artists after they had achieved acclaim and fame through it entered into contact with the official culture (we shall call it first culture for our needs), which gleefully accepted them and absorbed them like it absorbs new car bodies, new fashion or anything else. Here things are fundamentally different, much better than in the West (highlighted by the author of this article) because we live in an atmosphere of total agreement: the first culture does not want us and we do not wish to have anything to do with the first culture. In this way there is no temptation, which for every artist is a seed of doom: the desire for acclaim, success, awards and titles and, last but not least, material wellbeing which ensues from all of the above. While in the West a lot of people who we might befriend here based on their thinking are living in confusion, here things have been clearly delimited for once and for all. Nothing that we do can be to the liking of the representatives of the official culture because it cannot be used to create the illusion that all is in order. To be sure, things are not in order.

Of course, we do not have to agree with Ivan Martin Jirous that “here”, that is, in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s, things were “much better than in the West” but he was right when he compared the (pseudo)values of the established societies on both sides of the Iron Curtain to the spiritual climate of the Czech underground “ghetto” of those years, which was undoubtedly much sounder than the spiritual climate of the majority societies. This community can be a model of the underground resistance, both for its radical ambition, at least for some time, to create a culture truly independent of the pseudo-culture of the totalitarian regime, without any compromises, and for the surprising variety of artistic and literary activities which emerged from this environment.

The latter of the two characteristics, the variety of the artistic activities, resulted from the former. Following the pressure of intolerance of the Czechoslovak “normalization” regime, people were driven to the underground “ghetto” who were often creative and who, under so-called normal circumstances, would be unlikely to encounter each other – and would probably have no reason to communicate with each other. In this respect, we can paradoxically thank the regime of President Husák as it unintentionally became the co-author of the social and cultural variety of the Czech underground (it is clear that this could also be said about the broader community surrounding Charter 77).

It would make no sense to demonstrate this variety of, for instance, underground literature, by presenting a short list. It suffices to mention the first underground anthologies from the 1970s.85 At first sight these are rather heterogeneous conglomerates of text of different poetics, for what is there in common between, for example, the fragile dreamy poetics of Věra Jiroušová, drawing mainly on the work of Bohuslav Reynek and...
appraised by Prof. Černý, and the satanic, nihilist, apocalyptic visions of the rocker Josef Vondruška? What connects the “totally-realistic” poems, or rather diary entries of the radical Marxist and Maoist Egon Bondy, with New Testament parables of the Protestant priest Svatopluk Karásek? What do the zaznam, carefully polished, linguistically experimental verses by Andrej Stanek or Eugen Brikcius, share with the sarcasm of the lyrics by Charlie Soukup? How to understand the spontaneous, “schizoid” texts of Fanda Páněk, full of so-called vulgarisms or even blasphemies? On the outside, formally, there are not many similarities, but the authors for whom the underground community was a natural background were connected by what was totally lacking in the official culture: the feeling of unity, mutual tolerance, the awareness that in the spirit of defiantly gained “complicity” something new was hopefully being created – something authentic, unalienated. And it is probably this aspect which was responsible for the specific values with which the underground community of the 1970s and 1980s contributed to Czech, or even world culture.

In conclusion, let me give you one example of how the variety and plurality of opinions, ideas and artistic approaches within the Czech underground community was reflected in the life of one of its main protagonists – the founder of the originally “Prague psychedelic band” called The Plastic People of the Universe, musician Milan “Mejla” Hlavsa (1951-2001).

In 1968, Hlavsa was one of many Prague teenagers with long hair, like many of his peers he played rock’n’roll in different amateur bands. Incidentally he came across a record by the New York band The Velvet Underground, which was not yet very well known abroad, and their music made a great impression on him. The front man of the band, Lou Reed became his idol. Hlavsa put together a band with which he played songs by The Velvet Underground, but he named it after a song by another of the pioneers of the American underground, Plastic People by Frank Zappa, adding “of the Universe” to the title – perhaps as an allusion to John Lennon’s song Yer Blues. And by mere chance, the young art historian Ivan Martin Jirous came to see one of the gigs by The Plastic People and was captivated, immediately started cooperating with the band, wrote articles about them for artistic journals, and promoted the band’s music and performances among his fellow art historians, artists and authors.

However, following the Soviet occupation in August 1968, so-called normalization started – and artists and writers who were not willing to submit to the regimentation of cultural life were very soon deprived of the possibility to work in their profession; pushed to the margins of society, their names were erased from the history of literature and arts. In the field of popular music in particular there were only a few who were able to resist and who did not disgrace themselves by complying with the requirements of the “normalization” regime – and soon Hlavsa’s The Plastic People became a true symbol of such resistance. However, the stronger the oppression was, the more the solidarity among the oppressed grew. Different “ghetto’s” and paths to the underground were established and these were the only possible way to create dissent. They were no longer a handful of crazy rockers, eccentric students and suspicious philosophers: in this way, solidarity was gradually stirring with the representatives of the nation’s oppressed elite.

Hlavsa and his friends from the underground were in touch with leading dissident intellectuals even prior to the establishment of Charter 77 – in particular with Václav Havel and Jan Patočka, while many others such as Ludvík Vaculík, Zdeněk Mlynář, Jaroslav Seifert and even Václav Černý (though in his case undoubtedly with some reservations) manifested their solidarity with the underground as they understood that persecutions inflicted on the underground by the regime might soon concern them as well. In 1977, the majority of the underground musicians and artists joined Charter 77 out of solidarity, although the original thinking of the underground was not very close to the “legalist” principles of Charter 77 and consequently due to the police terror and the manifested solidarity the underground community disintegrated to a large extent at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s and it was only with difficulties and thanks to the younger generation that it was able to activate again in the 1980s. And as The Plastic People were not even allowed to play private concerts, they resorted to making “studio” records.
which were then distributed through samizdat means, or rather “magnitizdat”.

For Hlavsa, the revolution in November 1989 probably came just in time as he had been fatigued by the police terror in the years leading to it and consequently finally inclined towards certain concessions, compromises – just to be able to play the music he loved.

One of the consequences of the change of the regime after November 1989 was total disintegration of the underground community, which to a certain extent lost its raison d’être in the newly established state of freedom. The Plastic People stopped playing together, Hlavsa joined other bands and it looked like this chapter in the history of Czech independent culture would come to an end once and for all.

However, in 1997 Hlavsa managed to get The Plastic People together, this time as a living legend. After that they often played at home and abroad, already as a completely professional band and releasing new music records.

In 1998, they were offered a great opportunity thanks to President Havel. They were invited by President Clinton to play for him and President Havel at the White House. Hlavsa accepted, but he also had one wish: he asked for the idol of his youth, former leader of The Velvet Underground to play with him in the residence of the US president. His wish was granted and so on 17 September 1998, to quote Bohumil Hrabal, the “unbelievable came true”. Not just The Plastic People, but also Lou Reed played in the White House! It is hard to imagine that any representative of American alternative culture would be able to smuggle the ill-famed New York rocker, worshipper of heroin and self-destruction, into the sanctuary of the US establishment. Milan Hlavsa did it.

NOTES

1 The study was originally written in the English language and the author read it as a lecture at the University of Texas in Austin under the title Radical Standpoints of Czech Underground Community (1969-1989) and Variety of Czech Underground Literature as Specific Values in April 2006. Part of it was published in a Polish translation under the name Czeska społeczność undergroundowa (1969-1989) i jej literatura as an introduction to the anthology Czeski underground, Atut publishing house, Wroclaw 2008. For the publication in Paměť a dějiny the author translated it to the Czech language and rewrote it in many places, mainly abridging the text.

2 In Czech: “underground” and “podzemí”; “podzemí” being the literal translation of the English word, carrying the same secondary meaning, referring to “unofficial cultural sphere”, “counter-culture”, “anti-establishment movements” etc., however, with a broader meaning, i.e. culture and art not necessarily inspired by Anglo-American “underground culture”, but by some domestic predecessors as well.
3 Jiří Přemysl Števich was a guitar player in The Plastic People band at the turn of the 1960s-1970s.


9 The metaphor of the “barbarians” has become well established in Czech literature and culture, primarily thanks to Bohumil Hrabal, but nothing is known; however, it may be of interest that American literary historians soon started to use the same metaphor when dealing with the Beat Generation, e.g. Lipton, L. (1959) The Holy Barbarians. New York: Julian Messner.

10 The group around Charter 77, with its personal and social structure, in a certain way resembled the underground community, but it must be highlighted that its agents were in the majority of cases only prominent dissidents, intellectuals, latent leaders of a potential political opposition who also pursued their own goals. In this way, unfortunately, the unique homogeneity of artistic and intellectual plurality of the underground became blurred and faded within the Charter 77 community.

11 The fact that the underground community was perceived as a kind of “sect” by at least some intellectuals from the Charter 77 movement can be demonstrated by quoting one phrase from Václav Benda’s essay The Parallel Pols from 1978: “[...] underground, which forms by far the most numerous part of the Charter has been able to politicize and overcome its sectarianism; however, the permanency of such a result is probably conditioned by our abilities to ‘enlighten’ these circles. Prefan, V. (ed.) (1990). Od mordání k demokratické novoci. Dokumentace. Scheinfeld – Prague – Bratislava: Čs. středisko nezávislé literatury – ÚSD ČSAV – Archa. 48-47.

12 The subject of where to look for the cultural and social legacy of the Czech underground of the 1970s and 1980s and regarding the possible interpretation and misinterpretation of where the Czech underground was in fact placed within the traditional political spectrum was discussed in October 2014 in the Lidové noviny newspaper (At si milá udelal vlastní underground, supplement Orientace/Salon, 11-12 October 2014) by Jiří Fiedor, Stanislav Komárek, Zbyněk Petráček, Jáchym Topol, Martin C. Putna and Břetislav Rychlík. This debate made clear that different interpretations of the term “leftism” still exist in Czech society. Did the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia have anything in common with the political left in the normalization era, apart from (some of) its slogans? Wasn’t it rather an ultra-conservative, fascist-like quisling clique, whose ideology was empty and whose interpretation of so-called socialism led to establishment of a crypto-consumerist society? If it was indeed so, it also has consequences for the interpretation of the social and political position of the opponents of the regime, among whom a certain place should be reserved also for the Czech underground.


14 In the first place, the anti-utopian novel Invalidní sourozenci (Invalid Siblings) (samizdat, Prague 1974), in which Bondy, in a poetic vision, tried to explore the possibility of establishing a fully autonomous subculture. This vision of his gained wide acceptance in the underground community at that time. (For now the latest publication Bonyd, E. (2012). Invalidní sourozenci. Prague: Akropolis.) Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Bondy was perhaps the most outspoken proponent of cultural autonomy of the underground and dismissed both compromises with the official culture and drawing closer to the culture of the prominent dissidents. At the same time, though – and this only became public in 1990 – in some periods of his life he was forced to cooperate with the StB to a certain level. A wealth of material exists about the cooperation and the avoidance thereof between Fišer-Bondy and the StB which has not been processed by experts, let alone assessed. The latest comments come from Pert Uhl in his extensive interview with Zdenko Pavelka Dělal jsme, co jsme mohli za správné (I Did What I Thought Was Right) (2001, Prague: Torst), some of which were rather critical (159-177) although Uhl defends Bondy in many aspects. However, in the same book he also says: It never came to my mind to draw any conclusions from the fact that the State Security had listed someone in some category. It was a mendacious, conspiratorial organization, even towards individual StB members. [...] But if someone claims today in an effort to pretend that the documents of the State Security are truthful, that the organization was bureaucratic and well controlled from within and that is why Mr. XY “for sure” must have been an informant and a snitch, then that person is not telling the truth. The relationship between the StB member and its victim – they were always victims, no matter in which category they were listed or what position they held and despite the fact that they often also acted amorally – should be explained by studies of oral history with the actual people concerned, before all of them pass away.


The SMP organised a happening welcoming a blue whale to Charles Bridge on the eve of the anniversary of the Soviet occupation, 20 August 1989.

Photo: SMP Archive
Happenings against totalitarianism

The Society for a Merrier Present in 1989

The American historian Padraic Kenney dubbed events in Central Europe in 1989 a “carnival of revolution”. In his absorbing book he explores the activities of the new opposition groupings that gradually took shape in the second half of the 1980s. The ideological battles of the previous generations were either alien or not a matter of concern to their founders, who for the most part were members of the young generation. They had no illusions about the chances of reforming the political regime into which they had been born. They were focused on public events, organising various demonstrations, hunger strikes, petitions and happenings. Some of these became legendary. Among them were the street events of the Society for a Merrier Present (Společnost za veselejší současnost), which emerged several months before the fall of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia.

PETR BLAŽEK

Outside the Petschek Palace, once the HQ of the Prague Gestapo, a number of young people gathered on 1 May 1989 to run together from a memorial plaque bearing the famous Fučík quotation People, be vigilant to the post office building on Jindřišská St. The “Politických vězňů [Political Prisoners St.] run for political prisoners”, as the happening was dubbed by the founders of the Society for a Merrier Present (SMP), was held under the banner Today we’re running for you, tomorrow you’ll run for us! The runners were instructed to send cards and postcards to political prisoners and to announce their participation to the Society’s three founders, Luboš Rychvalský, Petr Payne and Bára Štěpánová. The event was to be repeated every day until all political prisoners were released.

TRY A DIFFERENT WAY

In Bára Štěpánová’s recollection, the Society for a Merrier Present was founded just a few hours before the actual run: On 1 May 1989 we were sitting at Slavia. I recall that Saša Vondra was there and he was going on and on about something terribly important (sorry, Saša) and it occurred to us to try a different way. So that people would get involved and not be afraid.

The name Society for a Merrier Present was coined by Luboš Rychvalský, who became the guiding spirit of the new independent initiative. He also created its logo, which appeared on stickers and later badges. A 25-year-old construction technical school graduate, he worked as a night security guard (to be able to take part in run happenings in the afternoons, he made a mannequin which he placed in his booth in his stead) and was trying to get into the Hussite Theological Faculty, where he hoped to take Religious Studies. He was sympathetic to opposition groupings and took part in a number of street demonstrations. Exactly three months prior to the establishment of the SMP he appeared in court over the misdemeanour of attending an unauthorised demonstration on 28 October 1989, receiving a fine of 2,000 crowns (he had originally been charged with attacking an intervening Sbor národní bezpečnosti [SNB, National Security Corps] officer and could have faced up to a year in jail).

Another co-founder of the SMP was 28-year-old actress Bára Štěpánová, a graduate of the Prague Conservatory. She had been working at the Semafor theatre since the 1970s and had also appeared in numerous films and television series. Her uncle Rudolf Battěk was one of the best-known opponents of the Communist regime and spent more than nine years in prison. Like Rychvalský she had appeared in court for participating in the 28 October 1988 demonstration; however, she was found innocent as there were inconsistencies in the SNB officer’s report.
articles and studies
Participants in the happening run, led by Karel Malek and Jan Jarkovský
Photo: SMP Archive

On the same day that the SMP was established, dozens of people protested during a May Day parade in Prague. In the photo is Miroslav "Kamil" Černý, later a regular participant in SMP happenings, 1 May 1989.
Photo: Jan Bejkovec / SMP

she became a signatory of the founding Charter 77 declaration, the Plzeň theatre where she was engaged let it be known that her services were no longer required.8

The third co-founder was Petr Payne, 27, who was completing his studies at the Comenius Protestant Theological Faculty. He was a member of the Independent Peace Association – Initiative for the Demilitarisation of Society (Nezávislé mírové sdružení – Iniciativa za demilitarizaci společnosti), which was founded in spring 1988 with the purpose of enshrining alternative civilian service in law. He was also a writer of one-act dramas.

A group of people who prepared street events gradually began to coalesce around the trio. The Society for a Merrier Present lacked an organisational structure and had a core group of around 20.8 The strategy adopted by Luboš Rychvalský and his friends was both simple and highly effective. Like the Orange Alternative in Poland, which organised its first event in 1986, it ridiculed the ruling regime through humour and pranks. Participants in traditional street demonstrations were often brutally dispersed by riot units with batons, tear gas and water cannons. It was not so easy, however, to employ such methods against runners who neither chanted slogans nor issued political declarations.9

The Society for a Merrier Present’s modus operandi was to parody various official “sports” events that the regime organised in support of “world peace”. They also used official state holidays, which – like Poland’s Orange Alternative – they imbued with new content and context.

One reason the happenings found acceptance was that they took place in a cultural milieu with a rich history of pranks.13 As Bára Štěpánová has stated, the accent on humour, pranks and parody was more than anything a response to the tense atmosphere among opposition activists in the spring of 1989. At Slavia, a legendary café with a view of Prague Castle, the trio of friends agreed to set up the SMP just hours after a group of opposition activists had expressed their dissatisfaction with the situation at official May Day celebrations on Wenceslas Square. In the middle of a speech by the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CC CPC), Miloš Jakeš, they chanted “freedom” and “free Havel”. The secret police intervened against the protesters, who were carrying various hastily made banners. One of those arrested was future SMP activist and chronicler Miroslav “Kamil” Černý, who held aloft a sign reading “Freedom for political prisoners!”14

While in neighbouring Poland things were progressing dynamically thanks to partly open elections agreed at roundtable talks, the situation was markedly different in Czechoslovakia. On the orders of the Communist leadership the “baton laws” making it easier to prosecute participants in street demonstrations were tightened. Shortly afterwards Václav Havel received an unconditional nine-month jail term. A number of

THE ORANGE ALTERNATIVE This prankster protest movement, which organised street happenings in several Polish cities at the close of the Communist era, has its roots in the Lower Silesian city of Wrocław. The name was first used for a samizdat magazine published by striking students at the Faculty of History and Philosophy at University of Wrocław in 1981. The key figure in the Pomarańczowa Alternatywa (Orange Alternative; due perhaps to the similarities of the languages, the Czech translation mistakenly used the word for orange, as in the fruit, when it should have used the word for orange, as in the colour) was a history of art student named Waldemar “Major” Fydrych (born 8 May 1953 in Toruń), who was inspired by the Dutch Provos movement. The author of the Manifesto of Socialist Surrealism, he painted a dwarf on the wall of a building with a friend; it became the symbol of the entire movement and even, following the fall of the Communist regime, became the symbol of Wrocław itself.

From 1986 the Orange Alternative organised a number of famous street events. The best known were the happenings “Krasnoludki na Świdnickiej” (Dwarfs on Świdnicka St., 1 June 1987), “Dzień Mikołaja” (St. Nicholas Day, 6 December 1987), “Karnawał RIO-botniczy” (a play on words meaning something like Workers Festival in Rio, 16 February 1988), “Rewolucja Krasnoludków” (Dwarfs Revolution, 1 June 1988) and “Rewolucja Październikowa” (October Revolution, 7 November 1988). The biggest happenings saw the participation of 15,000 people. Alongside Wrocław, the Orange Alternative was active in other Polish cities, in particular Łódź, Warsaw and Lublin. The happening “Bratnia Pomoc wiecznie żywa” (Fraternal Help Alive Forever, 19 August 1988) took place near Mount Sněžka on the Czech-Polish border; led by Major, around 200 participants set out for Czechoslovakia to quell the newly emerging counterrevolution. For several hours Polish border guards chased the intruders in the Karkonosze Mountains. In December 1988 the Polish director Andrzej Wajda praised the Orange Alternative for its activities.

In 2002 Padraic Kenney and Waldemar “Major” Fydrych wrote books in parallel whose jackets featured the same dwarf motif that was the symbol of the Orange Alternative.
other opponents of the regime also appeared in court. In such an atmosphere the opposition could not agree on whether to call for public protests. In the end only the most the radical\textsuperscript{25} decided to take advantage of the May Day tradition\textsuperscript{26} to hold the first demonstration in central Prague since the brutal interventions of Palach Week in January 1969.

Alongside word of mouth, samizdat magazines and flyers, the popularity of the run happenings was in large part down to Radio Free Europe, whose broadcasts were no longer jammed from December 1988. Among other information, it reported on the increasing number of runners. On 25 May 1989 the SMP reported that 488 persons had taken part in its events to date.\textsuperscript{27} Three days later the total number of runners was almost 100 higher.\textsuperscript{28} More runs took place in subsequent months. For instance on 5 June 1989, more than 50 people took part in a run on Jindřišská St.\textsuperscript{29} On 29 September 1989, 72 people participated in the same event\textsuperscript{30}, sending postcards to Renata Pánová\textsuperscript{31} and Josef Römer.\textsuperscript{32} On the first day of autumn, the prankster group Ladybirds (Berušky), modelled on the SMP and founded by a group of apprentices and secondary school students, also joined in. After the run some participants carried on to the new Rudé právo building at Prague’s Florenc where they celebrated Press Day with a parade of allegorical persons.\textsuperscript{33}

Alongside the run in support of political prisoners, the first SMP happening had another important outcome. Before 5 o’clock every evening, the spot in front of the Petschek Palace became an improvised Speaker’s Corner where people got to know one another, hung out together, debated and exchanged information. They were able to sign various petitions, read flyers and borrow samizdat magazines. Longstanding friendships were forged. While most were young, some older people also took part. For instance, Charter 77 signatory Jiří Wolf made new friends there after being released from prison, where he had begun serving a nine and a half year term in the mid 1970s.\textsuperscript{34}

**Cutting the Iron Curtain**

Alongside runs, the SMP gradually began organising other events, some of which became legendary. On 19 May 1989 it offered the Hungarian government help in removing security installations from the Hungarian-Austrian border, preparing the event under the title *Today we’ll cut in your country, tomorrow you’ll cut in ours*.\textsuperscript{35} SMP representatives brought a written proposal to the Hungarian Embassy inquiring as to what tools they would require and when they ought to come. The addressse rejected the offer, saying that it wasn’t possible to guarantee the safety of civilians at the border in question. In a misleading report, the SMP representatives described this as a weak excuse.\textsuperscript{36} Bára Štěpánová recalled that the Hungarian diplomats received them warmly and seemed to grasp the true meaning of the proposal.\textsuperscript{37}

In the late 1980s opposition milieu it was common for individual groups to overlap and cooperate very closely. Their members generally knew one another, were friends and spent time together. On 3 June 1989 they came together at the first football tournament of independent initiatives, “An Enlightened Prosecutor”, which took place on the Prague island Dětský ostrov. The SMP also fielded a team. Revolver Revue eventually won, beating a Czech Children side in the final. The samizdat paper Koruna reported foul play: To illustrate – Czech Children were losing 0:3 though they gradually started outplaying their opponents. They reduced the deficit to 2:3 and would undoubtedly have drawn level and won if the game hadn’t been prematurely ended by an obnoxious referee. Typically the Independent Peace Association finished last; they didn’t score a single goal, on the contrary conceding lots. The whole tournament was videoed by Interior Minister personnel. Uniformed VB [Public Security – regular police] officers checked IDs at the bridge to the island.\textsuperscript{38}

Perhaps the only event SMP people were involved in that did not epitomise their sense of humour was the “Week of solidarity with Chinese students”. From Monday 5 June to Sunday 11 June 1989 solemn gatherings were held on Charles Bridge. At the final one Luboš Rychvalský remembered the victims of the massacre on Tiananmen Square with a symbolic large black sheet bearing the word CHINA on which participants laid flowers. He also delivered a short speech. He was subsequently arrested with a number of other partici-
behind the iron curtain

pants, as he had been at the previous gathering on the Saturday.

A week later Rychvalský and friends from other opposition groups travelled to the Jeseníky Mountains to meet representatives of the similarly-oriented Polish groups Orange Alternative (Pomarańczowa Alternatywa) and Freedom and Peace (Wolność i Pokój). However, the Poles failed to reach the agreed spot in the mountains, having been scared off by troop movements.

The SMP organised a gathering headed You’re still at the helm, for a while we’ll be at the helm on 6 July 1989. Participants hired pedal boats at Prague’s Žofín island and took to the Vltava where they held up letters spelling out the slogan. Friends and random passers-by watched this carnivalesque “exchange of roles” from Charles Bridge.

MERRY SECURITY AND BLUE WHALE

Alongside its runs, the SMP’s most famous event was perhaps a happening organised on Prague’s Na Příkopě marking the 21st anniversary of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in which protesters marched in silence for 21 days. On 15 August 1989, 14 officers of the “Merry Security” (the name in Czech is a play on Public Security) armed with cucumber and salami batons intervened against them. Wearing helmets from hollowed-out melons, they possessed plastic squirting elephants, a plastic dog on wheels, a first aid team and several “secret” agents. The demonstrators they attacked fought back, chasing the “unit” off. One of the Merry Security officers was later arrested by a member of the real secret police and fined for imitating a police intervention against participants in a protest walk, 15 August 1989.
On 15 August the Society for a Merrier Present decided to hold an "unsuccessful operation". To that end it created the rapid response unit Merry Security (VB). Armed with cucumber and salami batons, melon helmets, squirting elephants and a plastic dog, this unit intervened at 17:30 against a civic protest parade that took place every day from 1 to 21 August on a pedestrian zone in Prague as a protest against the occupation of Czechoslovakia 21 years ago.

In the view of the SMP, the parade disturbed the general merriment ahead of 21 August and still the state organs did not take action. The SMP came forward to assist the Security, attempting to halt and disperse the parade participants.

The unit commander called on the demonstrators to depart and, his call disobeyed, gave the order for an intervention against the parade participants. However, the citizens’ gathering did not give up and was not intimidated, breaking up the Merry Security unit. The brave Merry Security officers retreated when they received no help from the onlooking state organs, dumping their helmets in rubbish bins and eating their batons. The operation was also manned by an SMP first aid team and several secret agents. Nobody was arrested or hurt and the citizens continued their parade and dispersed peacefully. The SMP later celebrated its unsuccessful operation.

Source: "Unsuccessful operation". Informace o Chartě 77, 1989, yr. 12, no. 16, 18.
on 21 August 1989. In this context the happening in question eased the tense atmosphere and broke through the barrier of fear.

The same purpose was achieved by another SMP event that took place on the very eve of the anniversary. On 20 August 1989 a “whale intervention” – as the happening was dubbed in a flyer in four languages – took place by Charles Bridge. According to the predictions of astrologers, a large blue whale was due to float into Prague. At the appointed time, a number of people were waiting in place and spotted the promised rival. It was a laminated model that Luboš Rychvalský had brought to Kampa and, with friends, transported along an embankment of the Vltava: In that instant, a police car arrived at great speed and skidded to a halt; they jumped out, took my documents and left again. We placed the whale in the water calmly, though I wasn’t sure until the last moment whether the double-deck chair would hold the monster up, so that it wouldn’t drown. But God was on our side. Everything worked out wonderfully. We floated along the bank with the whale until the weir. There a sailor appeared out of the blue, claiming he was familiar with the Vltava and showing us exactly where to release the whale so that it would float straight and hit the mark under an arch of the bridge. Then a random passerby jumped into the Vltava and swam with the whale to the exact spot that the sailor had shown us. To the cheers of those watching, who welcomed it to Charles Bridge, the whale was caught by police officers in a dinghy.

Despite the tense situation in Prague on the eve of the anniversary of the invasion of 21 August 1968, the SMP organised a happening on the Vltava. In a promotional leaflet in Czech, French, Dutch and English, it was stated that, according to astrologers, a blue whale would float to the Charles Bridge in Prague on 20 August 1989. The flyer recalls the dramatic events linked to the transport of a wooden horse to ancient Troy and the rescue of the prophet Jonah from the whale. It also includes the call: We welcome the intervention of whales!

At around seven o’clock in the evening members of the SMP released with the help of random passers-by a whale around the size of a personal automobile – made of wire mesh, paper, and latex coating – on the water. The whale floated with dignity to Charles Bridge where it was awaited by people who wished to welcome it to Prague. While the whale was floating, two police officers stripped to the waist in a dinghy joined it and led it to the left bank at Klárov. People on the banks applauded, girls threw flowers and the SMP members called to the intervening police as to where they were taking the whale. To Hamburg, the officers replied. The police expected demonstrations and rebellious crowds on that day as it was the eve of the August anniversary but in the end police transmitters were filled with reports about a pale blue whale. The following day SMP founding member Luboš Rychvalský was brought to the VB station on Vlašská St. He was required under the law on the SNB to explain the whale and was ordered to remove the remnants of it from the bank at Klárov as apparently the cetacean was continuing to pollute the city. Therefore the whale had apparently to be guarded by the river police. Luboš Rychvalský complied with the demand and moved what remained of the whale to an unknown location on the same day.

At that time on the Vltava at Charles Bridge a model of a whale (around 2 m in dimension), which was intended to attract the attention of citizens to goings on at Charles Bridge, was identified and shortly afterwards removed by a VB river unit.

Shortly before the fall of the Communist regime the SMP organised an event entitled “Everyone to their own piece of sand” (from a phrase similar to guarding one’s one corner) poking fun at the inability of the opposition to reach agreement on a common approach. On 12 October 1989 SMP representatives invited friendly dissidents (Václav Havel, Hana Marvanová, Petr Placák, Jiří Gruntorád and Stanislav Penc) to a children’s sandpit in Libeň, handed them sandcastle moulds and had them play with children in separate corners. The happening was brought to an end by the unannounced arrival of a digger bearing a tarpaulin with SMP written on it. The digger covered the sand castles that had been built in an uncompromising fashion.

As Luboš Rychvalský recalled at a gathering held 25 years after the foundation of the SMP, by no means all dissidents were sympathetic towards their activities. Some were unwilling to “play” at a children’s playground when the whole regime was in crisis. This explanation for refusing to come to the sandpit was preferred by, for instance, Rudolf Battěk of the Movement for Civic Freedom, who otherwise was not at all lacking a sense of humour.

However, the daily situational reports quoted above demonstrate that the authorities did not regard the organisers of SMP happenings as harmless pranksters. This is illustrated by a violent police intervention against a run happening that took place on 8 September 1989.

When at the start of November 1989 the Berlin Wall fell, the SMP announced that it would also be demolished in Prague. The symbolic wall was to be erected on Wenceslas Sq. However, events moved faster and by that time tens of thousands were demonstrating in the streets. A reference to plans for the event is preserved in a general report prepared for the Communist leadership by the StB’s analytics department: Planned events for 20 November 1989: at 9:00 meeting of Academy of Performing Arts students to discuss the intervention of 17 November – at 10:00 Proclamation of Academy of Performing Arts drama students – at 16:00 the Society for a Merrier Present to hold “demolition of the Berlin Wall” (using fruit boxes).

International news agencies devoted most attention to the establishment of an open-air museum of totalitarianism in the village of Bezpráví (meaning Injustice) in eastern Bohemia, which like the above happening was prepared prior to 17 November.
behind the iron curtain

1989. The unlikely monument, respectively its foundation stone, was ceremonially unveiled on 9 December 1989, the eve of Human Rights Day. Luboš Rychvalský recalled the plans for the outdoor museum: It was a simple idea. To transport statues of the potentates and symbols of communism (of which there were many in every city and town then) to a natural area by Bezpráví, to install them loosely in the countryside and let them gradually become overgrown by moss. This would give rise to a symbolic natural museum of monsters where future generations of children would take their children to remind them of our tarnished past.46

A few weeks after the outbreak of the Velvet Revolution, the Society for a Merrier Present organised an event targeted at the nascent political elite. On 5 December 1989, St. Nicholas’s Day, an SMP delegation in pioneer uniforms and red scarves visited the Civic Forum’s Špalíček headquarters. They handed out car nations, a symbol of the previous regime’s propaganda events, and mirrors, telling those present they looked awful and ought to rest and recharge their batteries. Bára Štěpánová addressed an appalled Václav Klaus as Comrade Havel.47

On New Year’s Eve 1989 Luboš Rychvalský and his friends jointly organised at Václav Havel’s request a celebration marking his election as president. When he grasped that the SMP people had been given this task as apparent experts on “humour”, Rychvalský came up with the idea of a tranquil tearoom in one of the smaller halls. The idea was a big hit and shaped its author’s future destiny.48 The final SMP public event took place on 15 January 1990, when Luboš Rychvalský and Bára Štěpánová presented Havel with a scooter on which he rode in front of journalists down the long corridors of Prague Castle. Štěpánová became his secretary for two years before returning to the acting profession.49 It is worth mentioning that Amnest International50 revived the SMP’s run happening at the same spot in the early 1990s, capitalising on its renown for a campaign calling for the release of political prisoners around the world.51

One of the last SMP happenings was an event named “Velvet putsch”. Shortly before Christmas 1989 SMP people in Russian style hats as worn by the Bolshevik army delivered punch to the HQ of the Civic Forum. Photo: SMP Archive

SAMIZDAT REPORT ON AN INTERVENTION AGAINST AN SMP RUN HAPPENING 8 SEPTEMBER 1989

On Friday 8 September at 17:00 a group of uniformed and plain-clothes SNB officers prevented the holding of the regular Politických vězňů St. run, dedicated on this occasion to Stanislav Devátý. Several participants in the run were arrested with SNB officers using violence in several cases.

Among those arrested were Jiří Wolf, Karel Mašek, Josef Kuhn (from 17 September 1989 the StB kept an agent category file on him, code-name “Fabius” – author’s note), Jiřka Němečková, Jakub Čech, Petr Vábečka, Martin Vachala and Josef Stochl. They were taken to the VB station on Školská St. where again violence was used against several of them and were forced to stand with their faces to the wall in a courtyard. All of them were subjected to detailed searches and progressively interrogated. Uniformed and plain-clothes police officers behaved very roughly on this occasion. One of the plain-clothes men struck Josef Stochl with handcuffs on the back of the head so violently that he fainted. He remained lying on the concrete courtyard bleeding from the head for around a quarter of an hour. Only after emphatic protests from the other detainees could one of them provide him with first aid and a doctor was called. The only assistance that the VB officers had previously provided him was a bucket of water that they poured over him so he would regain consciousness. The doctor did not arrive for another half hour and ordered the immediate transfer of the injured to hospital, where his wound required stitches. All of the other detainees were warned during questioning not to take part in a planned march for political prisoners on Saturday 9 September (this was an event in support of Stanislav Devátý – author’s note) and were told the VB would “deal with” anyone who appeared there. All of those arrested were gradually released between 21:00 and 22:00. It was the first serious attack on the hitherto tolerated events of the Society for a Merrier Present. Since 1 May 1989, when the daily run was launched, several hundred runners have taken place and arrests have been rare.

Čejka, M. (2012). Role of Babeta in television series still fun, says Bára Štěpánová. It is stated in several biographical interviews that she became a Charter 77 signatory in 1986. Her signature was not made public as early as 5 May 1989 an employee of the 2nd Division of the and Directorate of the administration of the NSC (concerning “flyers, terror, counter-intelligence defence of the Czechoslovak People’s Party, the Czechoslovak Socialist Party and the unions”) Cap. Miroslav Machatý (born 9 November 1944) created a “suspect file”, codename “Sicklé”, reg. no. 37314. According to data in the relevant line of the registration report the file was evidently destroyed on 6 December 1989. ABS (Security Services Archive), report on registration of agent and counterintelligence files, department: Statistics and Registration division of the FMV (Federal Ministry of the Interior).

It wasn’t the first time that the opposition attempted to use official May Day celebrations to inform the public about their activities. As early as 1 May 1987 during celebrations of the workers’ holiday in Olomouc a banner appeared with the words Charter 77 and calling on citizens to be courageous; it was held by bus driver Rudolf Bereza and labourer Tomáš Hradilek (originally a zoo technician, he was brutally beat up, knocking out a tooth and causing him lasting mental trauma that resulted in him starting to stutter. Ad–BFer 8 September 1989 they prevented the holding of a run, making several arrests. While taking those arrested to a police station they put up flyers in České Budějovice. She was released at the start of December 1989. VONS report no. 1059: Verdict against Reprisals for the run for political prisoners. "Sickle", reg. no. 37314. According to data in the relevant line of the registration report the file was evidently destroyed on 6 December 1989. ABS (Security Services Archive), report on registration of agent and counterintelligence files, department: Statistics and Registration division of the FMV (Federal Ministry of the Interior).


23 Berusky před tiskárnou Rudého práva.


25 Society for a Merrier Present to the Hungarian government. Informace o Chartě 77, 1989, yr. 12, no. 11, 17.

26 Conversation between SMP representatives and the Hungarian ambassador. Informace o Chartě 77, 1989, yr. 12, no. 13, 15.

27 Formánková – Koura (2008), 37.


29 Week of solidarity with Chinese students. Informace o Chartě 77, 1989, yr. 12, no. 13, 15.


31 Formánková – Koura (2008), 38.

32 "Unsuccessful operation". Informace o Chartě 77, 1989, yr. 12, no. 16, 18; Imitation of a police operation. Koruna, 1989, no. 3, no page numbers. Miroslav "Kamił" Černý, Ondřej Černý and Stanislav Penc stood to face conviction but the matter was dropped after the Velvet Revolution. (As told to the author by M.K. Černý, 25 September 2014.)

33 ABS, DSZ FMV no. 110, 16 August 1989.

34 Otáhal (2011), 449.

35 Bor (1993), 217.

36 Whale intervention. Informace o Chartě 77, 1989, yr. 12, no. 16, 18–19; SMP welcomes whale to Prague. Servis VIA Praha, 050-89, 18–19.

37 Formánková – Koura (2008), 38.


40 Ibid. 38–39; Setkání představitelů nezávislých iniciativ na jednom pražském pískovišti – akce SVS k výročí 21. srpna

41 The seminar was held on 24 April 2014, video recording available at the website of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes: http://www.ustrcr.cz/cs/aktivity-nelegalnich-struktur-audio-video (quoted as of 9 September 2014).

42 Seminar on SMP, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, 24 April 2014.

43 Formánková – Koura (2008), 40.

44 Cf. the author thanks Miroslav "Kamil" Černý and Luboš Rychvalský for their help with this article. The author is preparing a book on the SMP and would welcome period photographs and personal recollections at the address petr.blazek@ustrcr.cz.
Signature of agreement to collaborate
Photo: SSA
I undertake voluntarily...

Residents, agents, informers and others.
The State Security’s secret collaborators, 1945–1989

All of the world’s intelligence or security services have no doubt used and continue to use secret collaborators. The reason is simple: Frequently it is the only way to acquire necessary information from particular suspicious milieus and closed groups of people believed to be engaged in unlawful activities. The State Security (Státní bezpečnost, StB) – Communist Czechoslovakia’s secret political police – always regarded its network of covert collaborators (which on the Soviet model it dubbed an “agency”) as a very important tool in its work.

LIBOR BÍLEK

It would undoubtedly be misleading, however, to draw an automatic line between the agency activities of the State Security and analogous organisations in other former Eastern Bloc countries on one hand, and the activities of covert collaborators of the secret services of democratic states on the other. Naturally there are shared characteristics; every security or intelligence service employs secret collaborators in the fulfilment of their fundamental role, which is protecting their own state in the form in which it currently exists and combatting those attempting to change that form in a manner that is unauthorised or violates the laws in place in the given country.

The difference lies in the way security services fulfil that role in both quantitative and qualitative terms. While in democratic countries with a functioning rule of law secret collaborators are only deployed in a very limited range of cases (e.g., in the fight against the likes of organised crime and international terrorism) and the security services are bound by legal regulations regarding their recruitment and deployment, in the case of Communist Czechoslovakia (and numerous other non-democratic regimes) the exact opposite applied. The recruitment of covert collaborators was carried out on a mass scale, not with the purpose of infiltrating particular groups believed to be involved in crime but with a view to monitoring broad social groups or even the whole of society. In addition, Communist Czechoslovakia was characterised by a longstanding lack of legal norms governing at least in outline not only the use of secret collaborators but the work of the secret police in general, as well as StB officers’ continued unwillingness to adhere to the laws that did exist.

The State Security’s mission was to protect the Communist Party’s regime in its then form. This task was fulfilled along two overlapping lines. The first was intelligence (if you will, “preventative”) work aimed at monitoring as closely as possible the whole of Czechoslovak society with a view to uncovering all activities hostile to the regime, with the assessment of what was or was not “hostile” carried out by the StB according to the judgement of its officers or Communist Party functionaries, rather than the laws then in force. At the same time, it was just in intelligence work, in the collection and submission of reports, that secret collaborators were most effective.

The StB officers’ second focus were operational and repressive activities, meaning the investigation of crimes (gathering evidence, questioning suspects, working on documentation) and passing on concluded cases to the courts, respectively to the prosecutor’s office. Here secret collaborators could be deployed far less (e.g., in suspects’ cells).

The intensity and form of the covert collaborators’ work changed in different periods. So in the course of the regime’s existence did the concrete methods of carrying out intelligence and operational (police) work, according to how party leaders or top functionaries of the security forces viewed or presented the then international situation, as well as the internal stability of the regime and the related political line. Periods of increased perception of threat, linked to an intensification of surveillance and a tightening of repression (i.e., the show trials period in the initial years ad–BFer February 1948, the so-called normalisation years), alternated with times of relative liberalisation and easing of repression (in particular 1968 and the preceding years) and with periods that are hard to easily classify as belonging to either of the previously mentioned groups (the second half of the 1950s, the 1980s). Other factors also influenced the focus of the StB’s work (including that of its secret collaborators), such as perceptions of the greatest dangers facing the regime at
A TYPOLOGY OF SECRET COLLABORATORS

There were various types of informers, though those divisions and the criteria that applied to them were not set in stone. As can be seen in the attached tables, after a very dynamic period in the 1950s, when the StB felt the need to distinguish between its collaborators in a relatively detailed manner, subsequent development was more gradual and tended toward the maximum simplification of the designations used. As in a host of other areas, the voice of Soviet advisors was clearly decisive in this regard. From 1950 they enforced the use of “standard” Soviet terminology (resident – agent – informer – owner of conspiratorial apartment). One type of secret collaborator that existed in virtually unchanged form from 1948 until the dissolution of the StB was the “resident” (initially named “chief agent” for a short period). What was specific to collaborators with this designation was that they themselves ran other secret collaborators, in effect standing in for StB officers. They needed to be completely reliable. Residents were used in cases when the character of the “object” in which they were operating did not allow for regular contact between collaborators and their “controlling organs” (the officers who ran and issued orders to collaborators). Such collaborators were therefore primarily used by officers of the foreign intelligence service to handle collaborators in foreign states and military counterintelligence officers, who from 1950 were part of the StB.

The designation “proprietor of a loaned apartment” also underwent only formal changes. It was used for a person who, on a contractual basis, allowed intelligence officers to use their private apartment for clandestine meetings with secret collaborators and also covered up such activities. Conspiratorial apartments worked in a similar manner, with the difference being that such flats or premises were officially held by a counter-intelligence staff member, naturally acting under a false identity. Both categories (loaned and conspiratorial flat, resp. their owner or holder) were imported into the StB’s work from the Soviet secret police – conspiratorial apartment in 1950 and loaned apartment in 1954.

All of the typology employed reflected in some way one essential factor, namely the secret collaborator’s ability to infiltrate the targeted object, relay reports from there and actively fulfill other tasks. Naturally, this required that they have complete trust (or were capable of winning it) in the target environment and ideally come directly from that environment or at least enjoy close relations with its members. If a collaborator fulfilled these requirements, he was the most valuable kind of secret collaborator and, for most of the period 1945–1989, was designated an “agent” (initially StB officers distinguished different types of agents according to various factors). As the StB naturally focused most of their attention on objects whose members were covertly or openly hostile or critical (or at least cool) toward the regime, recruiting secret collaborators from their ranks was a very difficult task. However, it was not impossible – there were agents who collaborated under pressure (on the basis of compromising materials), agents predominantly motivated by their own gain (financial, material or other) and agents who worked wholly voluntarily (out of conviction).

Secret collaborators, recruited formally, who may have been able to supply regular reports from certain objects or milieus but were unable to carry out other missions within them (most frequently because they did...
not enjoy the trust of the persons intelligence officers were interested in) were until 1972 most often designat-
ed "informers". Rather than through their own actions, they obtained information due to the fact that they occupied a vantage that was advanta-
geous with regard to this activity, for instance holding a relatively senior post at a public agency or enterprise.

In character, informers were very similar to another group from which intelligence officers obtained re-
ports. This group were sometimes called "confidential sources" ("con-
fidants"), sometimes "assets". In the StB's scheme, confidants differed from informers in that they did not regularly submit reports - not having a great deal of contact with those of interest to the StB, they did not have the opportunity to acquire informa-
tion often. For this reason it was un-
necessary to recruit confidants for-
maly, so they were not regarded as part of the agency network.

Virtually anybody could, therefore, become an informer and in particular a confidant, regardless of whether or not they had the opportunity to in-
teract at first hand with "hostile" or "interesting" persons and to acquire significant information from them. This meant that the position could be held by people without direct contact with a "hostile environment" or open supporters of the regime for whom collaboration with the secret police was not at odds with their conscience or worldview.

It was far easier for State Security officers to acquire informers or con-
fidants than agents and they often used this fact to massage the results of their work, particularly in the pre-
1955 period. Enlisting a confidant was very simple; theoretically, any-
body who provided an intelligence officer with information, albeit banal, could be one. It was child's play for an adroit intelligence officer to pass a confidant off as an informer, the lowest category of secret collabora-
tor. It was enough to recruit them formally (to have them sign a com-
mitment to collaborate or state that they had agreed verbally to collabo-
rate) and to meet them occasionally in order to pretend that they regular-
ly submitted reports. It was similarly easy to enlist as informers those who committed minor offenses of a po-
litical or economic nature, to whom it was often enough to present col-
laboration as the only alternative to prosecution. This was done often, re-
gardless of whether those concerned had any opportunity of providing the StB with worthwhile reports. An StB document of 1951 states: Persons who operate on the margins of a hostile mi-
lieu who do not have the character of informers and of whom there is no ex-
pectation that they could become an agent and infiltrate hostile centres are recruited for collaboration.7

As long as senior officers tolerated these "ruses" (either deliberately or due to failure to understand the no-
omenclature or insufficient checks), a given section's count of secret col-
laborators could swell to several times that of others. Senior officials' view of the usefulness of collabora-
tors of the type of informer or con-
fidant therefore became more criti-
cal as time went on. Criteria for the selection of informers were gradu-
tely tightened until the category was completely done away with at the start of the 1970s. An order was given to make prospective collaborators in this category agents; the rest were to be removed from the agency network and treated as confidants in future.

SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT OF COLLABORATORS

Alongside the massaging of secret collaborators numbers, the inexperi-
ence and incompetence of rank-and-file officers and senior commanders in agency work also led to a number of other practices (which we will come to in subsequent pages) that - though they were later criticised - became so deeply engrained among intelligence officers that they could only be elimi-
nated slowly and with difficulty. The leadership of the StB and the Minis-
try of the Interior therefore gradually revised and refined both the working of individual directives and training in and oversight of that work. This process was perceptible in virtually all aspects of agency work - from the enlistment of secret collaborators to their management to the registration and handling of documentation.

In the initial period the process that concluded with a selected "or-
dinary" person becoming a recruited agent or informer was not spelled out in the regulations. Therefore every intelligence officer at first se-
lected and enlisted his collaborators independently and in an essentially random manner. At the start of 1949 this process was briefly codified for the first time in the document "Ad-
ministrative-operational aid".8 The regulation stated that prior to actual recruitment all available informa-
tion had to be gathered on the person identified; the intelligence officer would then use this to create a so-
called recruitment proposal, which had to be approved by a superior of-
icer, as did a so-called recruitment plan, if further steps had to be taken to ensure success (e.g., arresting the person). The recruitment process was not specified more closely, apart from a statement that the collaborator had to sign a uniform pledge to cooperate (which had not hitherto applied) and that it was necessary to immediate-
lly arrange a first meeting. If the re-
cruited person refused to cooperate, he was to sign a confidentiality oath. Later instructions (from 1951 and 1954) further specified the manner of enlistment until it was fixed in direc-
tives in 1962 (subsequent documents from 1972 and 1978 simply took on board the previous formulation). Great emphasis was placed on the selection of suitable candidates and on their careful screening (according to the guidelines this could take up to six months; in reality that period was sometimes exceeded), without which there was no point in proceed-
ing to the actual act of recruitment. It was compulsory to submit reports on the course of the recruitment pro-
cess to the relevant commanding offi-
cer; only after his approval could the collaborator and "his" file be for-
mally registered. The relevant supe-
rior officer (or a deputy) was also to take part directly in the recruitment inter-
view - in cases of particular im-
portance under the 1954 and 1962 di-
rectives; always, in later directives. It can be assumed that the presence of

behind the iron curtain

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### DESIGNATION OF SECRET COLLABORATORS 1948-1950

#### TITLES OF INTELLIGENCE COLLABORATORS, 2 APRIL 1948

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of agency network</th>
<th>Outside network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formally recruited (in writing or verbally), works consistently</td>
<td>Not formally recruited, works consistently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operates in hostile environment</td>
<td>Does not operate in hostile environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief agent (AA)</td>
<td>Confidant (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confidant- candidate (AK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agent (AP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agent - candidate (AKP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent informer (SI)</td>
<td>Advisor, confidential source (D)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AA – fully screened, runs other secret collaborators, collects their reports.
A - screened, works out of own conviction, can be given benefits.
AK – as yet unscreened, works out of own conviction.
AP – screened, works for money, other benefits, or out of fear.
AKP – as yet unscreened, works for money, other benefits, or out of fear.
SI – screened, works out of own conviction.
SIP – screened, works for money, other benefits, or out of fear.
D – provides information voluntarily.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE-OPERATIONAL AID, 17 JANUARY 1949

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of agency network, formally recruited (in writing or verbally), works consistently</th>
<th>Outside network, not recruited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operates in hostile environment</td>
<td>Does not operate in hostile environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has trust of enemy</td>
<td>Does not have trust of enemy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident (R)</td>
<td>Agent (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agent P (AP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agent – candidate (AK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agent P - candidate (AKP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent informer (SI)</td>
<td>Permanent informer P (SIP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidential source (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R – fully screened, operates other informers (may not operate agents).
A – fully screened, works from internal conviction.
AP – screened, works from material motives or out of fear.
AK – as yet unscreened, works from internal conviction.
AKP – as yet unscreened, works from material motives or out of fear.
SI – works from internal conviction.
SIP – works from material motives or out of fear.
D – provides reports voluntarily, does not have trust of enemy.

#### PLANNING OPERATIVE ACTIVITIES – DIRECTIVE, 5 JANUARY 1950

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of agency network, formally recruited (in writing or verbally), regularly controlled.</th>
<th>Outside network verbally recruited, controlled according to necessity.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has trust of enemy</td>
<td>Does not have trust of enemy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident ?</td>
<td>Operative agent (Ao)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General agent (Av)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Operative informer (Io)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General informer (Iv)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confidant (D)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The document does not refer to residents; in comparison with the previous guidelines there were evidently no changes in this category.
Ao – operates at key point of object of interest.
Av – operates generally in hostile milieu.
Io – operates at key point of object of interest.
Iv - submits regular reports.

Source: SSA
### DESIGNATION OF SECRET COLLABORATORS 1950–1990

#### NEW DESIGNATION OF COLLABORATORS, 21 NOVEMBER 1950

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of agency network, formally recruited, regularly controlled.</th>
<th>Outside network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resident (R)</td>
<td>Agent (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R – manages several informers or agents in object of interest.</td>
<td>A – has trust of enemy, operates in hostile environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### DIRECTIVE ON AGENCY OPERATIVE WORK, 20 APRIL 1954

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of agency network, formally recruited.</th>
<th>Outside network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resident</td>
<td>Agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident – voluntary and screened, handles several informers or agents.</td>
<td>Agent – works voluntarily, for money or through coercion, has the opportunity to infiltrate enemy environment and there fulfill tasks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### DIRECTIVE ON AGENCY OPERATIVE WORK OF THE STATE SECURITY, 13 MAY 1962

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of agency network, formally recruited.</th>
<th>Outside network, not recruited.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resident</td>
<td>Agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident – completely reliable, controls and runs other secret collaborators.</td>
<td>Agent – works voluntarily, for advantages or through coercion, has been acquired to work on particular cases, is capable of finding and uncovering officers of foreign intelligence services and their agents or persons conducting hostile activities against the state and is capable of conducting exemplary work in a hostile environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### DIRECTIVES FOR WORK WITH SECRET COLLABORATORS OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK COUNTERINTELLIGENCE SERVICE, 16 FEBRUARY 1972; AND DIRECTIVES FOR WORK WITH COLLABORATORS OF COUNTERINTELLIGENCE SERVICE, 25 JANUARY 1978

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of agency network, formally recruited</th>
<th>Outside network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resident</td>
<td>Agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident – completely reliable, managed by StB officer, controls the work of several secret collaborators.</td>
<td>Agent – voluntarily, for advantages or through coercion carries out tasks in finding, working on and documenting subversive criminal activities and tasks focused on preventing such activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SSA
a commanding officer or another authorized officer was required in part as a check on a future “controlling organ” and in part as reinforcement in case the recruit attempted to resist in some manner. It was often necessary to recruit persons who surpassed intelligence offers in terms of education or intellect.  

In the early years of the existence of the Communist regime in particular, it was common for StB staff not to adhere to prescribed procedures; instead of the systematic and documented enlisting of collaborators, they focused on recruiting persons over whom some advantage presented itself, for instance if they found themselves in custody. Some commanders clearly agreed with or at least covered up for them, approving recruitment proposals on such collaborators retrospectively. In addition, compromising materials on the basis of which collaborators were acquired were artificially created or even directly forged and in some cases “recruitment” was achieved with the help of brute force or threats of physical liquidation. Collaborators enlisted in this manner usually not only failed to deliver dazzling performances, in most cases they actually sabotaged the cooperation. Such procedures were therefore banned and occasionally punished; however, they did not entirely disappear.  

Alongside compromising materials, other forms of “persuasion” were used, including material or other advantages and “patriotic inducements”. The particular motivation (usually a combination of the elements listed) was naturally specific to every collaborator and always stemmed from a particular situation. Every case of secret collaboration therefore needs to be assessed, where possible, with knowledge of all the circumstances that accompanied it. However, in most cases this is impossible. When judging or condemning those who acceded to collaboration, it is advisable to maintain restraint and to remember that very few confidants offered their services to the State Security of their own volition and entirely voluntarily. The majority of people were “asked” to collaborate (albeit perhaps covertly or ambiguously, as officers acted in such a way as to get the committed person make the actual proposal) and rejecting such an “offer” was in view of the reputation that accompanied the State Security very difficult and in some cases virtually impossible.

On the other hand, the entire subject cannot be brushed aside with a suggestion that the secret collaborators bear no guilt – many of them paved the way to collaboration with their own ambition, desire for a career or willingness to fulfill the demands that the State Security placed on them because of their positions or contacts.  

**OATH of commitment to cooperation with the Czechoslovak security service**

I undertake voluntarily and out of patriotism to cooperate with the Czechoslovak security service. As a collaborator of this service, I make a commitment to obedience and loyalty to the organs of the security service superior to me as well as a commitment to complete confidentiality regarding this cooperation. I am aware that without the express permission of my security service superior organ I may not give evidence with regard to the content of my cooperation either in court or to security or other agencies, including the highest organs of the state administration. I will regard as my superior organ the person who submitted this oath to me for signature and anybody who addresses me with the words:

> I have a message for you from Dr. Janíček.

...to which I will reply:

> I am his personal secretary.

I pledge to fulfil the tasks presented to me with all of my might and according to the best of my knowledge and conscience.

I am aware that breaching confidentiality is a betrayal of state secrets, punishable by law.

I will sign my declaration in the name:

> which binds me like my real name.

In Uh. Hradiště on 1 December 1949. Vratislav Hradiš

**MANAGING SECRET COLLABORATORS**

In preserved directives from various periods of the StB’s lifespan there is an increasing emphasis on all officers strictly controlling and directing the activities of their covert collaborators. After all, poor or insufficient management could have resulted in undesired situations. For instance, some confidants were willing to collaborate and had the corresponding opportunities and skills to do so but their services were not employed as their controllers didn’t manage to assign them tasks correctly. Other collaborators wilfully carried out boycotts or sabotage unbeknownst to the StB officer. By contrast, others were overly active, committing undesired provocations or breaking the law. These unwanted results occurred most frequently in the first years after February 1948, though we can find them to a lesser degree all the way up...
StB officers were just people too…
Source: SSA

tially identical with the interests of the reassure that his collaborator was to be constantly aptly puts it, during the cooperation personal and work life. As Prokop Tomek an interest in the collaborator’s per- be obtained between them; the of- ficer was to cultivate this by taking the collaborator would willingly share information gathered) was to an “amicable” atmosphere (so that the ideal one between confidant and intel- ligence offer disdainful and superior, to the utterly familiar or friendly, with StB officers and their collaborators going on huge drinking sessions (this could end in bed if the collaborator was a woman), doing various favours for one another (mediating services or goods) or profiteering or smugg- ling goods from abroad together. In addition, conspiratorial apartments and cottages were often used for the drinking sessions referred to. Though these abuses were occasionally punished, they did not begin disappearing until the mid-1950s. Subsequently a pupil-teacher rela- tionship was regarded as being the ideal one between confidant and intelli- gence officer. Mutual trust and an “amicable” atmosphere (so that the collaborator would willingly share information gathered) was to be obtained between them; the officer was to cultivate this by taking an interest in the collaborator’s per- sonal and work life. As Prokop Tomek aptly puts it, during the cooperation the collaborator was to be constantly reassured that his interests are essen- tially identical with the interests of the StB, namely the benefit of the home- land and socialism. The relationship between the collaborator and the State Security was also to have been reinforced through potential rewards for the fulfilment of particularly dif- ficult tasks and small material gifts that always followed a certain period of cooperation.

SPECIAL ORDER of the Minister of National Security for State Security command staff

After an investigation into the incorrect approach in the handling of an agency collaborator

I am disciplining five State Security command officers
a/ for violating an order of a State Security commander,
b/ for endangering the good name of the Corps,
c/ for the betrayal of service secrets,
d/ for the immoral and undignified behaviour of Corps officers.

1. I sentence the deputy commander of the 3rd sector of the StB Sub Lieutenant Jiří Čermák to 20 days in prison and strip him immediately of the function of sector deputy commander, I revoke his rank and I expel him from the ranks of the SNB [National Security Corps] after the serving of his punishment.
2. I strip First Lieutenant Jiří Cikhart of the function of department commander and sentence him to 20 days in prison and strip him of officer status. Further classification will be decided by an StB commander.
3. I strip Sub Lieutenant Václav Král of the function of commander of the 3rd sector, I strip him of his officer’s rank, I sentence him to 20 days in prison and also strip him of officer status. Further classification will be decided by an StB commander.
4. I strip Staff Sergeant Karel Aresin of the function of deputy department commander, I sentence him to 20 days in prison and strip him of officer status. Further classification will be decided by an StB commander.
5. I strip Staff Sergeant Karel Polák of the function of department commander, I sentence him to 20 days in prison and strip him of officer status. Further classification will be decided by an StB commander.

All of the State Security officers listed took part on several occasions in immoral sexual aberrations in the flat of a pledged StB collaborator. A woman of dubious character with a hostile position toward the people’s democratic regime took part in these aberrations. The pledged collaborator knew the real and StB code names of all five organs, several of their telephone numbers and possessed for a certain period photographs of two of the participating organs. All of the participating organs were aware that their actions were wrong and dishonourable; however, none of them took it upon themselves to inform their commander of their transgression. The greatest degree of responsibility falls on Jiří Čermák, who as deputy sector commander should above all have been an example of exemplary fulfilment of the duties of a Corps officer.

Prague, 1 September 1951

Minister of National Security Ladislav Kopřiva

Favourable relations between the confidant and the intelligence officer was also to be reinforced by another element of cooperation – which incidentally also points to a certain analogy to the teacher-pupil relationship – education (in the StB’s conception primarily something like building a positive relationship to the then es-
tablishment). According to the directives, every controlling organ was to devote great attention to this. However, the preserved documentation tells us little about the concrete form that this education took, apart from general statements that it be coherent, systematic and specific, or that the operative officer adopt an individual approach. It must be admitted that such relationship-building methods genuinely worked in many cases (though it is difficult to determine what factor played the most important role in particular cases); some collaborators originally recruited on the basis of compromising materials gradually developed a lively interest in cooperation and essentially worked voluntarily.

Meetings between collaborators and StB officers took place at various locations. Initially (until the mid-1950s) the most frequent venues were quiet public areas (parks, side streets), cafes and restaurants or in cars. Meetings at the collaborator’s workplace or apartment, at StB offices, at National Security Corps stations or at party secretariats were not exceptional. However, such places could not guarantee total secrecy. Therefore in later periods (evidently drawing on Soviet experience) there was widespread application of the practice of holding meetings in conspiratorial or loaned flats, meaning at premises officially listed as flats, stores or offices and therefore, with the deployment of a suitable smoke-screen, providing good confidentiality.

CODE NAMES

The method by which code names were created for covert collaborators underwent a similarly interesting development to their categorisation. In the beginning (until 1948), collaborators of district intelligence branches were only distinguished by a symbol (a combination of letters and numerals) signalling the name of the regional intelligence branch (RIB) and the officer dealing with them; however, code names were not assigned. In this period (until the start of the 1950s) code names (along with relevant false IDs) were, however, popularly used by intelligence officers themselves – very often they operated clandestinely in a “hostile environment” and actually replaced the work of confidants.

The system of symbols persisted even in the period 1948–1954, when the StB was already employing secret collaborators. Though it underwent several substantive changes in connection with the currently used typology of collaborators, the symbol always contained a combination of letters (indicating the type of collaborator) and several-digit numbers. It is not yet entirely clear what key was allocated to individual collaborators; however, it seems that from 1950 at the latest, a sufficient range of numbers was employed in order that all collaborators were identified but no combination of numbers was repeated.

From the start of 1948, code names began to be employed alongside symbols. Prior to the introduction of a central register of secret collaborators at the turn of 1948 and 1949 all controlling organs bestowed or changed code names themselves. From the start of 1949, code names were compiled in advance at agency HQ in Prague14, which then assigned them at the central Prague department and later at regional HQs via regional commanders. However, such code names were exclusively for the StB’s internal requirements and were unknown to collaborators themselves. Confidants received a different code name for signing reports and contact with “their” officer.

In 1954 a practice was introduced that persisted practically unaltered until the dissolution of the StB under which collaborators decided on their own code name; only if they refused to do so did the controlling organ select a name for them. This was without doubt another means of building trust between the collaborator and the intelligence officer. Probably for the same reason StB officers were barred from using code names or pseudonyms.

At this time the complicated system of symbols combining letters and digits was abandoned; from then on all collaborators were only identified by a code name, sometimes preceded by a letter defining the type of collaborator (A for agent, I for informer, etc.). However, the number of the agency file documenting the collaboration, and in which the reports that collaborators handed in were placed, was now included in reports.

REGISTRATION AND DOCUMENTATION

The practice of maintaining documentation on every secret collaborator first appeared in regulations in the “Administrative-operational aid” from the turn of 1948 and 1949. However, at that time documentation was not held in one file but rather in two different bundles. The first contained information on the collaborator’s person and their recruitment process and was created in duplicate – one copy was stored at agency HQ and one was for the “controlling organ”. The second file gradually came to contain so-called A-sheets and B-sheets, which the controlling organ put together from the collaborator’s reports, as well as all other documents related to the collaboration. The regulations clearly stated that the true identity of the collaborator should not be apparent from the file. This file too was held in two copies – the first in the possession of the controlling organ (this also included all written reports submitted by the collaborator) and the second at the agency head office of the department in question.

The issuing of a document entitled “Registration Instructions” in February 1951 spelled major changes for this system. From then on all that existed was a so-called agent documentation file, or agent folder, in one copy only and held by the officer handling the collaborator. It comprised two parts – the first contained documents on the course of the recruitment and cooperation (including the agency oath), as well as A-sheets and B-sheets; the second contained written reports from the confidant. Naturally this file also included information on the true identity of the collaborator (and should have included their
**A-Sheets and B-Sheets**

In the period of their usage (1948 to 1954), A-sheets represented a record and first evaluation of every individual piece of information that secret collaborators presented to their controlling organ in verbal or written form. Therefore several A-lists could emerge from every meeting with a confidant, depending on how many "pieces of information" the collaborator shared or how the controlling organ divided them. They are a frequently used source in research because in the form of so-called operative material they became part of the investigative files of individual cases of "subversive activity" from that period; for historians they represent the only alternative source of information against which they can compare interrogation reports. At the same time as a source they are difficult to interpret – many researchers are unaware that the information recorded does not constitute verified facts (which StB officers were well aware of) but a mix of facts, impressions, garbled stories, slander and rumours - basically everything the collaborator heard and then imparted at a meeting. A-sheets on pre-printed forms were filled in on the basis of a prescribed schema by the confidant’s controlling organ. He entered on every such sheet not just the content of the report but also the date of the collaborator's submission, a summary, a list of persons (the report concerned), an appraisal (how true was the report), a note as to other steps already undertaken (for instance, whether he had assigned a task to the collaborator relating to the report’s content) and information as to where and how the collaborator acquired the report. Naturally A-sheets could not include the real name of the confidant, just the symbol and code name used for registration. For the most part, neither do we find in them the name of the officer who drew up the particular A-sheet; he also used his symbol only. This was usually composed as follows: it included the numerically designated department at which the given officer was deployed, followed by the first and last letters of the intelligence officer’s surname. Completed copies of the A-sheet made their way from the controlling organ to the secret collaborator’s folder and to another department of the given structure depending on what subject the given piece of information concerned. Alongside one or more A-sheets, a so-called B-sheet was to be written up after every meeting with a secret collaborator. The controlling organ included in it a description of the meeting, the collaborator’s behaviour and possible rewards or cash disbursements (e.g., payment in the restaurant where the meeting took place or the collaborator’s fare to a meeting venue).

Photograph), so it was to be held in a safe. With the issuing of the “Registration Instructions” the central registry of secret collaborators was dissolved, while maintaining lists of their names at individual department level was also banned.

Registration was renewed in 1954 by the issuing of secret Ministry of the Interior order no. 77/1954, "Announcement of instructions on the registration of Ministry of the Interior collaborators". At the same time, A-sheets and B-sheets no longer had to be typed up – secret collaborators’ reports were now processed loosely, depending on which ones the officer thought merited it. They were only provided with a uniform stamped heading in which the intelligence officer filled in data required for identification alone, i.e., their name and service classification as well as the relevant registration number of the collaborator’s file. It was evidently no longer necessary to draw up reports on the course of agency meetings (they are mentioned again in 1962). Changes were also made to the form of secret collaborators’ personal files and the method of handling them in 1954. The controlling organ continued to manage the file, which comprised two parts – the first contained documents on the collaborator’s person, their signed oath, and, for the first time, a signed CV. It also contained an assessment of cooperation to date which the handler was obliged to prepare every six months. The second part of the file contained documents relating to the handling of the collaborator and internal correspondence from individual departments relating to the collaborator in question. The entire file was once again lodged with the commander of the given department. Alongside both parts of the agent’s file there was a “folder of handwritten reports by the collaborator” containing all such reports submitted. This bundle was in the hands of the controlling organ himself.

Later changes concerning the handling of personal agency files tended to be on a smaller scale. A couple worth mentioning are the change of the title of the folder of handwritten reports in 1957 to “working file” and the unification in 1959 of the location at which personal and working files were held (with the controlling organ, not the commander). One major change was the renewal of forms in which brief records of meetings and in particular detailed content of submitted reports were entered. This occurred in 1978 and it is worth mentioning that in appearance and structure the forms greatly resembled the A-sheets done away with in 1954.

**The Form and Functioning of the Agency in Individual Periods**

**Timid beginnings (1945–1948)**

During what is referred to as the Third Republic (1945 to 1948), the State Security essentially did not use secret collaborators, focusing its energies in that period primarily on the investigation of cases of retribution. Secret collaborators did not appear among their methods until the turn of 1947 and 1948, when the intelligence service was incorporated into the State Security. Previously work with secret collaborators and intelligence work in general had been carried out at central level by an independent intelligence department of the Ministry of the Interior and at regional level by officers of regional intelligence branches. Communist Party officers quickly succeeded in taking control of both the Ministry of the Interior and individual IRBs, so the work of the entire intelligence service was fully adapted to the requirements of the Communist Party. Intelligence officers focused above all on obtaining information useful to their mother party, in particular on the activities and plans of other political parties, and on gathering comprising mate-
rivals on those in high positions who displayed insufficient inclination to the Communists’ policies.

When the non-Communist parties felt the first results of the Communists’ abuse of the intelligence service and became aware of the dangers stemming from this situation, they began exerting pressure for the dissolution of the intelligence service as an independent unit of the Ministry of the Interior and for it to be placed ideally beneath the office of the prime minister, where its activities could be better controlled. The Communists were therefore forced to dissolve the RIBs by the end of 1947, stating that the government would decide on the concrete form of the intelligence service in the future. This did not happen, however, so the Communists were able to settle the situation to their own advantage – though individual RIBs were formally abolished at the turn of 1947 and 1948, practically all of their staff were placed within the framework of the State Security. There Communist intelligence officers and their secret collaborators carried on without interruption with the work they had been doing, which, thanks to escalating differences between the Communists and other political parties, began to focus on one aim – paralysing the opposition of secret collaborators among the opponents of the new regime naturally grew. Third, nothing was necessary to deal with people from different classes. Though they carried out their work with enthusiasm and total dedication, the shortcomings listed necessarily impacted the quality of their agency network. For the most part the intelligence officers had no idea what to ask of their collaborators, meaning they often ran them at their own discretion. The selection of confidants was also ineffective – with the exception of a number of worthwhile collaborators, most often they were, alongside officers’ friends and lovers, receptionists, waiters, coat check staff, Communist Party contact men with ten juniors or small-time profiteers, thieves and other dubious sorts willing to collaborate for money. Regardless of this fact, the number of collaborators was very small – partial data (central registration did not yet exist) suggest there were at most a few dozen at every regional intelligence branch (after their dissolution at State Security regional offices) and another 100 or so at the Ministry of the Interior’s intelligence department.

**Building a network (1948–1955)**

In the fluctuating situation after the Communist Party came to power, the State Security began enjoying a privileged position that corresponded to its central mission – uncovering and liquidating all enemies of the new regime, both domestic (the church, entrepreneurs, supporters of other political parties, etc.) and foreign (Western intelligences services and their agents). The gradually escalating activities of opponents and the continued emphasis on the Stalinist doctrine of the intensification of the class struggle fostered such a strong sense of threat among Communists that they saw the existence of a powerful, active and unfeathered political police force as the key guarantee of the regime’s stability. StB officers shared that view of their role; they felt not only mandated but even duty-bound to wage a vigorous and utterly merciless struggle – in which there was neither time nor place for upholding the law – against their enemies (imagined or real). Secret collaborators were to be the most effective weapon in this struggle.

The shape of the agency in the post-1948 years was primarily influenced by three facts. First, it was finally possible to carry out an intake of new intelligence officers; commanding officers had been long calling for this but the opposition of other political parties had prevented it happening sooner. Second, thanks to the ruling party’s readiness to tolerate virtually any State Security methods, its officers were now able far more broadly to employ “tougher” methods alongside promises and appeals to civic duty, so their success rate in the recruitment of secret collaborators among the opponents of the new regime naturally grew. Third, nothing was now preventing the reconstruction of the State Security according to its leaders’ liking, allowing the creation of a numerically strong, centralised and independently functioning apparatus in which intelligence and in particular the work of covert collaborators would play a key role. To this end extensive reorganisation took place at the turn of 1948 and 1949 under which a strong central State Security department was established in Prague, along with subordinate departments in newly established regions. The cornerstone of the new organization of all such departments became “operative” sections or sectors, which were to focus predominantly on working with confidants.

In the spirit of the above-mentioned doctrine regarding the agency as the
most effective weapon, the StB’s leaders made intensive efforts to improve its hitherto wholly dissatisfactory state. Problems from the preceding period persisted – the selection of secret collaborators in particular remained inappropriate, as intelligence officers did not sign up persons capable of delivering the desired information but rather those willing to do so. Instead of arduously scouting suitable candidates within groups they needed to infiltrate, StB officers concentrated on enlisting collaborators wherever the opportunity presented itself, regardless of whether reports from such recruits would be in any way useful. Intelligence officers thus started to rectify formally another shortcoming left over from the past: the small number of collaborators. However, this did not make the network any more effective.

Naturally, talented officers did achieve certain successes. Some were relatively significant, such as the agency infiltration of then abundant “anti-state” groups. However, this was not without problems either; there was frequent use of provocation, which had to be covered up, in a complicated and often unsuccessful manner, in front of participants and sometimes the courts. Alongside previously employed methods of enlisting confidants (offering financial and other advantages, or on the basis of political conviction), there was now increased application of recruitment methods employing so-called compromising material. Blackmail, in other words. In that period comprising material most frequently concerned the previous activities of the recruited person, either focused directly against the regime or capable of being regarded as “hostile” in a certain light (for instance, helping somebody to flee the country). It was then indicated to the person whose “hostile” activity had been documented (even if only by their own testimony) that they had two choices – a lengthy jail term, or pledging to collaborate. The required response of the would-be recruit was often reinforced in advance by further drastic methods, such as kidnapping (euphemistically dubbed “secret arrest” or “isolation”), threats or actual physical violence. The deliberate creation or faking of compromising materials (such as pornographic pictures) was not unheard of either. However, the StB chiefs themselves soon began to regard these methods as undesirable. Evidently not because they were unlawful (though this gradually did become a factor) but because they produced problematic results – while blackmail victims did formally agree to collaborate, they later avoided it and sometimes even sabotaged it by delivering false information.

In an effort to stamp out the shortcomings referred to, it was repeatedly emphasised to lower StB units that agency work was the most important weapon in the fight against the enemies of the new regime and it was therefore necessary to devote due attention to the creation of a network of secret collaborators. The first binding directives and working guidelines for StB officers to follow were issued, including the aforementioned “Administrative-operational aid”. However, the StB’s top men were also typically uncertain with regard to what form agency work should take. The first three years after February 1948 are characterised by virtually continuous improvisation and the rather chaotic alternation of different conceptions. This is illustrated by the fact that there were four different typologies subdividing secret collaborators between 1948 and 1950.

From 1950 the impact of Soviet advisors on the State Security’s work became increasingly apparent. It was under their influence and careful supervision that two waves of major changes evidently meant to adapt the working methods of the StB to the Soviet model took place. The first was seen at the turn of 1950 and 1951, the second between 1953 and 1954. The advisors’ influence also made a major mark on agency work; in 1950, for instance, they brought to an end the constant changes to the typology of secret collaborators when they adapted it completely to the Soviet one, while they were also no doubt behind an extension of the practice of holding meetings with collaborators in conspiratorial or loaned apartments and the issuing of two secret ministry orders (no. 36/1951 and no. 72/1954) summing up the most common mistakes made by StB officers in work with confidants (poor choice of agents and informers, insufficient screening, poor management and control, provocations, etc.). It is interesting, however, that the second wave of changes sometimes revoked innovations from the first wave – with regard to agency work, this chiefly concerned the abolition of the central register of secret collaborators in 1951 and its revival in 1954.

The number of secret collaborators grew gradually in the post-February 1948 period, although establishing a specific number is not easy. Though there is some partial data, even then there were doubts over its credibility as in many cases it is obviously exaggerated. However, the following trend can be roughly deduced: In the first months after February 1948, the number of covert collaborators shot up – to over 400 at the Prague central department in December 1948; growth was also likely at most regional departments. In subsequent years the number listed in the agen-

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Max. several dozen (estimate)</td>
<td>c. 450</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>578</td>
<td>Min. several thousand (estimate)</td>
</tr>
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Source: SSA

behind the iron curtain 105
cy network fluctuated depending on how the criteria for assessing them changed. After 1952 the number of collaborators grew sharply, reaching over 24,000 by mid-1954. At the same time, however, there was major fluctuation – many collaborators had to be struck off soon after “recruitment” due to incompetence or unwillingness to cooperate properly.

Rise (1955–1960)
The second half of the 1950s is characterised by a gradual retreat from the mass repression of the preceding years. This was linked in part to a certain easing of international and domestic political pressure (with the exception of 1956) and with the fact that the major wave of anti-regime activities had subsided. Another important factor was an officially proclaimed effort to adhere to “socialist legality” – a demand from the ruling party that the security forces abide more rigorously to the laws in force. They had gradually been modified and toned down; sentences for particular (political) offenses were reduced and the role of the independent judiciary was boosted. These facts necessitated a change in the orientation of the StB’s work. Given that it was no longer possible to uncover (even less to fabricate) “subversive” activities by domestic opponents or foreign agents to the previous degree, from the mid-1950s StB officers shifted their attention to less serious crimes – instead of treason, terror and espionage, offenses of an economic nature began to predominate, as did the crime of leaving the country (without authorization) and sedition or defamation of the republic and its representatives. This shift in interest was officially explained by the claim that the focus of hostile activities had moved from large treasonous groups to smaller more conspiratorially organised espionage groups directly controlled by hostile Western agencies. However, the changes outlined had no impact on the State Security’s willingness to relinquish its blanket control of society via its network of secret collaborators. Quite the opposite. While previously it was possible thanks to the existence of numerous groups hostile to the regime to uncover at one time, perhaps with the help of a single collaborator, a large number of people and put them on trial, the new conditions required far more systematic and long-term agency work. Such an approach demanded another objective that the State Security adopted – informing party functionaries about the mood of the population and reactions to topical events and, last but not least, all “negative phenomena” in individual areas of life.

Throughout this period the heads of the StB and the Ministry of the Interior made strenuous efforts to improve the functioning and the composition of the agency network, including the structure of the network and the extent of collaboration. The number of collaborators peaked in 1958 and then started to decline, with the exception of 1956, when the number increased significantly. The number of collaborators in 1959 was similar to 1958, but then declined gradually until 1960, when the number dropped sharply. The decline in the number of collaborators continued until 1962, with a slight increase in 1963. The number of collaborators then remained relatively stable until 1966, when it started to decline again, with a slight increase in 1967.

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</tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
succeeding to a certain degree. Certain professionalism began to manifest itself that some commanders and rank-and-file officers (particularly those who had served before 1948) worked to achieve. The introduction of more systematic training also had an influence (not only with regard to agency work), as in particular did the presence and supervision of Soviet advisors. Recruiting people just because the situation presented itself or because they were willing (without regard to whether their information was usable at the time) was very slowly replaced by a more targeted approach - assessing the situation in a given object, selecting the most suitable candidate and enlist their collaboration. In the category of agent in particular the preference for acquiring collaborators on the basis of compromising materials remained in place; however, it was emphasized that controlling organs should attempt in their own way to "re-educate" such collaborators.

It gradually became the norm that controlling organs systematically assigned tasks to individual collaborators, thus directing their work, as well checking the veracity of their reports. The practice of using loaned as well as conspiratorial apartments began to be introduced. Nevertheless, in many cases the hitherto method persisted, with meetings taking place at isolated spots away from populated areas or in cars. In addition, the system by which their superiors controlled StB officers was reinforced.

The number of secret collaborators in this period rose steeply, from just under 25,000 in mid-1954 to almost 38,000 at the end of 1955. However, the following year there was a sharp fall to 28,000. Though the coincidence of the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party and subsequent events in Hungary and Poland might suggest a "revolt" on the part of secret collaborators, a mass rejection of collaboration out of a belief in an imminent change of regime, the reality is most likely otherwise - it was the result of large-scale screenings of collaborators aimed at ridding the agency network of inactive or unreliable agents or informers.

The year 1955 saw the issuing of a Ministry of the Interior order "On shortcomings in agency work" describing (for the umpteenth time after 1948 and not for the last time) the situation in this area as deeply unsatisfactory. The causes outlined were nothing new: instead of the active agency working of hostile elements, intelligence officers signed up agents and informers any which way, meaning that at regional departments the network was cluttered up with spreaders of disinformation, buck passers and ballast in general. The order therefore instructed all subordinate departments to carefully, unhurriedly, check the condition of the agency network and get rid of unpromising collaborators - both those who appear to be buck passers, spreaders of disinformation or have been uncovered and those who don't have the opportunities or skills to work on StB targets. In future StB commanders were to limit the random and incoherent recruitment of agents.77

The implementation of this order thoroughly "cleared out" the agency network and, though complaints in that regard continued to appear, it seems that a certain improvement in the selection and running of secret collaborators did actually take place. This is illustrated by the composition of the agency network, where a gradual increase in the share of agents (who were in a higher category) compared to informers began: while in 1955 agents accounted for one quarter, in 1957 it was more than a third and in 1959 it was over 43%.78 Therefore when in the following years the total number of covert collaborators again rose steeply (to almost 42,000 at the end of 1959) it is likely that a far greater percentage of them were actual active confidants, not just collaborators "on paper".

Stagnation (the 1960s)
The 1960s saw further transformations in the role of the StB within the system of Communist rule, with an instrument of direct repression gradually becoming more of an agent of preventative control and surveillance of the entire society. In 1960 the political elite announced that the foundations of socialism had been achieved in Czechoslovakia, suggesting that domestic enemies of the regime had effectively been defeated and offered no threat of immediate danger. The Communist Party's official position was that, parallel with the consolidation and development of socialism, there had been a decline in activities targeted against it, because the overwhelming majority identified with it internally. There were even certain gradual curbs on the activities of the StB; there was for instance a decline in officer numbers, while its organisation was also "downsized" to a certain degree (in 1964 and 1966). A change of approach was also proclaimed. Instead of "internal enemies" it was primarily to "fight" foreign enemies (and their domestic helpers): The blade of our security is chiefly directed at the liquidation of the external enemy. [...] This primarily concerns the proper focus of our activities on the uncovering of those enemies who have connections abroad, are briefed and given tasks by foreign intelligence services to carry out espionage, sabotage, subversion or other grave hostile activities.79

However, everyday practice did not correspond to these declared principles; after all, only a quarter of all StB agents worked in units focused against the "external enemy", which was also reflected in the structure of the agency network - over three-quarters of secret collaborators were operating under units focused on "internal enemies" of the state.80 Immediate goals and the methods of achieving them also changed. For senior officers this meant not only repression but preventative actions or direct "education": For example, the mission of the organs of the State Security will be extended when it comes to helping the party in educating people to be vigilant. The educational role of the State Security will increase with regard to people who have become randomly involved in subversive activities as a result of their political immaturity.81 It was emphasised, therefore, that it was not necessary to look for sabotage or hostile activity behind every shortcoming, misconduct or accident: We frequently gather and ag-
glomerate minor agency information about various shortcomings. Wouldn’t it be more correct to right from the beginning alert the relevant organisation so that within its powers it can either resolve them or use its weight to bring them to attention of the relevant economic or political officials?\footnote{22}

All of these views appeared in new directives issued in 1962, specifically in their introductory “ideological” section. The “practical” section differed just slightly, in some “technical” details, from the preceding instructions (from 1954), which shows that the StB leadership’s conception of the form work with confidants should take was at this time already stable (its implementation in everyday practice naturally remains a question). The only substantial change concerned the recruitment of secret collaborators. According to the new instructions, the previous focus on acquiring agents on the basis of compromising materials was mistaken as it led to frequent illegal behaviour and negatively impacted the reliability and activeness of agents so acquired. The directives therefore unambiguously favoured the enlisting of collaborators on a “patriotic basis”.

As regards the shape of the agency network, the 1960s represented a period of some stagnation in the sense that it managed to attain a certain acceptable standard and maintain it long-term. In 1963 the ratio of agents and residents to informers stood at nearly one to one and it continued to improve to the benefit of higher category collaborators.\footnote{23} As early as the 1950s the high degree of fluctuation among confidants also declined – the available figures from 1967 show that almost two-thirds of registered collaborators had been active more than five years.\footnote{24} This positive data from the StB’s perspective was counter-balanced by the fact that the overall number of collaborators fell consistently in the 1960s, most sharply in 1962 and 1963, when they declined by a full third, and in 1968, when there was a similar downturn. The losses in 1968 were undoubtedly linked to the liberalisation in the country and an unprecedented wave of criticism of the State Security that led many collaborators to refuse to cooperate further. As yet there is no satisfactory explanation for the downturn in 1962 and 1963, though it was perhaps linked in some way to the aforementioned changes in methods and targets adopted by the StB in that period.

\section*{From new beginnings to the bitter end (1970–1990)}

For State Security officers the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s was a “calm” and “fertile” period; compared to the 1960s there was a marked hardening of the political situation and words like repression were heard once again. However, it did not necessarily have to take the form of imprisonment; frequently it was “merely” confined to various kinds of official persecution and harassment. Well aware of the central role played by the StB in maintaining their monopoly on power, Communist Party leaders resolutely silenced all voices critical of its activities and ensured no more such voices were heard in the official media. The Ministry of the Interior and its officers became a favoured and universally supported element of the state administration. In return, the StB displayed total loyalty to the Communist Party and deliberately forewent any interventions into the higher echelons of the state administration or among party functionaries (the directives expressly forbade the enlisting of agents in those milieus).

StB officers again increased the focus of their activities and those of their network of agents on the so-called enemy within as well as foreign adversaries. This saw the application of a concept that elements of the StB leadership, unhappy with the then change of focus toward foreign adversaries, had been since working on since the first half of the 1960s – so-called ideologival diversion. This was allegedly based on the fact that hostile intelligence services were no longer just acquiring “classic” agents (capable of delivering reports from economic or security apparatuses) but were focusing on the subversion of the state “from within” (through propaganda and fomenting tension or conflict), employing to that end broader social groups within which they selected individuals who were “ideologically unsteady” and “volatile”.\footnote{25} This theory was unambiguously confirmed in the eyes of StB officers by the events of 1968 and 1969.

The new situation called for the issuing of updated directives with a suitably stylized ideological introduction, which occurred in 1972. The directives brought a number of substantial changes, such as the aforementioned abolition of the category of informer, the reintroduction of detailed, pre-printed agency report registration formulas and an obligation to recruit secret collaborators only when accompanied by another officer designated by a commander. Recruiting collaborators on the basis of compromising materials was “rehabilitated” – the instructions stated that none of the three possible incentives to collaboration (material benefits, patriotic motives and compromising materials) could be regarded as in itself preferred.\footnote{26}

There is as yet relatively little available knowledge in the literature on the workings of the agency network during so-called normalisation and the subsequent period. This is despite the fact that there is a great amount of preserved archival material. However, their registration remains in the form used by the StB itself, meaning it is easy to locate files on particular persons or objects but difficult to achieve a general overview. It can be asserted that the StB maintained the standard that it had reached in preceding periods in this area and continued to consolidate it, with officers acquiring collaborators practically everywhere they deemed appropriate: The only decisive factor in acquiring agents was the degree of StB interest and the time it had at its disposal. If it received both, it caught 20 to 25\% of the “souls” from a given group that it was focused on.\footnote{27} It did not just employ its agents to acquire information but also in efforts to actively direct the activities of certain groups (known as agents of influence).
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From the fragmentary information published to date it is apparent that after the losses sustained in 1968 and 1989 the network of agents consolidated again in quantitative terms at the start of the 1970s and the number of collaborators again started growing (the overall state is as yet unknown). This trend continued until 1982 when growth gave way to stagnation or mild decline. There was a sharp fall in overall numbers in 1985 after principles and criteria for assessing the state of the network had been agreed the previous year. From then on there was a consistent decline in the number of collaborators with the largest (understandable) downswing coming at the end of 1989.

The abolition of the STB in February 1990 also spelled the official end of the existence of the network of agents. However, for the covert collaborators themselves that chapter of their lives was by no means closed. On the contrary, after the publication of the Cibulka lists of secret STB collaborators in particular the issue came to the fore of media attention and became the subject of a broad public and political debate that persists to this day. The individual responsibility of former covert collaborators for their own actions, the extent of their guilt and the legitimacy of their deactivation, without knowledge of the specific background of each case, continue to represent highly controversial subjects for both experts and lay people.

NOTES
1 In this context State Security refers to the Czechoslovak political police in the period 1945–1990. It should be pointed out, however, that the name was not used with the same meaning through the entire period in question and its concrete content changed in the course of the period.
2 The Czechoslovak political police did not use the term informer. In this context we will for reasons of style use it as a synonym for the term “secret collaborator”.
3 Regarding typology, see Gula, M. (1994).
8 There were two slightly different variants – for the Prague central department and for regional commands. See ABS, f. Statisticko-evidenční odbor I. díl [Statistics and Records Department, 1st Part] (A 31/1), inv. j. 1 and 2. A full version of that document, like other regulations on work with secret collaborators, can also be found on the website of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes http://www.ustrcr.cz/cs/smernice-aop-evidenci-stb (quoted as of 20 November 2015).
9 Educational attainment among both rank-and-file STB officers and their commanders was very low (perhaps with the exception of priests and criteria for assessing the state of the network had been agreed the previous year. From then on there was a consistent decline in the number of collaborators with the largest (understandable) downswing coming at the end of 1989.
10 This is illustrated tellingly by the case of the “recruitment” of parish priest Václav Altrichter in April 1984. When the cleric refused to sign the agency oath voluntarily, the officers present first threatened him and his family with work-related sanctions. When that didn’t work, they resorted to threats of physical liquidation. See Blažek, P. (2007). Oruželová návrat Kopotánci. Závody z případu porušení směrcích A-oper L-3 příslušníků Správy STB KS SNB Ostrava. Pamět a dějiny, yr. 1, no. 1, 108–119.
11 It was noted in 1971 for instance that frequently the assigning of tasks is not thought through and the agency is sent to the object without any goal and the controlling organ relies on what the collaborator himself “dredges up” and delivers. It often happens that at meetings the controlling organ takes possession of reports that he doesn’t even read. Tomek, (2008), 79.
12 Ibid.
Prokop Tomek refers to the case of an informer enlisted by coercion in 1954 on the basis of work place transgression that could have had serious consequences for him at the time. However, though the original reason for the collaboration gradually faded in importance, the confidant willingly worked for another 33 years, not even breaking off the collaboration in the period of 1968 and 1989. Tomek (2008), 76.


Koudelka (1993), 25.


This data applies to the entire StB with the exception of the military counterintelligence, where the share of informers was higher. See Koudelka (1993), 56. This is illustrated by the situation at the 2nd section of the Regional Administration of the Ministry of the Interior in Bratislava. See Kinčok, B. (2008). Agentúrno-operatívna činnosť II. odboru Krajskej správy Ministerstva vnútra Bratislava v rokoch 1954 – 1959. Pamiát národa, No. 4. 41–55.


Koudelka (1993), 54.


Ibid, 18.

Koudelka (1993), 56.

Ibid, 60.


Československá socialistická republika

Přísne tajné!

ZÁVAZEK

Zavazuji se dobrovolně spolupracovat s federální československou kontrarozvědkou a odpovědně plnit všechny úkoly, které mě budou v zájmu obrany Československé socialistické republiky uloženy.

Zavazuji se, že za žádných okolností neprozradím svoji spolupráci a zachovám v naprosté tajnosti všechny skutečnosti, které se na základě spolupráce dozvím.

O své spolupráci sním hovořit jedině se svým řídícím orgánem, jím představeným, doručitelem stanoveného hesla nebo tohoto závazku.

Jsem si plně vědom důvěry, která je mně spolupraci s federální československou kontrarozvědkou prokazována. Při předávání poznatků budu používat krycího jména ČESTOVATEL.

podpis

V Praze dne 9.11.1979

odříh

ověřil
Adolf Hitler in a window of Prague Castle being greeted by Prague Germans, 16 March 1939
Photo: Czech News Agency
15 March 1939 and the occupation of Prague Castle

The occupation of the Czech lands in March 1939 and Adolf Hitler’s stay in Prague on 15 and 16 March 1939 have been described in both specialist and memoir literature. Yet new archival materials relating to these events are still emerging. These include the report on the occupation of Prague Castle from May 1939 by JUDr. Karel Strnad, an official of the President’s Office, and two German documents: on President Emil Hácha’s return from Berlin on 15 March 1939 and on Adolf Hitler’s stay at Prague Castle.

PAVEL ZEMAN

Strnad’s report is an authentic testimony to the events at Prague Castle from 14 March to 16 April 1939. It is one of the historical archival materials deposited in the Archives of the Office of the President of the Republic relating to the liquidation of the second Czechoslovak Republic. There are no documents relating to the report. We don’t know whether its author wrote it on his own initiative or at the request of the President’s Office. It was registered in its official documents in 1948. It was used for citations probably for the first time in 2006 by the historian and long-time archivist of the Archives of Prague Castle Věra Malá. However, she only used the passage dealing with 15 March 1939 and the arrival of Adolf Hitler in Prague. Therefore, the report has now been published in its entirety for the first time.

The official record of the German embassy in Prague dated 15 March 1939 provides information about the instructions of the German Foreign Ministry on how to welcome E. Hácha at Prague’s Wilson Station after his return from Berlin. It is part of the official files of the German embassy in Prague from the period 1918–1939, deposited in the archive collection of the Prague Embassy (Prag Gesandtschaft) in the Federal Foreign Office Political Archive (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes) in Berlin.

The letter by Ludolf von Alvensleben of 4 April 1939 to H. Himmler’s daughter, Gudrun, whom he often met as the main adjutant of her father, depicts Adolf Hitler’s feelings during his stay in the seat of Czech kings. The letter comes from the documents of Reichsführer-SS’s personal staff, which are archived in the Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv) in Berlin. An excerpt from it was published, for example, in 2008 by the German historian Peter Longerich, which incorrectly attributed its authorship to the head of Reichsführer-SS’s personal staff Karl Wolff. Both German documents have been published in the Czech translation by the author of the article for the first time.

The most extensive is the report by Karel Strnad dated 10 May 1939. Its author was one of the most experienced officials of the Office of the President of the Republic (OPR), with a highly developed sense of responsible performance of the public service. At the time of the Protectorate, he tried to actively resist German efforts to modify Prague Castle in the Nazi spirit. In 1943, he was arrested by the Gestapo and a year later, in Dresden, he was executed. These facts form the frame of reference of his report and give it the character of a credible historical document.

The report begins on 14 March 1939, when the German preparations for the military occupation of the rest of Bohemia and Moravia, from which Slovakia seceded on that day, were already in full swing. The clashes between Czechs and Germans provoked by Germans in many Bohemian and Moravian towns after 10 March 1939 raised concerns in the Presidential Office about demonstrations in Prague which could hit the seat of the President’s Office just like in September 1938. Therefore, on 14 March 1939, it decided to strengthen the security of the entire area of Hradčany. Instead of the protesters, German soldiers began occupying Prague Castle on the second day around 11:00 am. The first apparently appeared around 9:15 am.

According to Karel Strnad, the Germans’ arrival led to chaos. In order to monitor what was happening in the complex, he was based in the building of the Old Provostry in the Third Courtyard, next to St. Vitus Cathedral. This enabled him to watch the cathedral, where the St. Vitus treasure and crown jewels after their return from Slovakia in early October 1938 were stored. His testimony from the first day of the occupation not only depicts the chaos that was there, but also illuminates Adolf Hitler’s arrival at Prague Castle.

After the dramatic night negotiation with President Hácha in Berlin on 15 March 1939, finished by sign-
ing the protocol on the dissolution of Czechoslovak statehood at 3:55 am, Hitler travelled with a large retinue by train from the Anhalter Bahnhof to Česká Lípa after 8 am. Originally, his journey to Bohemia was to have the character of inspection of advancing German troops. After arriving in Česká Lípa at around 2:00 pm, he received the representatives of the Czech Germans Konrad Henlein and Karl Hermann Frank, and heard a report on the smooth course of the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia. Despite the disapproval of some members of the escort and security staff, he decided to go by car to Prague and stay at Prague Castle. According to some witnesses, he talked about the trip to Prague during the train ride to Česká Lípa. Around 4:00 pm, his military adjutant, Nikolaus von Below, left for Prague with the task of ensuring, together with the German embassy and the military command, accommodation in Prague. The motorcade with Adolf Hitler left at about 4:45 pm, heading through Mělník to Prague. The German embassy was informed of the trip at around 4:00 pm. Hitler arrived at Prague Castle after 7:00 pm.

We know from Strnad’s report that Hitler came from the Powder Bridge, turning from the Second Courtyard to the passage to the Third Courtyard. Due to the fact that the Third Courtyard was blocked by military vehicles, he had to stop in front of St. Vitus Cathedral, walk up to the Third Courtyard to the underpass leading to the presidential flat, from there walk to the Second Courtyard, and continue through the side underpass to the First Courtyard. Here he entered the South Wing, where an official suite for foreign visitors had been prepared on the 1st floor for him.

Karel Strnad learned about his journey from German officers at 5:00 pm. The President’s Office staff then prepared his accommodation. Food was ordered by the German embassy in well-known Lippert’s delicatessen. It served a cold buffet for about fifty people twice, because the first cold dinner prepared in the Throne Hall was eaten by the officers of General Blaskowitz’s staff.

The faithfulness of Strnad’s description of Hitler’s arrival and stay at Hradčany is confirmed by other evidence (see note No. 2). Above all, it is more or less identical to the memories of the chargé d’affaires of
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the German embassy in Prague and one of the major German persons in Prague that day, Andor Hencke.

Hitler spent the night from 15 to 16 March at the Castle in consultation with his political and military escort and with representatives of Czech Germans, as well as in preparation for the proclamation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. He also reportedly tasted Pilsner beer and, although a vegetarian, Prague ham.

He also had an intensive programme the following day, when he received K. H. Frank, greeted the gathered Prague Germans from a window and, together with Reich Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, Reich Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick and head of the Reich Chancellery Hans Lammers, signed the decree establishing the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, which was then given by Joachim von Ribbentrop to President Hácha. Furthermore, he heard a report from the commander in chief of the German occupation troops, General Walther von Brauchitsch, about the course of the military occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, and in addition to a number of German and Czech politicians, soldiers and officials he received President Hácha during a private audience and met with General Jan Syrový. After 3:00 pm, he reviewed Prague German students in the First Courtyard, appreciating their “struggle” for German Prague before 15 March. Subsequently, he went by car to Česká Lípa. Thence he proceeded by train to Moravia, where he visited Brno on 17 March and in the evening of the same day he arrived in Vienna.

Like other testimonies, Strnad’s report contains some ambiguities. These include statements about the participation of President Hácha in the dinner served by Hitler on the Castle premises in the evening on 15 March. Their meeting on that day is also mentioned by A. Hencke. According to him, in the evening on 15 March Hácha was informed by the Reich Chancellor about the forthcoming decree on the Protectorate, proclaimed the following day. Others don’t confirm this meeting. For example, Josef Kliment states in his unpublished memoirs that Hácha wanted to meet with Hitler after his arrival in Prague in the evening on 15 March, but Hitler didn’t accept him until the following day.

What is valuable is Strnad’s description of the gradual occupation of the Castle by the German army and negotiation with the German military command about vacating the space for German troops, which applied from 16 March to both standard and official rooms used by President Hácha and his office. It adds specific details to Czech studies and texts that, without giving sources, describe the circumstances of the military occupation of Prague Castle. Not only this finding but, for example, also some new foreign studies dealing with the circumstances of the breakup of Czecho-Slovakia show that, based on a thorough study of both domestic
and foreign (mainly German) sources, it is necessary to reanalyze the circumstances of military occupation of Prague on 15 March 1939, Adolf Hitler's stay in Prague from 15 to 16 March, as well as preparation and drafting a decree establishing the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. According to the German historian Angela Hermann, the decree was prepared before 15 March, i.e. not during the night from 15 to 16 March as testified in the Nuremberg trial by Hitler's men directly participating in the events. There is not even a satisfactory explanation of whether Reich Minister of the Interior W. Frick was at the Castle on 15 March. According to agency reports, he didn't arrive in Prague until the morning of 16 March, and in the meantime he was represented by the State Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior Wilhelm Stuckart. K. H. Frank's claim about W. Frick's participation in Hitler's journey to Bohemia and Prague on 15 March that was stated in October 1945 during interrogations held by Czechoslovak security authorities has not been confirmed by other sources. The published documents don't shed any more light on these issues. Yet they significantly complement the previously known facts. Strnad's report is the most detailed known contemporary testimony on the Nazi occupation of Prague Castle.

**DOCUMENT 1**

**1939, 10 May - Occupation of Prague Castle by the German army**

On 14/III 1939 in the morning, I was informed by the Military Office of the President of the Republic that an action could be expected by the Reich German army against us. It was thought that perhaps it would be occupation of some town, such as Olomouc, Brno, Pilsen, which had been previously talked about. Immediately I organized a meeting in my office, which was attended by c[hief] u[nion] e[xecutive] Dr Jiřík, on behalf of the castle guard, by pol[e] e[xecutive] Jakubec and Pol. Major Toman, on behalf of the Hradčany police, and by director Hanuš, on behalf of the economic administration. All shared a concern that demonstrations might occur in Prague if some other regions were occupied by the German army, and

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The Reichsregierung fordert
1) dass die bewaffnete Macht und die Polizeitruppen in ihren Kasernen verbleiben und die Raffen niederlegen;
2) dass ein Startverbot für alle Militär-, Verkehrs- und Privatflugzeuge ergeht, und dass Militärflugzeuge in den Friedensflughäfen abgesägt werden;
3) dass sämtliche Flugabwehrgeschütze und Flugabwehrmaschinengewehre aus den Feuerstellungen gezogen und in Kasernen abgestellt werden;
4) dass an Flugplätzen und ihren Anlagen keine Veränderungen vorgenommen werden;
5) dass keinerlei Unterbrechung des öffentlichen Lebens stattfindet, dass vielmehr die Weiterarbeit aller Behörden sichergestellt wird, besonders der Eisenbahn und der Post, die zur Verfügung der einsrückenden Inhaber der vollziehenden Gewalt zu halten sind.

6) dass keine Störungen des wirtschaftlichen Lebens erfolgen, und dass insbesondere Banken, Handel und Industrie weiterarbeiten;
7) dass in der Öffentlichen Meinungsaussicherung, sei es in der Presse, in Schauspielen, Rundfunk oder in sonstigen öffentlichen Veranstaltungen, vollkommene Zurückhaltung beobachtet wird.

Truppen, die Anstalten treffen, sich zur Nehr zu setzen, werden gefaehrlich angegriffen und vernichtet. Militärflugzeuge, die ihre Landeplätze verlassen, werden angegriffen und abgeschossen. Flughäfen, die Abwehrmassnahmen treffen, werden mit Bomben angegriffen.

Terms of the Government of Nazi Germany concerning the unconditional surrender of the Czechoslovak state. Berlin, 15 March 1939. Copy. The original is deposited in the PAA in Berlin.

Photo: AOPR
that, after the experience of September 1938, Prague Castle must be secured against the intrusion of protestors. A detailed plan of defence was prepared, and 240 gendarmes and 110 men of the financial guard were called up to the Castle. The gendarmes were accommodated in the Spanish Hall, and the financial guard in the Ernestinum. Safety considerations demanded that the gendarmes were held inside the Castle perimeter in order to intervene from the centre to all sides. There was no room at the Castle other than the Spanish Hall which would suffice for such a considerable number of gendarmes and which could be heated. The hall was equipped with long runners, and mattresses were borrowed from the municipality. That afternoon seven officers arranged the night-time emergency service with the economic administration, especially at the fire and technical guardhouse. That afternoon the President of the Republic went to Berlin. The departure made us suspect that these were more serious matters. The castle guard was on full alert. Like in the autumn, a permanent military service was introduced at the castle command, in which, apart from the officers of the military office, I permanently participated along with C. U. E. Scherks and director Hanuš. From there we were in constant contact with the castle guard, gendarmerie, police, financial guard and economic administration. The police directorate gave us regular reports on what was happening in the city. There was a concern that the population would respond to the evening news announced by radio that the German army had occupied Moravian Ostrava and was advancing towards Místek. According to the reports of the police headquarters, larger groups of people were only in Wenceslas Square, but these dispersed after 11 pm and the city was quiet. The emergency platoon of gendarmerie, standing in the Second Courtyard, was therefore withdrawn, but strengthened patrols were left along the wide perimeter of Prague Castle (Klárov – Marais Road – Czernin Palace – Nerudova Street). The military office was in permanent contact with the general staff. Nothing new happened during the night. It was only on 15/III after 4 am that the first report came saying that the German army would occupy the territory of our republic and that our army must hand over weapons without resistance. Then the Czechoslovak radio broadcast this message at regular intervals, urging people to stay calm and to work as usual. Therefore, I gave a command to the economic administration and the construction administration in Prague Castle, as well as to the Lány castle administration, that everyone should work as usual and that in Prague no one should unnecessarily walk in courtyards. The police were instructed to take the German officers after their arrival to the Office of the President of the Republic, where they would be received by the minister, Dr Havelka, along with union heads, Dr Křivánek and Dr Popelka. Around 11 am, the first units of the German army came to the Castle to occupy the courtyards and place guards at the entrances to the Castle, on the spots where the former guards of the Czechoslovak castle guard were placed. Subsequently, a 6-member deputation of German army officers led by generals presented themselves in the President’s Office. They were received by the minister, Dr Havelka, and by the aforementioned section heads. After midday, I was invited by the military attaché, Col. Tousain, to an interview at the German embassy. I performed the visit accompanied by director Hanuš. Col. Tousain introduced us to Governor Schicketanz as the military commander of Prague Castle. With him we discussed the accommodation possibilities for the German Burgwache (castle guard – author’s note), command and, if necessary, any distinguished guest. We considered the rooms used by the castle guard until now (First Courtyard) and the southern nose in the First Courtyard. However, we could not arrange any definite programme of accommodation, because nobody knew who would come to the Castle. It was a rather introductory conversation in which both parties ensured each other of their good will. I was also assured that no castle car would be seized. After returning to the Castle, we found the Second and Third Courtyard of the Castle full of large military trucks, and more and more were coming until it was impossible to pass through them. Then a blizzard started, while more and more platoons of German troops kept coming, seeking accommodation at the Castle. There was chaos. In order to make the agreements faster, I officiated permanently in director Hanuš’s office, the location of which on the ground floor of the old provostry was the most suitable. This is where the new military castle commander of the castle, Schicketanz, later came. We agreed to attempt to provide shelter under the roof of the Castle only to those platoons that had official service at the Castle. But it was chaos. Everybody claimed that they needed to be at the Castle, and the new military commander of the Castle could neither confirm nor deny it. I gave orders to the gendarmerie to vacate the Spanish Hall, which was occupied by the German Burgwache with their pallets. Straw was brought for other troops and laid in the gallery. We provided all of our own pallets, which were then laid in the corridors in the middle wing and in the corridor of the economic administration. On the first day, 1,000 Ger. soldiers slept at the Castle and approximately the same number were refused by us and sent elsewhere. The officers kept coming with new requests, but particularly they demanded plans of the Castle. At 5 pm I learned from the officers confidentially that Reich Chancellor Hitler’s arrival was expected at 7 pm. The southern nose in the First Courtyard, which was previously adapted as a wing for distinguished guests, was chosen for his and his entourage’s accommodation (K. Henlein, generals). This is where the Romanian king and crown prince stayed during their visit to Prague. The guest flats were hastily cleaned up by the economic administration. Then, over plans, I discussed security and ceremonial matters for the arrival of the Reich Chancellor with the officers of the general staff. His arrival was determined in the direction from Hradčany Square, and in the First Courtyard at the northern nose the entire Burgwache was to be standing, the car was to come to the underpass in the southern nose, where the Chancellor was to get out and, together with his entourage, go to his flat on the 1st floor of the nose. The matter was constantly changed, new officers kept coming with new commands and, finally, it was arranged as follows: At 7:15 pm the Reich Chancellor arrived with a number of cars from the Powder Bridge to the Second Courtyard, the procession turned through the underpass to the Third Courtyard, where, however, it had to stop at behind the iron curtain
St. Vitus Cathedral, because the courtyard was completely blocked by trucks. The Reich Chancellor got out of his car and, together with his entourage, made his way on foot between the vehicles up to the underpass leading to the presidential flat. There, upon knocking, the door was opened by the castle guard members, and the procession was let through the second door to the Second Courtyard, from where the guests walked through the side underpass to the First Courtyard and then to the guest flats. Immediately after that the Reich Chancellor held a meeting with the generals in the throne room. Meanwhile, at 7:45 pm Mr. President returned to the Castle from his trip to Berlin. It was already during his journey that a train delay was reported. Later, at approximately 9 pm, the Reich Chancellor was having dinner in the throne room, which was also attended by Mr. President. Not much was known about the arrival of the Reich Chancellor even among German soldiers at the castle. At about 1 am the place was more or less quiet. There were no new troops coming, and whoever was at the Castle was sleeping. We also closed the office and, when leaving, carefully stepped over the Ger. soldiers sleeping on the floor.

On 16/III 1939, concerns about accommodation began early in the morning. The entire northern nose in the First Courtyard was vacated and handed over for the disposal of the German command. The officers of the military office were moved to the 3rd floor of the outbuilding in front of the Vladislav Hall in the Third Courtyard. The ground floor and the 1st floor of the south wing in the Third Courtyard were also vacated, and the officials were provisionally moved to the 2nd and 3rd floors of the same wing. The vacated rooms on the ground floor were taken by the Burgwache and mil. doctor, and on the 1st floor by the mil. command. In the morning, I was asked by Governor Schicketanz and Governor Heyne to put all the official rooms on the 1st floor of the south wing from the Matthias Gate to the balcony in the Third Courtyard at the disposal of the command of the 3rd Corps. I refused to do so and I explained to the gentlemen that these are rooms used by Mr. President. They did not insist, but after lunch they repeated the request. After a prolonged discussion we agreed that we would go together to General Felber, to whom I would give an explanation on the use of these rooms. We went to the general together (both Ger. officers, dir. Hanuš and me) at 3 pm. On the way to the Third Courtyard, the Ger. officers remembered that at that time the R.[eich] Chancellor was leaving the Castle, as well as Prague, and that Gen. Felber was in his suite. We went to the First Courtyard, where along the northern nose the

Entrance room and office of the official suite on the first floor of the South Wing of Prague Castle, where Adolf Hitler was accommodated for the night from 15 to 16 March 1939.

The photographs show the state in 1936.

Photo: AOPR
Burgwache was standing with music, and along the Matthias Gate stood a platoon of young men in grey shirts without hats. Some, standing in the 1st row, had their heads bandaged. Opposite them were six girls in civilian clothes. Hradčany Square was closed by a line of troops from the archbishopric to the Schwarzenberg Palace. The Reich Chancellor reviewed the platoon of honour of the Burgwache, walked around the line of young men and shook hands with every girl. Then he got into an open car and went towards Neruda Street. Behind the rear seats of the car, where the Reich Chancellor sat, were 2 uniformed people on raised seats who could clearly see ahead and both sides.77 After that we visited Gen. Felber at his office on the vacated 1st floor in the Third Courtyard, where yesterday were the officers of the civilian office of the President. I explained to him that the salons that they wanted are used by Mr. President, that they are his official office, his reception and conference rooms, offices of his secretaries, that we cannot do without those rooms and that we cannot use them freely. General Felber acknowledged our difficulties charmingly and stressed that they did not intend to make official work difficult for Mr. President or his office at all, but that they urgently needed the rooms and that they would really appreciate if we offered the rooms to them. He said that they needed the rooms for the time when the command of the 3rd Corps would be at the castle, not longer than to the Easter holidays (9-10/IV), and then they would return them. We parted after the agreement that I would report the matter to Minister Dr. Havelka.

On the following day, that is 17/III, Mr. President decided to grant Gen. Felber’s request and to officiate and receive visits in his flat on the 2nd floor until Easter. On the same day, Mr. President received 3rd Corps commander General Blaskowitz, to whom – upon prior request communicated to me by Governor Heyne – he offered the southern entrance in the First Courtyard for use. After the audience, only the documents of Mr. President and his secretary were moved to the flat on the 2nd floor, otherwise the salons remained untouched. In this state they were then handed over to the 3rd Corps command.

The influx of German troops stopped for the time being, but the Second Courtyard and Third Courtyard were still filled with military trucks and motorcycles. In the courtyards the soldiers refuelled, repaired cars, oiled them and tested engines, so particularly in the Third Courtyard the granite tiles were damaged by spilled oil. The German soldiers closed the First Courtyard with guards, so it was only possible to enter the Castle from Hradčany through the Fourth Courtyard.78 However, on request, they allowed the Cardinal to pass through the Matthias Gate during the Easter holidays. The Third Courtyard was closed by guards at the underpass to St. Vitus Cathedral and under the corridor to the oratory. Passage was only allowed to those who could produce an identity card issued by the 3rd Corps command. These identity cards were given to all employees of the President’s Office. Checks were conducted liberally, and there were no checks at the entrance under the balcony to the Third Courtyard at all.

On 16/III, the financial guard obviously vacated the Ernestinum, and the building was taken over by the German army. Our primary concern was to vacate the Spanish Hall and the gallery, where about 750 Ger. soldiers still had their quarters. The German military command of the Castle acknowledged our reasons and was willing to vacate both halls, but it required a spare room at the Castle, because the Burgwache could not be accommodated outside the Castle. It was only possible to consider the middle wing. Meanwhile, some officials arrived from Berlin to prepare rooms for the protectorate. They demanded 200 rooms at the Castle. Ad–BFer a lengthy negotiation, when the representatives of the protectorate saw for themselves that the Castle does not have so many rooms available, they focused their request on the middle wing. So when it was clear that even after the departure of the troops it would not be possible to keep the middle wing for official purposes of the office, it was decided to move the registry from the 1st floor of the middle wing to the current rooms of the Castle archives in the south wing in the Third Courtyard (from the Third Courtyard: underground, from the garden on the ramparts: 1st floor) and the archives to the adjacent 2 rooms, which can be accessed from the vane staircase. After minor modifications (stoves, wooden floors, telephones, etc.) the relocation was completed. The troops then moved to the vacated 1st floor in the middle wing from the Spanish Hall and the gallery. This happened in late April. At that time, the Ger. military command of the Castle ordered the Ministry of For. Affairs79 to immediately vacate the 2nd floor and a part of the 3rd fl. of the middle wing, which was taken over by the soldiers from the gallery after vacation. For the sake of completeness, it is also necessary to mention that on the very day of the occupation the Ger. military administration established its own telephone exchange next to ours (3rd floor of the middle wing). After transitional changes, at the beginning of April 1939 Prague Castle looked as follows: the First Courtyard was closed to all civilians and the gates were manned by guards.

Com.[mand] in Chief, General of Infantry Blaskowitz and his staff were accommodated in the southern nose.

The northern nose was occupied by the army: the ground floor of the guardhouse by the Burgwache, the 1st floor by the Military Command of the Castle, and the 2nd and 3rd floors were used for the Burgwache quarters. All the ceremonial and official rooms on the 1st floor of the south wing from the Matthias Gate to the Vladislav wing served as official rooms of the command of the 3rd Corps of the Ger. Army. Mr. President could only use the flat on the 2nd floor. The President’s Office, as well as civil and military departments, were squeezed on the 2nd and 3rd fl. of the south wing from the staircase below the balcony in the Third Courtyard to the Vladislav wing. The ground floor below these offices was taken by the Burgwache and the military doctor. The middle wing, i.e. the 1st and 2nd floors completely and on the 3rd fl. the rooms vacated by the For. Ministry, were taken by the Burgwache. In addition, the Ger. army used the porter’s flat next to the underpass to Mr. President’s flat. Porter Pálk retired on 31/XII 1938 and at that time vacated the flat. Governors Schicketanz and Heyne stayed in the flat of the butler Kotyza, who moved to his own house.
On 16 April 1939, the command of the 3rd Corps along with all the troops left Prague Castle. This ended the military occupation of the Castle. After that the Castle was used by the protectorate authorities with S. S. "Germany".

It can be said that the German officers acted in official matters fairly and kindly, but with regard to the matter itself they were adamant. The soldiers themselves only carried out two major rash actions. On 17/III 1939, they broke the locked door of the interim gallery and took several smaller paintings. After the investigation of the case, the military administration covered the loss of 16,600 K (crowns) in cash (our file S 841/39).

The following day the soldiers forcibly removed the closed cover in the floor of the 3rd floor and at night, through the open tunnel, they got into the White Tower on the 2nd floor, i.e. to a part of Mr. President’s flat. There they were frightened off by a night watchman. See a separate file.

On 28/III, the Hamburg police shot light rockets, as well as live ammunition, in the Upper Deer Moat (file S 667/39). Apparently, they were scared by the bears in the bear enclosure or by the sculpture of the "Night Watchman" standing in the Deer Moat.

On 8/IV, a Ger. mil. motorcycle knocked down and lightly wounded Marie Svobodová, a 69-year-old retired official from Břevnov, in the Second Courtyard (S 706/39).

A German military car hit a coach of the econ. administration driven by the coachman Novák when it was turning from the Powder Bridge to the courtyard. Our coach was not affected at all, but the car’s wing was damaged and the headlight was broken (S 666/39).

The German military command paid 11,000 K in cash for cleaning and repairs of the Spanish Hall and the gallery, which served as German barracks for 14 days.

The German officers staying at the Castle paid for accommodation 1.50 MK (marks) per person per day, a total of 9,585 K. This price was determined by them. The troops’ accommodation, as well as a high consumption of heat and light, were not paid for.

This is all I know as a direct participant.

In Prague on 10 May 1939
Dr Strnad
1939, 15 March – An official record of the German embassy in Prague on the call of Head of Protocol of the German Foreign Ministry, Alexander von Dörnberg, about President Emil Hácha’s journey from Berlin to Prague on 15 March 1939 (time of the call not recorded)

Prague 15 March 1939
Ambassador Dörnberg’s call:

State President Hácha left Berlin today at 11:15 am; he will arrive in Prague at 4:52 pm in a special closed train prepared by us. His entourage includes the same persons who went with him yesterday. They have been joined by: Dörnberg, Halem, two attachés, a liaison officer, clerical staff, an auxiliary officer. In Prague, the State President will be received with full military honours: the guard of honour of the ground troops or air force with music and banners at the station, all members of the embassy wearing uniforms or top hats. All this provided that the arrival will take place without any trouble. Reception of the Czech side will depend entirely on the will of the Czechs. Hácha is still the State President and travels as head of state. The Czech guard of honour is out of the question, since the Czech army disarmed itself. (highlighted by the author)

At the Führer’s command, the flats of Minister Chvalkovsky and the State President are guarded by German soldiers. For the protocol, the entire floor of the Esplanade hotel has been reserved for tomorrow, namely the living room and bedroom with bathroom, as well as the office with direct connection to Berlin, for Dörnberg. Four rooms with bathroom (Halem) and two other rooms have been prepared for today. Reliable telephonists speaking German and Czech have been prepared at the Esplanade for the telephone exchange of the protocol.
DOCUMENT 3
1939, 4 April – A letter from Ludovin von Alvensleben, chief adjutant of Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, to Himmler’s daughter Gudrun about Adolf Hitler’s stay at Prague Castle from 15 to 16 March 1939

[...], 4 April 1939
Miss Gudrun Himmler

Dear Puppi!

I am writing this letter, presenting you and later especially your grandchildren and great-grandchildren with a valuable document. You know that I, as the chief adjutant of your father, am always in his company, and I was also witness to the following experiences.

After a very stormy and cold night-time car trip from Česká Lípa on 14 March 1939, when we passed many columns of marching soldiers, the Führer arrived at the old Prague Imperial Castle at Hradčany, where he and his staff were accommodated.

On the historic premises of the old Imperial Castle, which looms over the luminous sea of an old German city on the Vltava River, numerous prominent men of the Reich gathered around the Führer.

One could see generals and officers of the units which were enlisted for Prague, head of the High Command of the Wehrmacht Colonel General Keitel,24 Chief Quartermaster in the General Staff of the Army Lieutenant General von Stülpnagel,25 the Führer’s personal and military adjutants, head of the Reich Chancellery Minister Dr. Lammers, Reich Leader and Chief of the German Police Himmler with his close associates.

In the immediate vicinity of the Führer walked your father. It was a great historic moment. Upon the Führer’s arrival, the castle guard of the German guard regiment put out the Führer’s standard on the Hradčany battlements.26

The Führer went to the modestly furnished private premises,27 turned to your father, and happily embraced him, having managed to acquire Bohemia and Moravia for Germany. At the same time, he said the following: “Himmler, isn’t it beautiful that we are standing here, we are here now, and we will never leave?”

He later told your father again: “I am not praising myself, but here I must really say that I did it smartly.”

I hope, dear Puppi, that I will prepare much joy for you with this experience.

Heil Hitler!
Alvensleben

NOTES


3 JUDr. Karel Strnad (1889–1944), from 1939 to 1943 Minister Counsellor of the Construction Administration of Prague Castle.

4 Archives of the Office of the President of the Republic (AOPR), f. (collection) T-secret, 1945–1953, k. (box) 60, sign. (call number) T 2473/48, Occupation of Prague Castle by the German Army. Prague, 10 May 1939, Dr. Strnad, 9 typed pages.

5 One of the most valuable is a record on the termination of Czechoslovak independence dated 15 March 1939, the terms of the German Government concerning the unconditional surrender of the Czechoslovak state dated 15 March 1939, a decree establishing the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia dated 16 March 1939, and Emil Hácha’s report on the negotiation with Adolf Hitler in Berlin on 15 March 1939. See Otáhalová-Červinková, M. (ed.) (1966). Dokumenty z historie československé politiky 1939–1943 (I.). Vznášej se země československá diplomacie k politice československé emigrace na západe. Prague: Academia, 417-422 (including references to placement in the AOPR).


7 The Archives of Prague Castle (APC) have been based at Prague Castle since the 16th century. Today they are part of the Office of the President of the Republic (OPR) as well as of the AOPR, which was established in 1954. The AOPR archive official documents on activities of the OPR and the President of the Republic. The APC archive documents on the history of Prague Castle, its architecture, art collections and building care. They also administer the Archives of the Metropolitan Chapter by St. Vitus.

8 See Malá (2006), 150.

9 To maintain authenticity, it is printed in its original language form with all deviations from the current spelling and capitalization in names. Formal inconsistencies in writing points after numbers, angle brackets and different ways of writing dates have also been left in the original form. Only abbreviations have been given in full form in square brackets.

the Czechoslovak Army, from September to December 1938 prime minister of the caretaker government, from 1938 to 1939 Minister of National Defence, in 1939 retired from public life, in 1947 sentenced to 20 years for collaboration; granted amnesty in 1960.

Henne (1977), 308.

Josef Kliment (1901-1978), publicist and legal historian, from 1938 to 1939 Secretary of the Supreme Administrative Court, from 1938 to 1944 advisor to President E. Hácha and press officer of the President’s Office, from 1944 to 1945 the first President of the Supreme Administrative Court, in 1945 arrested, in 1947 sentenced to life imprisonment; granted amnesty in 1960.


Ibid., 449-458.

On 15 March 1939, Adolf Hitler was accompanied, for example, by H. Himmler, R. Heydrich, J. v. Ribbentrop, W. Stuckart, M. Bor-...
The North Wing of Prague Castle in the First Courtyard opposite the Archbishop’s Palace. Until 15 March 1939 it was the seat of the Czechoslovak Castle Guard, until May 1945 of the German Castle Guard, then again of the Czechoslovak/Czech Castle Guard. Further details on this person are not known.

Hans Gustav Felber (1889–1962), from 1935 Chief of Staff of the 3rd Army Corps, from 1937 Major General, from 1938 Chief of Command of the 3rd Army Group in Dresden, from 1939 to 1945 commander of different army corps. These were the members of Hitler’s personal guard (SS-Begleitkommando des Führers) sitting in the third, raised row of seats. Passage through the First Courtyard was enabled in the second half of April 1939. The Ministry was already in liquidation at that time.

Čeněk Pták (1869–?), employed at Prague Castle from 1905. From 1945 lower official of the OPR in the service rank of doorman at the entrance to the flat of the President of the Republic. Further details on this person are not known.

On 16 April 1939, the office of Reich Protector was fully assumed by Konstantin von Neurath, appointed by Adolf Hitler for this office on 17 March 1939.

One of the stolen paintings (oil on wood Flower Still Life [around 1740] by Jan Kašpar Hirschely [1695-1743]), was returned to the OPR by an anonymous German donor in January 2006. It is not known what kind of unit it was. The bear enclosure was in the Deer Moat until the mid-1950s. It was originally built for two bears that were given to T. G. Masaryk in 1919 by legionnaires.

T. G. Masaryk received the sculpture of the Night Watchman for his 75th birthday in 1925. It was created by the students and graduates of the Hofice sculpture school, according to the sculptor Franta Úprk’s model. Further details on this person are not known.

Alexander Freiherr von Dörnberg (1901–1983), from 1927 an official of the German Foreign Ministry, from 1930 to 1938 he served at the German embassies in Bucharest, Tallinn and London, from 1938 a member of the SS, from 1938 to 1945 Head of Protocol of the German Foreign Ministry. Gustav Adolph von Halem (1899–1999), from 1926 employed at the German Foreign Ministry, in 1929 at the German embassy in London, in 1932 Vice-Consul at the Consulate General in Memel, from 1935 a member of the SS, from 1937 of the NSDAP, in 1938 at the German embassy in Prague, in 1937 acting Head of Protocol of the German Foreign Ministry, in 1941 German Consul General in Milan, in 1945 German ambassador in Lisbon. Arrested by Americans, in 1947 questioned within the Nuremberg trial, after 1947 a publisher and businessman in the film industry.

Due to a delay, the German military band nearly missed Hácha’s arrival. Hencke (1977), 304. A hotel in Washingtonova Street in Prague 1 still bearing the same name. However, the trip took place on 15 March 1939, approximately between 4:45 to 7:15 pm.

Wilhelm Keitel (1882–1946), General of the Army, from 1938 to 1945 Commander in Chief of the German armed forces; executed in Nuremberg in 1946. Carl Heinrich von Stülpnagel (1888–1944), General of Infantry; from 1938 to 1940 Chief Quartermaster in the General Staff of the German Army, from 1942 to 1944 Military Commander of France, in 1944 executed for participating in an assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler.

The standard was put out in the evening on 15 March in the South Wing of Prague Castle. The suite had the form of an official flat for foreign visitors.
INTERVIEW
Zu leider Prof. E. A. Becker. Dr. Reisig.
Maximilian Adler, G. Rick von Fehrenberg
Prof. Dr. L. Rosenthal
F. H. Holley, Dr. Siegmund Reisig
m. e. g. Meierhans
Dr. Otto Tilly
F. A. Reuter Prof. Schulz
Prof. H. R. Fialt Doc. Dr. J. Mohly
Dr. Falbe Spiegel
Dr. Dominik Eisinger, Prof. F. Herrmann
Dr. W. Finke, Dr. B. Mayd ft. Stein
Dr. M. Quaeschning
Dr. R. H. wines ft. the Stein
Walter Frohlich
Dr. C. Nurnberg, Prof. A. I. Steinberg
F. A. Reuter
H. Karl Weinberg, Prof. O. Foerster
Dr. J. Ernrich Winck
Dr. K. Klein Ferendel
Despite the advances in research after the year 1989, there are still blank spaces on the map documenting the country's victims of Nazi persecution and racially motivated persecution of the Jewish population of Bohemia and Moravia. Together with a number of scientific institutions, museums and archives, initiatives and civic associations, the Cabinet of the History of Sciences of the Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic has also been involved in documentation of the victims of Nazi persecution and persecution on racial grounds for many years. The Cabinet's collective research project Scientists and Intellectuals of the Czech Lands as Victims of Nazi Persecution 1939–1945 was launched in 2007 and focused on representative documentation of the consequences of the Nazi occupation in the personnel composition of the scientific community in the Czech lands in the latter half of the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s.

The outcomes also include the publication called Disappeared Science, the release of which in 2013 was financially supported by the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe. The book is a pioneering work in that it focuses on a total of 46 victims from among the ranks of leading Czech scholars and intellectuals of Jewish origin in the form of comprehensive biographical entries written by 17 authors. At the same time it should be seen as a contribution to the history of the individual scientific disciplines in the Czech university and scientific milieu of the first half of the 20th century. It also contributes to the study of the power instruments of the Nazi occupation forces and the way its persecution apparatus worked, including the so-called topography of terror. Its editors were Michal V. Šimůnek and Antonín Kostlán, historians at the Cabinet of the History of Sciences of the Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.

Why do you dedicate yourselves to the documentation of scientists who were victims of Nazi persecution and persecution on racial grounds?

Basically, the motivation was twofold. One of the general topics we study in the Cabinet of the History of Sciences is the changes in the scientific community and its personnel composition in the Czech lands in the 20th century. Similar research projects are quite common abroad; they use an elaborate methodology and within the methodology they often employ the so-called prosopographical method, i.e. a method to evaluate and compare personal biographies of a larger circle of persons within a clearly defined group. We could not help noticing that in the Czech case, the scientific community developed in two subsequent phases which differed from the point of view of internal continuity, or rather discontinuity. From the 1860s to the late 1930s it was characterized by a gradual increase linked to the professionalization of individual disciplines and at the same time the national emancipation allowing for an institutional development. The disintegration of the state and cultural political framework of the Habsburg composite state and the establishment of Czechoslovakia did not constitute, in principle, a crucial breaking point, although they did bring a change in the conditions for migration of scholars and new inspiration. On the one hand, the scientific infrastructure was enhanced, universities were established in Brno and Bratislava, together with departmental state institutes and so on; however, for instance the German university
establishments were preserved. The presence in Czechoslovakia of Russian and Ukrainian and later also German and Austrian exile communities was a certain novelty. In the wake of the Munich Treaty and the establishment of the Protectorate, however, the second phase began which we might call the phase of a permanent "disruptive selection" in the scientific community. At that time, the scientific community was repeatedly weakened based on criteria which were not primarily linked to scientific results, but were dictated by the political regime and its ideology. And the first, crucial and until then hardly imaginable hiatus came with the exclusion of scholars of Jewish origin and their subsequent persecution which more often than not ended in their death as part of the Nazi "final solution to the Jewish question". In parallel, and sometimes also with certain overlaps, the selection within the scientific community was followed by imprisonment and executions of other experts and university employees, or by a number of leading scientists and intellectuals leaving and going into exile. If we wish to continue, it did not stop even after the war naturally. At that time, forced migration of German scientists organized by the state followed, and later also communist purges at universities, exile of democratically thinking scientists, which became particularly massive after 1968, persecution during the period of normalization, etc. In fact, this disruptive phase in the development of the scientific community ended only in the year 1989, which created space for its natural restoration and organic involvement in the international scientific community.

So to return to your question: our motivation was to try and explain the role the first and most tragic persecution wave of 1938/39–1945 played in this. This gradually resulted in our interest in the worst affected group of scholars and researchers of the period who paid the biggest price for the Nazi terror. In this we had come across a subject which, to our surprise, had not been studied in full yet. Apart from this, of course, there was also the commemorative and human element. The general awareness about what became of these people naturally appealed to us anytime we came across their names and in a way we felt an urge to commemorate them and the tragic fate that often befall their entire families.

In your view what is the main contribution of the book?

Firstly, the aim was to process all of the biographies in some sort of an integral way, focusing on details. The research so far has viewed them from one perspective only: in the history of science they were people like any
other, regardless of their sad fate, and in the work of contemporaries and historians of the Holocaust they were mostly perceived as victims, without a deeper understanding of the role they played in social, scientific and intellectual circles of the pre-war period. But our book consists of bios that are drafted along the same lines and each person’s life is depicted in three balanced areas: outlining the family background and the development of the professional career, assessing their scientific contribution to the given discipline, and summarizing all the information and findings we collected during targeted archival research which may help cast some light on the last, tragic period of their lives.

Here we touch on the second part, which deals with facts. Based on our own personal experience and first reactions from potential readers we decided to provide detailed factual supplementary material, which would enable readers to quickly navigate themselves and make use of primary sources and a secondary bibliography for further research. In this way, the bios offer 46 concentrated small monographs, each complete with references to known archival materials and a long list of relevant bibliography. Of course, the contrast between the dry, dense facts without which the scientists’ bios would not be complete, and the agitated historical context, which determines them, is profoundly emotional.

**How difficult was it to carry out collective biographical research based on primary sources?**

Simply put, it was difficult as the basic heuristics had to deal with limits imposed on the research of the Holocaust by the very nature of the Nazi genocide. This immense human tragedy naturally had an impact on the limited amount of the primary archival sources available for research and crosschecking. It was impossible for us to simply rely on Czech archives and we also had to work abroad: primarily in Germany, but also in other countries. In the end, we were searching for sources across several continents. Our research was further complicated by the fact that the objects of our research were generations of people who were active as scholars mainly after the year 1900. Consequently, it was not possible to lean on memories of people who were closely acquainted with them or who were their students. Naturally there was also no source list of people who fell within our scope of research. The original post-war lists concerned only Czech universities. For instance, the series of memorial articles in the magazine Naše věda (Our Science) from the years 1945-1946 lacked the necessary distance to be able to include all individual cases.

**The book is called Disappeared Science. To what extent did the Nazis succeed in erasing the traces, both physical and intellectual, of the Jewish scholars? And how did the anti-Semitism of the Czechoslovak Communist regime in 1948–1969 affect their post-war wiping of the country’s historical memory?**

The title Disappeared Science was meant as a metaphor, but it is true that the majority of the scientists introduced in the book really partly or almost completely disappeared — we can say that they were wiped from the collective memory, which constitutes the identity of the Czech society today. What’s more: as a result of the Holocaust, family traditions were often disrupted too. Also because German-language university science ceased to exist in the Czech lands after 1945, in some cases it was apparently our book which brought back the memory of the life and work of some of these people in a manner other than adding their name onto a long list of victims. The beginning of this disappearance from memory lies already in the Nazi regime, because after their physical elimination their intellectual legacy was also supposed to disappear; for instance, there was a special directive by the Reich Minister for Science and People’s Education, pursuant to which all bibliographies in dissertations in Germany were to be scrutinized in order to make sure they did not contain citations from Jewish authors! Similarly, if older works were published again, the racial origin of their authors was carefully examined. On the other hand, unlike the demonstrative burning of books by prominent intellectuals or artists whose opinions opposed the Nazis or whom the Nazis had disqualified, citing their alleged racial difference, the works by highly specialized scholars meant not for thousands but only for hundreds or dozens of potential readers were often physically preserved in library funds. These did not have to be discarded and destroyed in such a spectacular manner; they gradually declined to oblivion covered in dust on library shelves after their authors were excommunicated from scientific institutes, schools and leading journals and their names were kept secret from or discredited before students.

The vehemence with which the Nazis turned their attention to the academic and scientific community soon after they came to power is clear proof of the importance they ascribed to this field, primarily for ideological and racial reasons. In the times to come, Jewish scientists were to be banned from “fouling” the allegedly pure roots of German science, which in the eyes of the Nazis represented the highest attainable spiritual level. This was typical not only for newly established disciplines tainted by racism at the intersection of biology, geopolitics and ethnography, but also for the most exact of disciplines such as physics. For example, the German physicist Philipp Lenard (1862–1947), who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1905, in his work *Deutsch Physik in vier Bänden*, published in 1936-1937 suggested that not only Albert Einstein should be excluded from science, but theoretical physics as such, which to him represented a “Jewish world deception” and a “shameful product of the Asian spirit”. In consequence, works were destroyed before even being published, together with the author. In the Czech environs, this happened to historian Bedřich Mendl (1892–1940). Following his suicide in August 1940,
the typeset of the completed volume of the edition of Czech medieval documents *Regesta diplomatica nec non epistolaria Bohemiae et Moraviae* was destroyed. The new German deputy director of the Prague-based State Historical Publishing Institute, the Nazi Rudolf Schreiber, decided that the publication would be transferred to Berlin and the work would be purely German.

**Was the Nazi regime always so rigid?**

Not always: the third volume of the monumental *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*, a kind of Who Is Who of the ancient Roman Empire, could be published in Berlin in 1943 although one of the authors, the professor of Roman history and epigraphy Arthur Stein (1871-1950), who was dismissed from the German University in Prague, had already been interned in the Terezín ghetto. However, his name was missing from the front page, as was the name of his co-author, a librarian from Vienna called Edmund Groag (1873-1945), but both were mentioned as the book’s authors in the foreword.

It is only natural that for the permanent removal of an individual or a group of persons from the collective memory, a coincidence of two factors is needed – a power must be in force which will perform the removal of the given person, followed by a power which is later able to successfully prevent a retrogressive inclusion or commemoration thereof. After the reasons for the original selection have already passed and which acts in line with some innate strategy. If we name the Communist Party in post-war Czechoslovakia as such a power, we make a certain and not altogether unimportant simplification. With individuals whose natural language of communication was German, the “retrogressive non-inclusion” happened already in 1945–1948, regardless of whether the given person belonged among German anti-fascists or Jewish intellectuals imprisoned during the war in a ghetto or concentration camp. The Communist Party was one of the main driving forces in this ostracization; however, it was not the only one: in this respect it proceeded in touching on cooperation with the democratic politicians of the period who used it as one of the methods of “de-Germanization”, or in other words nationalization of the political, economic and cultural life in Czechoslovakia.

After the Communists seized power in February 1948, a primitive functionalist anti-Semitism prevailed, also backed up by declared hostility towards Israel, a former ally; in such an atmosphere a mere memory of the reasons and course of the Holocaust was suppressed. For the people introduced in our book, an additional reason for their ostracization – together with the “racial” origin and possibly also an unsuitable language of communication which they had used all their lives – was cited: their social status. It is interesting to see how certain individuals whom the Communist Party had decided to celebrate were excluded from this mechanism. Soon the choice fell, among others, on the journalist and historian Kurt Konrád (1908-1941), who in fact did not even have the right predispositions for such treatment – he came from a well-off, “bourgeois” Jewish family and his mother tongue was German. However, at the same time he was an eager Communist who stood up for the revolutionary traditions and was involved in the Communist anti-Nazi resistance. This brought a change in his image: his unsuitable origin was no longer a problem because – to quote Ladislav Stoll’s words published in the *Torba* magazine as early as in 1945 - he belonged among journalists who *had left university to join the workers in their new historic fight for a new world*. Also the fact that he was German-speaking suddenly became an advantage as it allowed him to devote himself to studying the works of Marx and Engels in the original, which in turn made it possible for him to enlighten his Czech comrades on the content of the books which had not been translated yet.

**Apart from Czech projects, did you find inspiration also in some foreign works or similar foreign projects?**

It is clear that such a project cannot be done without thorough acquaintance with parallel projects abroad and their methods. Some sort of a comparative level for us was formed for example by the “Gedenkbuch” of researchers expelled from the Kaiser Wilhelm Society, published in 2008 by Reinhard Rürup in cooperation with Michael Schüring as part of a long-term project on the changes which this most important German scientific institution of the first half of the 20th century underwent during the Nazi period. In this project Rürup followed up on his earlier work published in 2006 in which he described the policy of dealing with the past (“Vergangenheitspolitik”) in today’s leading German post-war non-university research institution, the Max Planck Society (Max-Planck-Gesellschaft), the successor of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society. However, the circle of people this memorial book includes was defined in a different way than in our book: the main criterion for being included in the selection was their exclusion from the society, so consequently we have here also people who were unacceptable for the Nazis due to their political opinions and attitudes, along with a wide group of prominent scholars who chose exile to escape from the Nazis.

We were further inspired by foreign books on scientific exile communities during World War II, primarily due to their thorough refinement of the prosopographical method. The logical source here was the factographical database of the German-speaking emigration communities after 1933, compiled and published by a German-US team led by Werner Röder and Herbert A. Strauss. We must not forget the research into the scientific emigration communities in Austria with its landmark book by Friedrich Stadler and Peter Weibel about the “expulsion of the sense” published in 1995. This book also includes short bios of exiled Austrian intellectuals, including those from the scientific community. The many books which
behind the iron curtain

The destiny of scholars and intellectuals of Jewish origin is often mentioned only in connection with their imprisonment in the Terezín ghetto. How successful were you in balancing this deficit?

Unfortunately, the research into this subject in the Czech Republic has not been sufficient so far. In the future, we would definitely like to process in this way all victims of the Nazi regime who had belonged to the community of scientists and academicians, if possible. According to preliminary estimates this concerns about 200 people. Also, greater attention should be paid to those who led the country to go into exile and worked in other countries; that is, people who made a prominent mark outside their home country. As usual, though, the main hindrance to implementing the plan is funding. At the moment, therefore, we primarily focus on the preparation of a broader study in which we would analyse the findings we arrived at in our book and put them in a broader context.

Which of the people included in your book would you single out as worthy of special attention?

A total of 46 bios are included in the book, which means it tells the same number of dramatic life stories although most of the people had led rather quiet lives prior to the war. One of the more dramatic lives was that of the zoologist Jiří Baum (1900–1944), a famous explorer who travelled through North and South America, Africa and the Far East in 1921–1939, and in 1935 visited Japan and Australia during his voyage around the world. He was in the south of Africa when the events surrounding the Munich Agreement broke out and his feeling of solidarity with the country in danger forced him to come back home. After many years spent abroad he returned on 13 March 1939, two days before the German occupation, and was not allowed to travel abroad again. He was arrested and interrogated by the Gestapo for his involvement with the resistance. Later he was imprisoned in the Small Fortress in Terezín, in Auschwitz and other concentration camps before he died, probably in Warsaw. We may also mention the older brother of the well-known Czech poet František Gellner, Gustav Gellner (1871–1943), a doctor (a specialist in epidemiology) and in his later years also an excellent historian of sciences and medical science. He was arrested by the counter-espionage department of the Prague Gestapo and died in 1943 in the Small Fortress.

While remembering these people, the philosopher and publicist Josef Fischer (1891–1945) also comes to mind. He worked at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University as an external lecturer and was a preeminent specialist in the work of František Palacký and of Tomáš G. Masaryk’s philosophy. In 1937–1938, in the period which threatened the existence of the Czechoslovak state, he acted as president of the Association of Friends of Democratic Spain, and in May 1938 he became one of the members of the Petition Committee We Will Remain Faithful. During the occupation he was a member and one of the leaders of the eponymous resistance group and co-authored its programme document For Freedom, towards a New Czechoslovak Republic. In October 1941 he was arrested by the Prague Gestapo and later transported to Berlin, where he was sentenced to death and executed on 19 February 1945. His story is probably the strongest evidence of unsustainability of the stereotypes, rooted deep
in the historical research, about how
the Jewish minority, resigned and si-
ent, left to be slaughtered while the
Czech heroes in the resistance move-
ment fought to win the freedom for
them and for themselves. A realis-
tic evaluation of the role the people
who were labelled as racially inferior
by the period legislation played in
organizing, financing and possible
achievements of the Czechoslovak
home resistance during World War II
remains a task to be fulfilled by his-
torians.

We must not omit the story of the
only woman in our selection, the
historian Käthe Spiegel (1898–1941),
whose early rise to stardom was soon
interrupted by the death of her father
Ludwig Spiegel (1864–1926), a profes-
sor and in 1926 Rector at the German
University in Prague. After his death,
Käthe faced existential problems,
and it was only shortly before the
war and with the help of the Presi-
dent’s Office that she was able to se-
cure a permanent systematized job in
the circulation department of the Na-
tional and University Library. Twice
she attempted to become a docent at
the German University in Prague but
both times she was confronted with
a barrier of gender and racial stereo-
types. Although she never gave up
easily, she was one of the first people
who were sent to the Lodz ghetto.

And we should not forget that among
the people portrayed in our book
are also seven people who decided
to avoid the inevitable and commit
suicide. This was also the case of
Bedřich Mendl, one of the prominent
Czech pre-war historians, who found-
ed economic history as a separate
field of study. He wrote the following
words in his letter of farewell of 24
September 1940: As I do not see a pos-
sibility for me to live honourably in my
home land, I have voluntarily decided
to leave to the other world, pleading
with God to forgive me. He died of Ve-
ronal poisoning four days later in the
General Hospital in Prague.

If I were to highlight and select
one of these scholars, then I would
opt for the fascinating personality
of Emil Starkenstein, a professor of
pharmacology and toxicology at the
German University in Prague, a pas-
sionate bibliophile and motorist and
a socialite of pre-war Prague high
society. He was one of those people
who tried to anticipate the upcoming
events and leave for the USA. How-
ever, he and his whole family stayed
in the Netherlands, where the Nazis
finally hunted him down. He was
transported back to Czechoslova-
chia, from where he continued to the
Mauthausen concentration camp in
Austria, where he perished. Part of
his medical library containing over
20,000 books remained in Amster-
dam during the war. After the war,
his widow donated it to the Czecho-
slovak state, more precisely to the
newly established Medical Faculty at
the University in Olomouc. The other
part of Starkenstein’s library went
to the USA. The Emil Starkenstein
Stiftung, a foundation, was founded
in Rotterdam in 1989; it awards re-
search grants in medicine. Also one
of the major toxicological handbooks,
published in Germany in 1936, was
dedicated to his memory.

If we were to think about which
of these scholars made a name not
only in Czechoslovakia but also in
Europe or worldwide, it is again
Starkenstein who comes to mind.
But he is not the only one. In draw-
ing up such a list we must not forget
the mathematician Georg Pick, a per-
sonal friend of Albert Einstein, one
of the people who used to play with
Einstein in a string quartet during
his stay in Prague. Emil Kolben too
was an internationally renowned ex-
pert whose articles were published in
major German journals of electrical
engineering; Hans Meyer, awarded
a prestigious Ignatz Lieben Award;
or Richard Werner, a co-founder of
medical radiology in Europe. Un-
til today, the reports by Apostolic
Nuncios in Germany in the 16th and
early 17th centuries are studied by re-
searchers around the world from edi-
tions compiled by Samuel Steinhzer
(1857–1942), an Austria-born his-
torian at the German University in
Prague and the first ever Jewish rec-
tor thereof. His appointment as a rec-
tor in 1912 was accompanied by harsh
protests in Prague of German nation-
alisists and anti-Semites from among
the ranks of students and professors
alike. And in this way we could con-
tinue naming other people whose sci-
entific contribution went beyond the
territory of the Czech lands.

Your publication is also a contri-
bution to the history of different
scientific disciplines. How impor-
tant are the people selected in the
context of the study of the Czech
history of science?

Generally speaking, an easy-to-
understand depiction of a complex
subject in a historical context is al-
ways an extremely complicated and
almost impossible thing. One of the
main difficulties lies in the fact that
each discipline has its own dynamics;
their development is quite unique
and by no means straightforward.
Even today, experts in the given field
have a limited understanding of the
development which has led to the
current level of knowledge; in this
way, simplified explanations of the
achievements of the most renowned
individuals prevail. In a historical
perspective, though, the scientific
work was much more complicated,
interactive and naturally not always
really successful. However, some less
acknowledged findings may be fully
relevant from a scientific perspective
and open a path for further develop-
ment. To give one example: in 1907,
the psychiatrist Oskar Fischer\textsuperscript{16} described, in fact in parallel with Alois Alzheimer\textsuperscript{17}, the symptoms of a serious degenerative disease, today generally referred to as Alzheimer’s Disease. This fact was acknowledged only a short time ago. So it seems that drawing attention to the half-forgotten or prohibited persons has an irreplaceable place in the development of individual disciplines.

The lives of the victims depicted in your book show a whole spectrum of interventions of the Nazi occupational authorities against the Jewish scientific and intellectual elite of Bohemia and Moravia. However, the individual stories also remind us of the places of suffering and physical destruction of the victims. How do you feel about it?

Basically, in this case the tragic end of these people mirrors, both in terms of time and topography, the anti-Jewish measures executed in the Protectorate. They were present in all the deportation waves, for most part to Terezin and in the follow-up transports to the extermination complex in Auschwitz. So these two places were peculiarly fatal also for scholars and academics of Jewish origin in the Czech lands. In this context we would like to point out the relatively high average age in this group. Proportionally maybe the number of suicides is surprisingly high – they represent 15 percent of all deaths. The decision/resolution to commit such a desperate deed as suicide undoubtedly is, of course, telling of the tragic situation in which not only scholars and intellectuals of Jewish origin, but the whole Jewish community found themselves in the years 1939–1945.

NOTES
1 Primarily the Jewish Museum in Prague, Terezín Memorial, National Archives, Military Central Archives – Military History Institute, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Czech Union of Freedom Fighters, Czech-German Future Fund, civic association Post Bellum and the Terezín Initiative Institute.
4 Czechoslovak State Historical Publishing Institute (also State Historical Publishing Institute /ŠÚV/) existed between the years 1921–1953 and focused primarily on publishing of works dedicated to the oldest national history.
5 Rudolf Schreiber (1907–1954), in the years 1935–1945 worked at the German University in Prague (in 1944 was appointed professor of history). In the years 1940–1945 was head of the Prague City Archives, 1940–1943 deputy director at the State Historical Publishing Institute, 1950–1954 head of the city archives in Speyer.
6 The Kaiser Wilhelm Society for the Advancement of Science (Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften) was the main German body offering institutional support mainly to natural sciences in the years 1911–1945.
12 Emil Kolben (1862–1943), studied electrical engineering and mechanical engineering at the German Technical University in Prague, in 1888–1892 worked in the USA with Thomas Alva Edison and Nikola Tesla. In 1896 co-founded Kolben a spol., elektrotechnická továrna (the Kolben and Co. Factory, an electrical engineering factory) in Prague-Vysočany, later (from 1921) called Českomoravská-Kolben, (from 1927) Českomoravská-Kolben-Daněk. He was the chief executive of the company. In the Protectorate he was forced to leave the post due to his Jewish origin, and died in Terezín in 1943.
13 Hans Leopold Meyer (1871–1942), organic chemist, from 1908 a regular professor of chemistry at the German Technical University in Prague, from 1911 a regular professor of chemistry at the German University, took retirement in 1938, died in Terezín in 1942.
14 Ignaz Lieben (1805–1862), Austrian businessman and banker, based on whose testament an award for scientists in chemistry, physics and physiology was presented by the Vienna Academy of Sciences in the years 1865–1897, referred to as the “Austrian Nobel Prize”. In 1938 it was abolished due to the Jewish origin of its founder, in 2004 re-established as an award for young scientists.
16 Oskar Fischer (1876–1942), in 1910 co-founded a private sanatorium for neural and mental diseases in Veleslavín, Prague, in the 1920s acted as its scientific director, in the years 1917–1939 an extraordinary professor of neurology and psychiatry at the German University in Prague. In 1941 arrested by the Gestapo, died the following year in Terezín.
17 Alois Alzheimer (1864–1915), psychiatrist and neuropathologist, in the years 1912–1915 a regular professor of psychiatry at the University in Wrocław.
FOR TOTALITY
Wilhelm Wollner during basic military service as a member of the Infantry Regiment 33 "Doss Alto" orchestra.

Photo: State Regional Archives (SRA) in Prague
Two journeys to the gallows

Life stories of members of the Prague Gestapo Wilhelm Wollner and Friedrich Dennert

In January 1942, the representatives of nine occupied European countries, including Czechoslovakia, met in London to formulate their attitude to post-war punishment of Nazi war criminals and collaborators. Together they adopted the Declaration of St James’s Palace, which later became the basis of the principles according to which war criminals were prosecuted and which were also adopted by the Allied Powers and many other countries.

JIŘÍ PLACHÝ

Within this trial, more than 30,000 people in the Czech lands were brought before what was called retributions courts, established under Presidential Decrees No. 16 and No. 17/1945 Coll. II, after the end of the war. A total of 708 (737 in the whole of Czechoslovakia) of them were sentenced to capital punishment, which was also executed. Most of the executed could probably be included in the category "collaborator". With regard to the rest, only a few were sufficiently significant to stand out of the narrow regional or even "Czechoslovak" framework. These were, for example, K. H. Frank, as a member of the Reich German Government – the German State Minister for Bohemia and Moravia, acting Reichspräsident Kurt Daluege (from 4 June 1942 to 20 August 1943), several members of the Reichstag, SS-Brigadeführer and Major General of Waffen-SS Bernhard Voss, several male and female guards from concentration camps and one of the architects of the final solution, SS-Gruppenführer and Waffen-SS General Walter Schmitt. However, the prototype of an "ordinary" war criminal sentenced by the Czech extraordinary people’s courts to death was a member of the German secret state police - the Gestapo.

The horror caused by the Gestapo throughout occupied Europe during the war years was a sufficient reason for the preventive arrest of any of its former members. The Gestapo members were aware of that and tried to hide especially in the chaos of defeated Germany, particularly in the territory occupied by the Western powers. However, the British, French and, especially, Americans in most cases very strictly abided by the Allied agreements and commitments, and extradited the detained Gestapo members to the countries that requested them. Cooperation between the American and Czechoslovak forces at the time before the February coup was free of any problems.

This study deals with the life stories of two of these "ordinary" war criminals, former members of Section II BM (charged with Czech non-Communist resistance and opposition) of the Prague Gestapo headquarters, Wilhelm Wollner and Friedrich Dennert, extradited to Czechoslovakia by American authorities from Germany and Austria to be punished, who were in 1947 sentenced to death by the Extraordinary People’s Court in Prague for war crimes and executed.

BEGINNING OF HIS CAREER

Wilhelm Georg Wollner was born on
12 July 1913 in Aš (Asch), Western Bohemia. He was the fifth child of the stoker Hans Christian Wollner and his wife Margaretha, née Fedr. At that time, due to the historical developments, the Aš salient was the only compact territory of the Czech Kingdom without dominance of the Catholic religion. The Wollner family were also affiliated to the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession and their children were baptized in its church. In the 1930s, they lived at Herrengasse 47.

In his hometown, Wilhelm completed a five-class German primary school (Volksschule), two years of town school (Bürgerschule), two years of follow-up trade school and a one-year course at a textile vocational school. Then he worked as a weaver.

In 1930, as a seventeen year old, he volunteered for the draft. This was the lowest age allowed by the Czechoslovak Defence Act. Although he later stated that he had done it out of love for the Czechoslovak Army (Lust und Liebe zum tschecho-slovakisch Militär), the reasons for this decision were apparently far more prosaic. In 1930, the Great Depression began to manifest in Czechoslovakia too, and the export-oriented textile industry in border regions was one of the first to be affected. In contrast, the army offered a stable position with the possibility of social advancement – according to the testimony of his colleagues, he dreamed about becoming a professional non-commissioned officer or, more precisely, company sergeant major. As he had played the trumpet and violin since his childhood, he joined the music unit of Cheb Infantry Regiment 33 "Doss Alto" on 5 August 1930. After completing the basic training, he served again in the music unit and, in early October 1931, he was transferred to the 1st Company. At that time he was already a non-commissioned officer (he was promoted to the lance corporal rank on 16 August 1931). In November of that year, he began attending the regimental NCO school.

In February 1932, before he completed his studies at the school, he was given permission to remain in the army as a longer serving non-commissioned officer. Subsequently, he was transferred again, this time to the separated 5th Company of the 2nd Infantry Battalion in Falknov nad Ohří (now Sokolov), where he spent the next several years. In May 1932, he achieved the rank of corporal and, on 1 October of that year, the rank of sergeant. He was assigned as a duty platoon commander and training instructor. He probably proved himself as very good in this capacity – he successively worked as an instructor for new recruits, second-year soldiers, substitute reserves and reservists. From September 1935 to March
1936, he was even an auxiliary instructor in the divisional School for Education of Reserve Infantry Officers, located in Beroun.

However, he did not serve in the army throughout this period — although his commitment was extended in February 1933, he went into reserve on 5 November of that year. Due to the fact that after a year, on 1 December 1934, he started work in his old position again, it seems that he did not leave the army as a punishment. In August 1936, he was even given command of the platoon and was sent on several courses.

At the end of October 1936, he was transferred to elite Border Battalion 5 in Cheb. This can be interpreted in different ways. Border battalions (along with the air force) were traditionally departments that recruited mostly conscripts of Czech nationality. This led some SdP politicians to accuse the military authorities of discrimination against Czechoslovak Germans. To prevent the nascent scandal, border battalions also recruited a large number of German conscripts on 1 October 1936 (often for the first time in history). As the brother of a well-known radical, Sergeant Wilhelm Wollner became an instructor of newcomers (as well as second-year soldiers) of the 1st Company. In late 1936, his superiors extended his service commitment without reservation. However, after a few months, he (probably again by choice) asked for its premature termination and, on 16 May 1937, he went into reserve.

As a soldier of the Czechoslovak Army, Wollner was always rated very positively. For example, in May 1935, Infantry Lieutenant Colonel Josef Skalák wrote the following report on him: *Lovely, honest, ambitious, very diligent and hardworking. As a trainer: resolute, energetic, very good. In combat: training: makes decisions a little hastily, good perception. A very good squad leader and a good deputy platoon leader. Qualifies as an executive company sergeant major...*

During his service in Falknov, he had a serious relationship. This was one of the reasons why, as he said, in the spring of 1938, he made a speech during the May Day celebrations in Cheb in which he said, among other things: Henlein and we all may profess National Socialism, because we can rely on the full weight of the Reich. We will take our complaints and demands not only to Geneva but also to Berlin.

After Munich, he became a member of the Reichstag. He briefly served as district head of the NSDAP in Karlovy Vary. From 1939 to 1940, he was the provincial inspector of the NSDAP in the Sudetenland. During the campaign to France, he was appointed special commander of the Waffen-SS in the Todt Organization at the rank of SS-Hauptsturmführer. In the same function, he then also briefly worked as SS-Sturmbannführer, on the Eastern Front (17 January to 31 March 1942). At that time, he was also district head of the NSDAP in Pilsen. He remained in this influential position until June 1944. He led Gauorganizationsamt in Liberec from July of that year. He also held the posts of deputy inspector for antiaircraft defence, commissioner for the construction of military positions and others.

In April 1945, he received his last “combat” task from K. Henlein. He was to build a saboteur organization known as Freikorps Adolf Hitler in West Bohemia. He gathered around two hundred men and women with whom he went to Hofenfels, Bavaria, where they began training on 17 April. However, the US Army was approaching (Americans captured his native Aš on 20 April), and the saboteurs had to move to Třemošná, north of Pilsen. Two Sudeten companies were divided into squads, regionally covering the territory from Železná Ruda to Liberec (probably depending on the destination of their future place of operation). The last training area of the saboteurs, just before the end of the war, was in Kladská near Mariánské Lázně.

After the war, he hid in the American occupation zone in Bavaria. He died only a few months after his younger brother — on 24 July 1948 in Marburg an der Lahn, Hesse.

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b For more information on the Karlovy Vary demands, see http://wwwmodemni-dejazyc.cz/ členek/karlovarske-poziadavky-23-24-4-1938 (quoted as of 21 May 2014).
d The Todt Organization was established in 1938 and focused on the construction of military facilities. Initially, it was intended for the Germans incapable of military service, but during the war it essentially became a form of forced labour.
e Biman (2008), entry Georg Wollner.

Photo: Kdo byl kdo v České republice. Biografická příručka A-Z.
he left the army in the spring of 1937. Shortly thereafter, on 24 October 1937, he and Barbara Spinnler were married. The spouses first settled in Aš, where Wilhelm found a job as a gateman at a local hospital.

The post-war court did not attempt to reconstruct Wollner’s activity during the fateful September 1938. According to his own statement, he stopped working in Aš in the summer of 1938 and found a job as an agent at St. Florian’s Insurance Company in Cheb, where he also moved with his wife. According to the police report, however, he did not change his residence until the Munich Agreement, namely 10 October 1938. This is a relatively essential matter. The Aš salient was one of the places that the Sudeten German rebels managed to occupy on 22 September 1938. Subsequently, it was also occupied by members of the SS and the SA. For strategic reasons, the Czechoslovak units did not conquer back the territory that was difficult to defend. In contrast, the riots caused by the SDP were suppressed in Cheb.

The possibility that Wilhelm Wollner also contributed to these events, for example, as a member of the Sudeten German Volunteer Corps, is extremely high. It is certain that he did not participate in the September mobilization. After the war, he tried to give the impression that as a “Czechophile” he was persecuted after Munich”, which, however, seems highly unlikely, even though he stated, among other things, that he had to face the hatred of his fellow citizens and that already in 1932 his mother told him that he should be careful and should not go to Aš in uniform. In 1939, he said the opposite – when talking to his Czech acquaintances, he boasted that at that time he supplied information of a military nature to his brother, who then sent it directly to Germany. The second version seems more probable. In any case, after Munich he was awarded the Sudeten Liberation Medal, which would probably not have happened if he had been suspected of political unreliability.

In mid-January 1939, he was called for a six-week military training course to the 72nd Infantry Regiment of the Wehrmacht in Nuremberg. The sergeant rank achieved in the Czechoslovak Army was recognized as an equivalent of the Unteroffizier rank without difficulties. After returning to civilian life, he faced the biggest and truly fateful change in his life up to that moment. In early March 1939, probably through the intercession of his brother, who served as district head of the Nazi Party in Karlovy Vary at the time, he became a member of the Gestapo. He temporarily joined the Karlovy Vary office, but two weeks later he moved to another workplace – he participated in the occupation of the Czech lands and remained in Prague.

Friedrich Dennert was born almost two years before Wollner, on 28 August 1911, in Friedenau, in the suburbs of Berlin. He came from a middle-class family. His father, Dr. Friedrich Dennert, worked as a librarian, and his mother, Emma, née Knoecke, was a housewife. Friedrich completed primary school (Volkschule) and lower secondary school (Realschule) in Berlin-Zehlendorf, and then an unspecified one-year course. At Easter 1927, he started as a trainee at the Berlin engine factory of R. Stock & Co., Spiralbohrer, Werkzeug und Maschinenfabrik A.-G. in Berlin-Marienflede. He spent four years there and gained the qualifications needed for further studies at Beuth-Schule, Höhere technische Lehranstalt der Stadt Berlin, which he began in 1931. At that time, he wanted to become an engineer.

However, his plans were adversely affected by the Great Depression. His father lost his job in 1932 and Friedrich had to leave school immediately after that. He managed to find a job as a mechanic and lorry driver at Uhlmann, a Berlin-based company. From June 1933, he worked for Berliner Verkehrsgesellschaft (BVG), a transport company providing public transport in Berlin. First, he obtained training as a mechanic and omnibus driver, and moved to a position in the technical service. Before the Nazi takeover, Communist unions had a strong position at BVG. However, they closely cooperated with the NSDAP, e.g. in organizing one of the biggest strikes in the Weimar Republic in November 1934.

Dennert himself later claimed that he was not a member of any party at that time and that he left the company due to the increasing influence of the Nazis at BVG. It sounds highly unlikely, given that his new place of work from the autumn of 1934 was at the Schutzpolizei (Security Police), which he joined as a trainee. According to other documents, however, he had already been a member of the NSDAP. He was assigned as a driver to the Berlin-Charlottenburg office, also training his colleagues. In 1935, he suffered an injury during the service as a result of which he developed bone tuberculosis. He spent several months in hospital. After his recovery, he joined the new location. On 1 January 1936, he became a member of the secret state police - the Gestapo.

Later he tried to prove that relocating from the Schutzpolizei was the result of his deteriorated health. He also claimed that he was not satisfied with the service at the Gestapo and that he tried to leave several times unsuccessfully. He topped his statements by saying that he was transferred to Prague in April 1939 as punishment. None of this sounds very likely. In Berlin, he was assigned directly to the main office (Leitstelle), to Section II P, which was in charge of monitoring the press and activities of societies. Tasked with suppressing the last remnants of civil society and pluralistic views, it was extremely important. According to his own statement, Dennert supervised delivery of foreign newspapers. Consignments containing “objectionable” books, newspapers and magazines were removed daily from further delivery at Berlin’s main post office and at the airport, and forwarded to the Gestapo for destruction.

Shortly before the outbreak of the Sudeten crisis in the autumn of 1938, Dennert was “transferred to telex”.

Unfortunately, the nature of his work in these months was not examined in detail during the post-war investigation. At the time, he allegedly asked to be transferred to the technical department. After his application was

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rejected, he (again, allegedly) submitted a request for release. Instead, in April 1939 he was transferred to the newly established office in Prague.

**IN THE SERVICE OF PRAGUE’S GESTAPO**

Wilhelm Wollner appeared in Prague in the early days of the occupation and remained there. At the newly constituted headquarters of the Prague Gestapo (Stapo-Leitstelle Prag), he was from the beginning assigned to Department II BM, where he was “in charge” of the prosecution of leaflet activity and monitoring of foreign radio broadcasting.

In Prague, he found a flat at Přemyslovská Street No. 9, Vinohrady. His wife followed him to the new location and gave birth to two children there – son Manfred in 1940 and, four years later, daughter Renata.

As confirmed by dozens of post-war testimonies, in his job Wollner was one of the investigators who acquired confessions by brute force. Although he sometimes tried to use more “psychological” methods, mainly threats and time “to think it over” before the interrogation “really begins”, his work results were primarily based on brutal torture of the detainees. His “buddy” in torture was often the Gestapo member Rudolf Hartel. Wollner officiated at the 2nd floor of the Petschek Palace (office No. 129) and achieved the official rank of chief criminal assistant. In addition to membership in the NSDAP, he was obviously also a member of the SS, where he achieved the SS-Hauptsscharführer rank (equivalent to the military rank of master sergeant).

During his service, Wollner had several major cases involving arrest and investigation of dozens of Czech patriots. The cases were mainly connected with the detection of the illegal magazine *V boj!*. From 1939 to 1941, the magazine was the most important periodical of the Czech non-Communist underground. Its publication began in May 1939 and reached the relatively high circulation of up to several thousand. It also had regional mutations, so it was significantly widespread. It was published by an illegal group called the Squad in the First Line (Družstvo v prvním sledu), comprised mostly of former legionaries having contacts to the resistance organizations Political Headquarter (Politické ústředí), “We Shall Remain Faithful” Petition Committee (Petiční výbor “Věrni zůstaneme”) and Defence of the Nation (Obrana národa).

In the autumn of 1939, the Gestapo managed to disband its editorial board. However, two groups independent of each other began publishing the magazine again. The first, the Spořilov group, was led by a significant representative of the Czech non-Communist resistance movement, Inka Bernášková (executed in 1942), and the second consisted of members of the Defence of the Nation. The Spořilov group was eliminated by the Gestapo in September 1940. Soldiers and the Central Leadership of Domestic Resistance (Ústřední vedení odboje domáčího – ÚVOD) managed to maintain the continuity of the magazine until the autumn of 1941. Wollner participated in the arrests and interrogations of more than fifty Czech patriots who were among the publishers’ collaborators or who distributed the magazine. A large group of resistance workers was revealed by the Gestapo especially among the officials of the banks Slavia and Živnostenská banka. Their interrogations were conducted in an extremely cruel way. In response to a call of the magazine of the Association of Liberated Political Prisoners, the tribunal after the war received a number of written statements which independently of each other confirmed Wollner’s brutality. The following example, having almost a journalistic nature, is the post-war testimony provided by Jan Hrubý, an official of the Slavia bank:

*Arrested on 2 October 1942. This was followed by the first interrogation, which was still relatively less painful.*

*On 5 October, the second interrogation, which began as follows: Take off your glasses. As a welcome, my hands and feet were immediately tied together, hands under my bottom tightened by a chain, and I was hit over the head with a wide piece of rubber with the remark that this should help me remember better. When this did not work, there was bedlam, in the real [sense] of the word, swearing, kicking, hitting and beating over my head, and kicking my genitals.*

confirmation of damage to the suit of the chief criminal assistant Wilhelm Wollner, which occurred on 3 December 1942 during an unspecified house search. Wollner was “lent” to the Gestapo office in Pilsen for a few weeks at that time.

*Photo: SRA in Prague*
On 6 October, another interrogation after a confrontation with Havlůj. That day I was kicked so brutally by Wolnner, Rudi and “Frajle” that I came to Pankrác and could not sit for a really long time. The open wounds were then iodinated by Dr. Makovička at the police department.

On 7 October one more interrogation, not so brutal as that on 6 Oct., but still many insults. [...] Insults such as: Czech dog, Šrámekite, pigs and other expletives that I did not even listen to. All interrogations were held as the first one, with my hands and feet tied together, hands handcuffed under my bottom, and Wolnner, Rudi standing above me. [...] Another of the arrested employees of the financial institution, Kamil Kuchler, summed up his opinion at the end of the testimony in which he described similar experiences: I came to know Wollner as a brutal Gestapo man with all the tendencies and characteristics of a primitive German soul. He beat people maliciously and brutally, deliberately to the temples and ears, trying to surprise his prey by using the filthiest words and screaming. I believe that it was at his order that, having served my sentence, I took a deadly path through the concentration camps. Gross Rosen, Sachsenhausen, Schleben and Buchenwald only to be, miraculously, rescued from death by the advancing American army. He was essentially right in the last remark – some of those who were only sent to prisons and correctional institutions for “minor” offences by German courts and who, after the end of their sentences, went to concentration camps by order of the Gestapo, did not return. For example, out of the twenty-one-member group of the collaborators of Squad in the First Line, who distributed V boj!, arrested in the period from 1939 to 1940, three people died – Čeněk Pečený died in custody of the People’s Court in Nuremberg in April 1944, Jiří Pečený was killed during a raid on Dresden in February 1945, and the person with the surname Stehlík lost his life during the death march in April 1945. In this case, nine other illegal workers of Jewish origin were arrested, all of whom perished in the extermination camps. As a member of the arrest group, Wollner was involved, for example, in capturing the radiotelegraph operator František Peltán and head of the radio group of the illegal organization ÚVOD Rudolf Mareš, which occurred on 11 July 1942 in the Kinský Garden in Prague (Peltán was mortally wounded during the operation and succumbed to his injury nine days later). In the summer of 1942, in the Turnov region, Wollner participated in the arrests of the collaborators of this organization during which Doc. RNDr. Vladimír Krajina, one of the leading figures of the Czech non-Communist resistance movement, was to be caught. However,
behind the iron curtain

he managed to escape even though the Gestapo, including Wollner, were shooting at him. 

At the beginning of 1944, Wollner started experiencing serious mental problems, which culminated in a nervous disease. In the period from 20 February to 6 March 1944, he was even on a sick leave. The causes of the disease are not known, but it was clear that he was no longer able to work in the executive section of the Gestapo. His superiors found a job for him as commander of the educational labour camp in Břežany (now part of the Lešany municipality, Benešov district), established in late 1943 at the edge of the training area of SS-Truppenübungsplatz Böhmen. The camp was intended for people released from prisons and concentration camps who were to complete an “educational course for work in the industry”, as well as for those who violated the general work duty (e.g. refugees from forced labour in Germany). The camp also had its branch offices in other villages of the training area: in Bukovany, Tvoršovice and Krhanice. The number of prisoners ranged from five hundred to a thousand and far exceeded the capacity of the camp. The sanitary conditions of the interned people were appalling. In total, ten thousand people were interned there. The regime in the camp was apparently looser than in a concentration camp, but Wollner introduced “tough discipline” soon after his arrival. 

A testimony about the conditions was provided after the war, for example, by one of the former members of the guard section of the Protectorate Gendarmeries who was subject to him: Wollner, as commander of the labour educational camp in Břežany, was known to our Czech people who were interned in this camp for a period of 2 to 12 weeks for the offence of desertion from work or sabotage of work in Germany, as a man of brutal and ruthless nature [...] It happened quite often that this Wollner ordered some of our interned people to line up early in the morning, around 4 am, in the yard of the camp, where he was present, and at his command the people had to trot, lie down, etc., and carry out this exercise until they departed to their workplace, and the same was repeated in the evening after work. [...] Wollner had, and assumed, great power, which he manifested, and usually when he was in a bad mood or when he received bad news about the situation at the front, he was very angry, usually taking this anger out on our interned Czech people in different ways... 

As already stated, Friedrich Dennert came to Prague in April 1939. He joined Department II F of the Gestapo. He was responsible for “reputation survey” of various people (e.g. for courts). In November of that year, he was transferred to Department II BM, where he was responsible for Czech societies (section 2, which he led). This is where he worked until the summer of 1943. In 1944, like many other officials of security forces in the Protectorate, he was transferred to Hungary, which was occupied by German troops in March of that year. 

In the Gestapo, he gained the official title of “criminal employee” and the rank of SS-Oberscharführer (roughly equivalent to staff sergeant). He lived at Nosticova Street No. 4 in the Lesser Town. At that time he was married and had three children, but the marriage probably was not happy. After the war, when he was extradited to Czechoslovakia, he stated that he was a widower.

During interrogations, with few exceptions, he did not use physical violence. He achieved results, for example, by demotivating the interrogated persons – he told them that everything was lost anyway and that the Gestapo knew everything from the other detainees, he changed the content of the statements given by the interrogated persons for the reports or he directly dictated the reports at his own discretion. When it was necessary to use physical methods, he used others to beat the detainees. He mostly just watched impassively. Compared to Wollner and others, disproportionately fewer people went through his hands. He was apparently not a fanatic Nazi and only tried to make the most of his position. František Mařík, a former informer of the Gestapo in Prague, testified the following after the war: When possible, Dennert avoided work and service, leaving it to his subordinates. In that sense he also arranged his office in Senovážná Street. In that 5-room flat, which was to serve as an office, he used four rooms for romantic affairs, both for himself and for his friends. As I learned, there were also lesbian orgies. Seeing such officials, I realized that Hitler’s empire was slowly but surely disintegrating. 

It was mainly in the first phase of his operation at Section II BM that he participated in the elimination of Czech community life: the primary aim was dissolution of legionary, military and shooting organizations and societies, National Guards, and later also Sokol and others. During his post-war investigation, the circumstances of the liquidation of the scouts organization Junák on 25 October 1940 were documented in detail. As part of it, one of the first lists of Scout officials killed and tortured to death was prepared, containing 248 names. Although Dennert could not be the only person to be blamed for their death, it was proved that the arrest of several officials who tried to hide the Scout property from seizure was within his control. Property issues played a substantial role. The inventory of Czech organizations, often having a value up to tens of millions of crowns, was confiscated by the Reich. The network of scout club-rooms, built for nearly three decades, their equipment, camping gear, as well as houses, land and financial assets, were to be used in the future mainly as facilities for Hitlerjugend in the Protectorate.

During the second martial law, called the Heydrich Terror, Dennert ordered the Protectorate police to arrest some prominent personalities, e.g. Secretary General of the National Community (Nationale Gemeinschaft) Dr. Jan Hruška, President of the Supreme Accounting and Inspection Office Dr. Vladimír Horák, landowner and Agrarian Party politician Ing. Jindřich Žílka and others. At that time, he was a member of the German court-martial. From this position he sent dozens of Czech patriots to their...
deaths. For example, he was responsible for the death of the well-known Czech politician, pre-war senator of the National Socialist Party and journalist Františka Plamínková, who is considered the first Czech feminist. A firing squad ended her life at the firing range in Kobylisy on 30 June 1942.

Despite this engagement, however, Dennert was essentially a man in the background, and after the war his name might have even escaped the attention of the Czechoslovak investigative service. The fact that he eventually became one of the war criminals whose extradition from the American occupation zone was eagerly expected in Czechoslovakia, is especially related to the task given to him after the destruction of the village of Lidice in June 1942. Seven women from Lidice were pregnant at that time. Four of them, who were to give birth in the coming days, were first taken to the Kladno hospital and then to a secret "shelter" established for them by the Prague Gestapo at Dykova Street No. 20, Vinohrady, where they gave birth. Their children were immediately killed by the Nazis. The other two women had been taken to a concentration camp. Two other women had been taken to a concentration camp in June 1942, but just before delivery they were transported to Prague, where they gave birth. Their children were treated by German staff. The last, seventh, child, František Horník, was born in Ravensbrück on 28 October 1942 and was immediately killed by the Nazis.

"Supervision" of this "secret maternity hospital", which was later used in the same way for at least another three pregnant wives of the executed Czech resistance fighters and which operated until mid-February 1943, was entrusted to Friedrich Dennert. For the free nations, it was already during the war that Lidice became a symbol of the most barbaric German fury, and any involvement of German security forces in its tragic end was very carefully checked. In the first months after the war, the tragedy of the Lidice children was not yet fully elucidated – some of those who were selected for Germanization due to their "racial predispositions" were found. There was hope that many more managed to survive the war.

The fate of those who were removed from their mothers in Dykova Street could at least initially raise questions. The children were entered in registers under German names. At the time when Dennert's extradition was being dealt with, the Czechoslovak security authorities were feverishly searching for them. Finally, in early May 1946, two of them were found.

Věra Müllerová, born 5 September 1942, was taken from Dykova Street to the orphanage of the 2nd German Children's Clinic on Charles Square after six weeks and from there to a special isolated department of the children's home in Prague-Krč at the end of August 1943. Shortly after liberation, in early June 1945, she was sent to be taken care of by the family of the Zbraslav nursery director, Mrs Ptáčková. This is where she was found, based on the information from the Krč hospital, on 1 May 1946 by the search service and handed over to her mother, who survived imprisonment in a concentration camp. Jaroslav Korecký was found with the clerk Otakar Kříž's family in Stránice. Unlike Věra Müllerová, he grew up there until his adulthood. Blood tests that he underwent in the early 1960s showed that he was indeed a child from Lidice.

The other four children did not live to see the end of the war. Věnceslava Kohlíčková died on 1 September 1942, Karel Hanžlí less than three weeks later, on 20 September. Both reportedly died of nutritional disorders. Anna Straková succumbed to pneumonia on 2 March 1943, and Marie Pešková died on 2 June 1943, apparently of septic pleurisy. All of them died in the orphanage of the 2nd German Children's Clinic on Charles Square.

Dennert's testimony could not bring much new information to clarify their stories. The members of the 5th Department (state security) of the National Security Service Directorate in Prague concluded the investigation with a final report, dated 3 May 1946. Dennert only confessed his role in managing the secret maternity hospital in Dykova Street and his truly organizational role in setting up a shelter for the children of the arrested people and members of the Czechoslovak Foreign Army at Jenerálka, Prague, in August 1942. The management of the shelter was assumed in November of that year by Department II G (unlawful possession of weapons and explosives, offences under the Act of so-called insidious attacks on the state). In total, approximately fifty child prisoners were kept at Jenerálka. On 14 April 1944, they were sent to the internment camp in Svatobořice. Another nineteen children up to three years of age were kept at the former Masaryk Homes in Prague-Krč in early 1945.

As already stated, Dennert's engagement in Prague ended in March 1944, in connection with the German occupation of Hungary, where he was transferred. His work in Hungary after the war was not investigated at all by the Extraordinary People's Court.

GOING TO THE GALLOWS

Wilhelm Wollner managed to leave Břežany with his family before the
end of the war. He went to Bavaria, but as early as 28 July 1945, in the Šumava town of Neukirchen beim Heiligen Blut near the Czechoslovak border he was arrested by the American CIC.30 He was transported to the Detention and Internment Camp in Dachau near Munich. From there, almost exactly a year after the war ended, on 11 May 1946, he was extradited at the request of the Czechoslovak War Crimes Investigating Team to be punished in Czechoslovakia. His investigation ended on 5 February 1947, when the public prosecutor at the Extraordinary People’s Court in Prague brought criminal charges.31

Friedrich Dennert’s story evolved in a similar manner. After his return from Hungary in early 1945, he did not start work at his original post in Prague, but was assigned to the Gestapo office in Klatovy, West Bohemia. In the last days of the Third Reich, he managed to escape, but as soon as on 29 May 1945, in the Upper Austrian village of Waldzell, he was arrested as a former Gestapo officer by the members of the CIC belonging to the 65th Infantry Di-
vision of the US Army. First, he was taken to prison in Linz.

The Czechoslovak authorities began to look for him a few months later. The Czechoslovak War Crimes Investigating "Team of Colonel Bohuslav Ezér" launched a search for him in the Western occupation zones of Germany on 26 October 1945, apparently in connection with the gradual clarifying of the stories of the Lidice children. In mid-February 1946, they were contacted from Prague by the representatives of the War Crimes Commission at the Association of Liberated Political Prisoners. They also expressed the assumption that Dennert might have left Klatovy for the village of Sankt Johann near Linz. Therefore, the letter was forwarded from Wiesbaden to the Czechoslovak War Crimes Office in Salzburg. This was a step in the right direction. In late March 1946, Dennert was found by the local investigators, who then arranged his transfer to the Internment Camp Marcus W. Orr near the capital of the Salzburg region. They also started negotiations on his extradition.

As in almost all cases, the Americans willingly granted the request. The exact date of Dennert's extradition to Czechoslovakia is not known, but the order of 19 October 1946 concerning his escort from Pilsen to Prague has been preserved. The Pilsen prison served as a transit point for war criminals extradited to the republic by the Western allies. They spent from several days to up to several weeks there (in this case, it is possible that Dennert was interrogated about his Klatovy engagement at the very end of the war).

In Prague, he went first to custody of the 5th Department of the National Security Service Directorate (i.e. the StB, which investigated war crimes at that time), but on 30 October 1946 he was transferred to judicial custody of the Extraordinary People's Court at Pankrác. Criminal charges were brought exactly five months later, on 30 March 1947.

**Conclusion**

Wilhelm Wollner and Friedrich Dennert were almost contemporaries. They were born just before the outbreak of the Great War, Dennert into a middle-class family in one of the better suburbs of Berlin, and Wollner, on the contrary, into a large working-class family in Aš in Sudetenland. Both received vocational technical education, corresponding to the social strata they came from. Wollner trained as a weaver, and Dennert attended a higher technical institute that he, however, did not finish. The lives of both were affected by the Great Depression, during which their political views were formed. Both solved their existential problems by joining the civil service – Dennert joined the police in 1934, and Wollner became a professional soldier about two years before him. Both professed Nazi ideology in the second half of the 1930s. In the spring of 1939, they met at the newly established headquarters of the Gestapo in Prague and spent almost the whole war there. Although their work styles were different, the results were essentially the same. Wollner was a classic "beater", extracting detainees' confessions almost exclusively by beating and
threats. In contrast, Dennert was more of a “man in the background” and was entrusted with somewhat more sophisticated tasks that he, however, carried out with the same ruthlessness and without remorse. At the end of the war, both managed to escape to the territory occupied by the US Army, where they were arrested and, as war criminals, extradited on the basis of Allied agreements to be punished in Czechoslovakia. This is where they were brought before the Extraordinary People’s Court in Prague in the last days of the first retribution in the spring of 1947. They were sentenced to capital punishment and executed.

Regardless of their different origins and pathways of their pre-war lives, in the service of the Gestapo they became typical representatives of the repressive occupation apparatus of the Nazi state in occupied Czechoslovakia, and the punishment that they were sentenced to after the war is definitely justified in the context of the time.

NOTES

1 The history of retributive justice in the Czech lands has been paid considerable attention in Czech historiography in the last two decades. For the first time, it was dealt with by Mečislav Borák in his extensive monograph (Borák, M. [1998]. Spravedlnost podle dekretu. Retribuční soudnictví v ČSR a Mimořádný lidový soud v Ostravě 1945–1948. Senov u Opavy: Tilia.) and then by many others.

2 Liška, O. et al. (2006). Tresty smrti vykonané v Československu v letech 1948–1989. Prague: ÚDV. The total number of death sentences was slightly higher, because it also included those sentenced in absentia and those pardoned by President Edvard Beneš.

3 In 1880, a total of 13,209 inhabitants lived in Aš. All were of German nationality. Aš was a district town, with thirteen textile mills, two breweries, gasworks and many mechanical weaving mills, dye houses and bleacheries. The Aš region had a special constitutional status as a feudal territory within the lands of the Czech crown until 1770. Ottův slovník naučný (1896). Volume II. Prague: J. Ott, 534.

4 Hans Christian Wollner came from Aš (his father was a weaver), and Margaretha Fedr was born in nearby Verněřov (now a part of Aš). Her father was a coachman. State Regional Archives (SRA) in Prague, f. (collection) Extraordinary People’s Court (EPC) Prague, k. (box) 649, sp. zn. (file No.) Ls XX 7246/46, Birth and baptismal certificate Vilém Jiří Wollner (copy), l. (sheet) 430.

5 In his later autobiography, which he wrote during the investigation, Wollner stated that he professed the Roman-Catholic confession. However, a copy of his birth certificate shows that from his birth until 1940 he was a member of the Evangelical Church; this is also confirmed by his pre-war military documents. During the 2nd World War, as a good Nazi, he was not affiliated to any confession, and specified himself as “a believer in God” (Gottgläubig). Ibid.


9 Ibid., l. 142.

10 Ibid., l. 144.

11 Education called Obersekunda in the German lands.

12 For more information about this company, see http://www.albertgieseler.de/dampf_de/firmen1/firmadet16901.shtml (quoted as of 21 May 2014).


14 SRA in Prague, f. EPC Prague, k. 649, sp. zn. Ls XVII 7424/46, General information about his life – National Security Service Directorate in Prague in the last days of the first retribution in the spring of 1947. They were sentenced to capital punishment and executed.


16 Eventually, however, he was arrested in February 1943 and imprisoned until the end of the war. After the war, he was General Secretary of the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party and a deputy. After February 1948, he went into exile, where he died in 1993.


18 ibid., unmarked, undated, l. 89. The spelling errors were corrected in the citation of the document.


20 For more information, see, for example, SRA in Prague, f. EPC Prague, k. 649, sp. zn. Ls XX 7246/46, State Security Service [STB] Regional Office in Mladá Boleslav, Report drawn up on 28 March 1947 in the office of Gen.[eral] Secretary [of the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party] Prof. Dr. Vladimír Krajin, born 30 January 1905, […] concerning the arrest of members of the illeg.[al] org. [anization] ÚVOD in Kacanovy conducted by the Prague Gestapo, l. 465–472.


22 SRA in Prague, f. EPC Prague, k. 649, sp. zn. Ls XX 7246/46, Official letter by police officer of the Nový Bydžov National Security...
Corps František P(?)arl (the first letter in his surname is not clear – author’s note), dated in Nový Bydžov on 6 June 1946, for the Praha-Pankrác [Extraordinary] People’s Court, l. 226.


24 Ibid., unmarked, undated, reports of Cpt. Matěk and Mahler (Maler, Malcher) on Dennert, l. 82.

25 Shortly before the occupation of the rest of the Czech lands, there was a merger of several previously separate Scout organizations into one. The activity of Junák was restored in 1941 in Great Britain.

26 SRA in Prague, f. EPC Prague, k. 662, sp. zn. Ls XVII 7424/46, e.g. Record of 2 June 1942, Dr. Hříbek Pres. B. K. S., l. 182, and Regional Office of the State Security Service, Section B/3 in Prague, 5 April 1947, for ref. No. 5553/46, Report drawn up with Staff Captain Josef Novotný, born 21 July 1912, l. 185.

27 They included the midwife Michaela Dolejší (born 26 September 1900 in Carinthia) and the main nurse Aloisie Kuhrová (born 18 November 1900 in Lhota, Litovel district), who provided an extensive testimony after the war. Originally, it was a refuge for poor and abandoned women. The Prague Gestapo leased the facility through the Prague organization of the National Socialist People’s Welfare (Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt). See, e.g., ibid., Report drawn up on 10 May 1948, StB Department at the National Security Service Directorate in Prague, with Michaela Dolejší, born 26 September 1900, l. 61; ibid., National Security Service Directorate in Prague, Report drawn up on 17 April 1948 at the StB/S Department with Aloisie Kuhrová, born 18 November 1900 l. 74-75. For more information about the Lidice children, see, for example, ibid., National Security Service Directorate in Prague, the StB/S, in Prague, on 18 April 1948, Record for the purpose of searching for abducted Lidice children, l. 87.

28 Ibid., judgement, 2 May 1947, l. 201-203.


31 SRA in Prague, f. EPC Prague, k. 662, sp. zn. Ls XVII 7424/46. General information about his life – National Security Service Directorate in Prague, on 18 April 1946, Report drawn up with Staff Captain Josef Novotný, born 21 July 1912, l. 185.

32 Bohuslav Ečer (1893–1954), a Czech lawyer and university teacher. During the Second World War he lived in exile in London. He dealt with the issue of the law of war and, as a representative of Czechoslovakia, he became a member of the United Nations Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes. He was bestowed the rank of General of the Czechoslovak Army judicial services. After February 1948, he was persecuted by the Communist regime.

33 The person who alone or in cooperation with others in times of increased threat to the Republic (Section 18), in the service or in the interest of Germany or its allies, or a movement, its organizations or members hostile to the Republic, is responsible for the loss of freedom of a larger number of inhabitants of the Republic without other consequences shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for five to twenty years. If the offender causes loss of freedom of a larger number of inhabitants of the Republic in such a manner, the court may impose rigorous imprisonment from twenty years to life imprisonment and, under particularly aggravating circumstances, the death penalty. See The Collection of Laws and Regulations of the Republic of Czechoslovakia, Volume 1945, No. 16/1945 Coll. II.

34 SRA in Prague, f. EPC Prague, k. 649, sp. zn. Ls XX 7246/46, Report on the trial, l. 387–401; Judgement, l. 418–423, and Official Record of execution, 23 April 1947, l. 424. The execution was carried out by the executioner František Nenáhlo in the courtyard of the Pankrác prison. The convict’s death was confirmed by the prison doctor, MUDr. Navara, at 8:43 pm.

35 Ibid., Barbara Wollner’s request of 8 March 1947 for the release of her husband. Copy in English and the translation of the same document into Czech, l. 377-378.

36 The person who in times of increased threat to the Republic (Section 18), in the service or in the interest of Germany or its allies, or a movement, its organizations or members hostile to the Republic, committed the following crimes: a) under the Criminal Code of 27 May 1826, No. 117 of the Imperial Law Gazette, a crime of public violence of robbery of people (Section 95), public violence of treating a person as a slave (Section 95), murder (Sections 134–137 ), manslaughter (Sections 140 and 141) and grievous bodily harm (Section 156), (letter b refers to similar crimes committed under the Hungarian Criminal Code – author’s note) shall be punished with death. See The Collection of Laws and Regulations of the Republic of Czechoslovakia, Volume 1945, No. 16/1945 Coll. II.

37 SRA in Prague, f. EPC Prague, k. 662, sp. zn. Ls XVII 7424/46, Record [of execution], 2 May 1947, l. 199.

38 On the following day, the following persons were executed: former commander of the SD headquarters in Prague Dr. Walter Jacobi, former adjutant of His Excellency Richard Heydrich, former adjutant of H. E. C. Wünsche, the former adjutant of H. E. F. Dönhoff, former adjutant of H. E. F. Böcking, former adjutant to H. E. F. Wettig, former adjutant to H. E. F. von Bredow, the adjutant to H. E. F. von Stülpnagel, a Moravian. See Šustek, V. (ed.) (2012). Atentát na Reinharda Heydricha a druhé stanné právo na území tzv. protektorátu Čechy a Morava. Edice historických dokumentů, Vol. 1. Prague: Scriptorium, document No. I/96, 519, and document No. I/107, 817.

39 However, as stated, for example, by Heinz Pannwitz, even he did not hesitate to use brutal methods in more intense interrogations. It is interesting that both received War Merit Cross 2nd Class with Swords for their “merit” in investigation of Reinhard Heydrich’s assassination. See Sustek, V. (ed.) (2012). Atentát na Reinharda Heydricha a druhé stanné právo na území tzv. protektorátu Čechy a Morava. Edice historických dokumentů, Vol. 1. Prague: Scriptorium, document No. I/96, 519, and document No. I/107, 817.

A record by CIC dept. of 65th Infantry Division of the US Army of arrest of Gestapo officer Friedrich Dennert

Photo: SRA in Prague
DENNERT

DEBERG

SurName

First Name

Occupation: custoke agent

Identity Documents: destroyed all papers

Details of arrest: a) Place: Linz, Austria
b) Date: 29 May 1945
c) Time: 1000


SIGNED: Names and Address:

Statement after arrest:

Claims custoke employee, not agent

Property: (Property taken from prisoner to be listed on back, together with description and whereabouts of any other property relevant to the case)

MILITARY OR CIVIL AUTHORITY TAKING CUSTODY OF PRISONER:
The residence of T4 headquarters, a villa in Tier-gartenstraße 4 in Berlin.

Photo: Author’s Archive
Chancellery of the Führer of the NSDAP and Action T4

Adolf Hitler wrote that ‘it is impossible to let the incurably ill continue infecting the healthy’1 in Mein Kampf as early as in 1924. Three years later, he mentioned the eugenic killing of newborns in his speech at the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) rally in Nuremberg: If Germany gains one million children and gets rid of the 700,000 to 800,000 weakest individuals every year, it should emerge stronger ultimately. The greatest hazard for us is not enabling the natural selection process, thus losing the possibility of gaining capable individuals.2

PAVEL ZEMAN

In 1935 Adolf Hitler told Gerhard Wagner, the Reich Physician Leader (Reichsärzteführer) that he would order the ‘euthanasia’ to be carried out in the event of the outbreak of war.3 He kept his word in October 1939, issuing a written authorisation to conduct ‘euthanasia’ on incurably ill patients.4 In addition to the Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases (Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses), enacted by the Nazi regime as early as on 14 July 1933, ‘euthanasia’ became the next step towards creating a racially pure and sound German society in the Nazi spirit.

Before the ‘euthanasia’ of incurably ill adult patients in lunatic asylums would commence at the turn of 1939 and 1940, child ‘euthanasia’ was first prepared. Allegedly, its launch was triggered by a plea from the Knauer family in Leipzig at the turn of 1938 and 1939. The family had reportedly contacted the director of the children’s teaching clinic in Leipzig, Professor Werner Catel5, with a request to euthanize their incurably ill child. When Catel declined on the grounds of illegality, the child’s father reportedly applied to Adolf Hitler for the same permission. Hitler commissioned his personal physician Karl Brandt6 to consult other physicians on the child’s health, suggesting that if the report of a blind, retarded child without parts of limbs, with a small head and suffering from incessant spasms7 is true, doctors should be authorised to euthanize it. When Catel responded positively, the doctors at the children’s clinic in Leipzig were reportedly permitted to conduct ‘euthanasia’. According to the latest knowledge, however, this occurrence – cited in all of the principal literature on the ‘euthanasia’ programme for decades – never took place in reality. Its roots lie in the post-war depositions of the masterminds of the programme, Karl Brandt and Hans Hefelmann8, who ascribed the responsibility for the start of the ‘euthanasia’ to Hitler in an attempt to obtain an alibi.9

Regardless of whether or not the “child K.” story was true, Adolf Hitler permitted an analogous procedure to be followed in other cases in 1939. In order to keep the programme of killing incurably ill children patients secret, the Reich Committee for the Scientific Registration of Severe Hereditary Ailments (Reichsausschus zur wissenschaftlichen Erfassung von erb- und anlagebedingten Schweren Leiden) was founded. Its inception was overseen by Hitler’s physician Karl Brandt and Philipp Bouhler10, the head of Hitler’s special personal bureau, which played a sombre role in the preparation and execution of the children’s and adults’ ‘euthanasia’ programme as well as in the extermination of Jews in occupied Poland and murdering Jews in the north of Italy between 1939 and 1945.11

It was named the Chancellery of the Führer of the NSDAP (Kanzlei des Führers der NSDAP, “KdF”) and as a party authority it was independent of the top NSDAP officials and of the Reich Chancellery. The decision on establishing it was made in 1934 at the NSDAP’s national rally in Nuremberg. It was a private chancellery subjected directly to Adolf Hitler as the Reich head of the NSDAP and it was initially intended primarily for processing inquiries and clemency petitions addressed to the NSDAP leader. Its inception was meant to underscore Hitler’s leading role at the helm of the German state and the Nazi party, which had already been expressed through the existence of three other bureaus subjected directly to Adolf Hitler – the presidential chancellery of the head of state led by Otto Meissner12, the Reich Chancellery’s Bureau led by Hans Lammers13 and the party’s office in Munich led by Martin Bormann14 (until 1941, this comprised the Deputy Führer’s staff led by Rudolf Hess15).

Philipp Bouhler became the head of the KdF on 17 November 1934.
The Chancellery first resided at Berlin’s Lützowufer Street, then moved to the new Reich Chancellery building at Voßstraße 4. Initially a small authority, it employed 42 people in February 1935 and grew gradually to employ 195 people by 1939. The structure of the KdF stabilised with five departments in 1938: Central Office I (Hauptamt I, Personal Affairs), Central Office II (Hauptamt II, State and Party Affairs), Central Office III (Hauptamt III, Pardon Office for Party Affairs), Central Office IV (Hauptamt IV, Social and Economic Affairs), Central Office V (Hauptamt V, Internal Affairs and Personnel Matters). The principal work of the KdF was 1) addressing clemency petitions in criminal and party cases (co-deciding from 1938), 2) allocation of foreign currencies, provision of economic aid and granting concessions, and 3) processing applications for the granting of exemptions from the ban on marriages between Aryans and non-Aryans (the Nuremberg Laws 1935) and exemptions from the act on forced sterilisation.

The third range of agenda also meant the KdF’s responsibility for the preparation and execution of forced ‘euthanasia’ of incurably ill patients, both children and adults. The pleas from the parents of disabled children for ‘euthanizing’ of their ill offspring addressed to Adolf Hitler through the KdF became an argument in favour of children’s ‘euthanasia’. The aforementioned Reich Committee, which worked concealed under the auspices of the KdF, was responsible for it. It was led by Hans Hefelmann who simultaneously was the head of Central Office IIb of the KdF, and his job description included liaising with Reich ministries and clemency petitions. He, together with his deputy Richard von Hegener and the physicians Werner Catel, Heins Heinze and Ernst Wentzler, made decisions about the life and death of disabled children based on specific forms.

As well as the ‘euthanasia’ of children, the Central Office II of the KdF led by Viktor Brack and his deputy Werner Blankenburg was in charge of all affairs associated with the ‘euthanasia’ of adults. On 18 July 1939, the head of Central Office IIb of the KdF and of the Reich Committee Hans Hefelmann informed Viktor Brack that Adolf Hitler had permitted the Reich Physician Leader Leonard Conti to conduct ‘euthanasia’ on adults. Karl Brandt and Philipp Bouhler started organising it in cooperation with Leonard Conti and the Head of the Department for Treatment and Care Institutions of the Ministry of the Interior (Referatsleiter für Heil- und Pflegeanstalten im Innenministerium) Dr. Herbert Linden in the summer of 1939. As...
behind the iron curtain

of its commencement, Adolf Hitler signed an authorisation in October 1939 (antedated as of 1 September 1933), the text of which was most likely prepared by Philipp Bouhler, Viktor Brack, Karl Brandt and Werner Blankenburg together with certain psychiatrists. The vague wording ...so that the incurably ill can be granted merciful death based on human assessment with the ultimately critical evaluation of the state of their illness was used in order to apply to patients without any mental affliction whatsoever.

To implement the ‘euthanasia’ programme, a semi-state organisation was set up; at first it involved three and then four institutions that worked in concealment under the Central Office II of the KdF, as did the Reich Committee. The Reich Cooperative for State Hospitals and Nursing Homes (Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft Heil- und Pflegeanstalten) was in charge of identification of the victims in medical terms. The Charitable Foundation for Institutional Care (Gemeinnützige Stiftung für Anstaltspflege) was responsible for selecting and employing staff and setting up and operating the extermination centres for ‘euthanasia’. The transport of the ill along with their medical documentation to the extermination centres was provided by the Charitable Foundation for the Transport of Patients (Gemeinnützige Krankentransport GmbH). The payments of the costs of the care for the victims were the responsibility of the Central Accounting Office for State Hospitals and Nursing Homes (Zentralverrechnungsstelle Heil- und Pflegeanstalten) from April 1941. The entire project was financially backed by the Reich top officials of the NSDAP represented by the Reich treasurer of the NSDAP Franz Xaver Schwarz and his deputy Hermann Ried. At the same time, the KdF and its concealed semi-state structure had to cooperate inconspicuously with the top officials of the SS as well as the Reich Ministry of the Interior and the ministries of the interior of the various countries in pursuit of the ‘euthanasia’ programme. The cooperation with the Technical Institute for the Detection of Crime (Kriminaltechnisches Institut der Sicherheitspolizei, KTI) of the Central Office of the Reich Detective Forces (Reichskriminalpolizeiamt, RKPA), which operated under the Reich Main Security Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt, RSHA), was also necessary. In order to conceal the association of the ‘euthanasia’ organisation with the KdF, the majority of its structures with approximately 100 persons resided in the centre of Berlin; first, from 1 December 1939, at the Columbuschaus on Potsdam Square, and then, from April 1940, at a former Jewish villa at Tiergartenstraße 4. This is where the organisation’s name – T4 – derives from. Viktor Brack and Philipp Blankenburg managed and planned its activity from the KdF headquarters at the Reich Chancellery in Vößstraße. T4 fulfilled its other tasks primarily at Tiergartenstraße 4.

This organisational structure hidden under the KdF in cooperation with the above institutions and other state, party and district authorities of the Third Reich managed, over a relatively short period from the summer of 1939 to early 1940, to recruit the necessary number of medical, nursing, office, police and other staff and map the majority of disabled patients of lunatic asylums, homes for the elderly and other institutions for the disabled with the aid of the Reich Ministry of the In-
Senior medical experts psychiatrist Werner Heyde and the psychiatrist Hermann Paul Nitsche made the final decisions as to the patients’ destinies. It also managed to make the decisions on which of the patients would live or die based on medical reports, choose the best method for killing them (suffocation using carbon monoxide in an enclosed area) and transform the selected lunatic asylums and prisons into ‘euthanasia’ killing centres.

Senior medical experts (Obergutachter) of T4 Werner Heyde and Herbert Linden (replaced by psychiatrist Hermann Paul Nitsche in February 1940) made the final decisions about the patients’ destinies. Viktor Brack estimated the expected number of victims of the programme at 65,000 to 75,000. We arrived at this figure through calculation based on the ratio of 1000/10/5/1. This means that, out of one thousand people, ten need psychiatric treatment and five out of those need hospitalisation. And out of those, the programme will concern one person. If we apply this to the population of the entire Greater German Reich, we need to expect 65,000 to 75,000 cases. Hence, we can consider the issue of “who” solved. T4 also considered the issue of the killing method solved after having poisoned 18–20 mentally ill people with carbon monoxide in a specially adapted bathroom in the former prison in Brandenburg City in the State of Brandenburg in early January 1940. The murdering of the disabled in eastern Prussia, Pomerania and Poznan with gunfire, drugs and carbon monoxide in progress from October 1939 served as a source of experience on how to best mass murder afflicted patients.

To make it reality, T4 selected from among the suggested lunatic asylums and prisons the institutions that would cover the entire territory of the Reich, occupied Austria and the catchment areas of Silesia and the Sudetenland. The murdering at the facilities, adapted into killing centres with gas chambers and crematories, commenced in January 1940. The first facility to start operation in this way was the psychiatric asylum in Grafeneck in Baden-Württemberg, referred to as centre “A” by T4. Its catchment area was the South Tyrol and German patients from the Italian provinces of Bolzano and Trento were also sent there in cooperation with Italian authorities. A total of 9,839 people were murdered at the centre between January and December 1940. The second killing centre, which started operation in January 1940, was the former prison in Brandenburg City in the State of Brandenburg (centre “B”). Its catchment area included psychiatric asylums and treatment institutions in Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein, Brandenburg, Brunswick, Mecklenburg, Anhalt and in Hamburg and Berlin. A total of 9,772 people were killed there from February to September 1940. Commissioned at the same time as Brandenburg, centre “C” operated in Hartheim near Linz in Upper Austria. In the former mansion and lunatic asylum, 18,269 people from Austria, south of Germany, Saxony, the Sudetenland and Yugoslavia died between January 1940 and August 1941. Killing centre “D” was set up in the former psychiatric asylum in Sonnenstein near Pirna.
in Saxony in April 1940. The 13,720 people who died there by August 1941 came from Thuringia and in part from Saxony, Silesia and the Sudetenland. In November 1940, the Brandenburg killing centre was replaced by centre “Be” in Bernberg in Saxony-Anhalt, which was better equipped and where 8,602 people died by August 1941. When the centre in Grafeneck was closed, the last centre, referred to as “E”, was opened in Hadamar in Hessen in December 1940, and the Grafeneck personnel relocated there. A total of 10,072 victims were murdered with carbon monoxide there.46

Approximately 8,765 people were gassed at those facilities in the first half of 1940; three-quarters of them in May and June 1940 when the attention of both the German and the international public was focused on the war developments in France. By the end of 1940, another 28,459 patients were murdered, and 35,049 more were killed from January to August 1941. Based on the surviving T4 registries, a total of 70,273 people were murdered between January 1940 and August 1941.47

A very rough estimate of about 3,500 victims per month shows that the semi-state organisation T4, concealed within the KdF, managed to build a relatively highly operational organisational structure, both on the central level in Berlin and at the six killing centres in Austria, Saxony, Baden-Württemberg, Saxony-Anhalt, Hessen and Brandenburg. The structure was capable of organising the project – it built a fully operational organisation that identified and selected hundreds of thousands of disabled patients, transported them to the killing centres (through interim institutions), then murdered the people, photographed selected victims before killing them, eliminated their remains and “appreciated” their personal belongings (enriched itself at their cost). The process worked despite problems with the conduct of the staff in the killing centres, with keeping the killing secret48 and the technical difficulties faced in eliminating the victims.49 The fact that the KdF had succeeded in building a highly operational murderous organisation was confirmed not only by the course of the actual organised “euthanasia” between 1940 and 1941, whose victims included patients of German and Czech origins from the Sudetenland,50 but also by the later deployment of the murdering “euthanasia” personnel in occupied Poland as part of Operation Reinhard from the end of 1941 to the autumn of 1943. After that, it also influenced the persecution and murdering of Italian Jews in the Venice Giulia region and the Istria Peninsula (the Operational Zone of the Adriatic littoral – Operation szone Adriatisches Küstenland) as part of the Special Deployment Unit R from December 1943 to the end of April 1945.51

The importance of the KdF started diminishing from 1942. Its headcount was reduced to 137 and it lost the possibility of receiving mail at the Reich Chancellery. It was still in charge of processing clemency petitions, but the principal decisions were already made at the party office led by Martin Bormann. However, the KdF retained a direct influence on the process of extermination of the Jewish population in occupied Poland as part of Operation Reinhard from the end of 1941 to the autumn of 1943. After that, it also influenced the persecution and murdering of Italian Jews in the Venice Giulia region and the Istria Peninsula (the Operational Zone of the Adriatic littoral – Operation szone Adriatisches Küstenland) as part of the Special Deployment Unit R from December 1943 to the end of April 1945.51
Odilo Globocnik, the SS and police leader in the Lublin district and the head of Operation Reinhard. They belonged under his command after the end of Operation Reinhard in the autumn of 1943. As part of the Special Deployment Unit R they were relocated to the Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral and, once again, they reported to Odilo Globocnik whom Heinrich Himmler named the high leader of the SS and police in the operating zone with residence in Trieste on 13 September 1943. As far as personnel issues are concerned, however, they were managed directly by the T4 headquarters from Berlin (de facto KdF) throughout their deployment in Operation Reinhard (1941–1943) and then at the Special Deployment Unit R in Northern Italy (1943–1945). This direct official liaison between the headquarters of T4 and its employees in occupied Poland was provided through the position of the Operation Reinhard extermination camp inspector, which Christian Wirth held from August 1942 to the autumn of 1943. The same model was used between December 1943 and the end of April 1945 during the T4 employees’ tenure at the Special Deployment Unit R in the Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral. Again, Christian Wirth worked as the inspector for these R Units (Trieste-R1, Fiume/Rijeka/-R2, Udine-R3) until partisans killed him near Trieste on 26 May 1944. Dietrich Allers (the official Head of T4 from January 1941) held this position after Wirth until the end of the war.

German historian Boris Böhm has used the example of the continuity between the T4 and Operation Reinhard projects to successfully illustrate the operation of T4, a secret semi-state organisation hidden within the KdF and directed by the top officials of Hitler’s private party office. In a matter of two years (1940–1941) it built a functional structure capable of transferring the tried-and-tested centralised method of murdering to occupied Poland. There, it applied the method in field conditions. According to B. Böhm, the principal points of the murderous programme can be summed up as follows:

- All potential victims were first statistically identified in the place of their residence and their names were reported to the headquarters;
- By authorisation of the headquarters, killing centres were built in order to kill the victims in gas chambers on a mass scale and, if possible, efficiently; the headquarters would select the staff for the killing centres;
- The headquarters determined which registered persons should be deported to the specific killing centres. A centrally managed transport structure determined the headcounts and schedules of the various transports from the victims’ places of residence to the killing centres; it organised the transports by itself or through other transport organisations;
- Immediately on arrival at the killing centres, the mostly unsuspecting people were deceived and told to have a shower; they were asked to take their clothes off and go to gas chambers disguised as showers, where they were murdered by gas;
- Once their gold teeth were extracted, the dead bodies were eliminated immediately; the murdering was a mass murder conducted using industrial technology;
- The headquarters enriched itself with the victims’ property.

The National Archives (NARA), RG 549, Records of HQ, USAREUR, War Crimes Branch, War Crimes Case Files (“Case not tried”), 1944–1948, Exhibit 38, Box 491, Case 000-12-483, Die bisher geleistete Arbeit der Aktion, 1

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**“T4” KILLING CENTRES**

(CENTRALISED PHASE OF THE ‘EUTHANASIA’, JANUARY 1940 – AUGUST 1941)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Period of operation</th>
<th>Commanders</th>
<th>Victims</th>
<th>Murdering technology</th>
<th>Countries of origin of the victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grafeneck (A)</td>
<td>January–Dec. 1940</td>
<td>Christian Wirth</td>
<td>9,839</td>
<td>Carbon monoxide</td>
<td>Germany, Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandenburg (B)</td>
<td>February–Sept. 1940</td>
<td>Irmfried Eberl</td>
<td>9,772</td>
<td>Carbon monoxide</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartheim (C)</td>
<td>Jan. 1940–Aug. 1941</td>
<td>Rudolf Lonauer</td>
<td>18,269</td>
<td>Carbon monoxide</td>
<td>Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonnenstein (D)</td>
<td>April 1940–Aug. 1941</td>
<td>Horst Schumann</td>
<td>13,720</td>
<td>Carbon monoxide</td>
<td>Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernburg (Be)</td>
<td>Nov. 1940–Aug. 1941</td>
<td>Irmfried Eberl</td>
<td>8,601</td>
<td>Carbon monoxide</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadamar (E)</td>
<td>Dec. 1940–Aug. 1941</td>
<td>Ernst Baumhard, Friedrich Berner</td>
<td>10,072</td>
<td>Carbon monoxide</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of victims: 70,273*

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* The National Archives (NARA), RG 549, Records of HQ, USAREUR, War Crimes Branch, War Crimes Case Files (“Case not tried”), 1944–1948, Exhibit 38, Box 491, Case 000-12-483, Die bisher geleistete Arbeit der Aktion, 1
**“OPERATION REINHARD” EXTERMINATION CAMPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Camp</th>
<th>Period of operation</th>
<th>Commanders</th>
<th>Victims</th>
<th>Murdering technology</th>
<th>Countries of origin of the victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BELŽEC</strong> (managed by T4)</td>
<td>17 Mar 1942 – early Dec 1942</td>
<td>Christian Wirth Gottlieb Hering</td>
<td>600,000 (B) 550,000 (H) 434,508 (W-T)</td>
<td>Carbon monoxide Gas chambers</td>
<td>Poland, Germany, Protectorate, Austria, Soviet Union, Slovakia, Belgium, Denmark, Holland, Norway, Romania, Hungary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOBIBÓR</strong> (managed by T4)</td>
<td>May 1942 – 14 Oct 1943</td>
<td>Franz Stangl Franz Reichleitner</td>
<td>250,000 (B) 200,000 (H)</td>
<td>Carbon monoxide Gas chambers</td>
<td>Poland, Austria, Germany, Slovakia, Protectorate, Soviet Union, Holland, France, Belgium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TREBLINKA</strong> (managed by T4)</td>
<td>23 Jul 1942 – 19 Aug 1943</td>
<td>Irmfried Eberl Franz Stangl Kurt Franz</td>
<td>900,000 (B) 750,000 (H)</td>
<td>Carbon monoxide Gas chambers</td>
<td>Poland, Austria, Germany, Slovakia, Protectorate, Bulgaria, Greece, Yugoslavia, Belgium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of victims 1,500,000 – 1,750,000

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**MANAGEMENT OF KDF EMPLOYEES IN “OPERATION REINHARD” AND SPECIAL DEPLOYMENT “UNIT R”**

- Reichsleiter Philipp Bouhler
- Oberdienstleiter Viktor Brack (Deputy Werner Blankenburg)
- SS-Brigadeführer Odilo Globočnik (Action Reinhar Head Staff in Lublin)
- Criminal Commissar Christian Wirth
  - Extermination Camp Inspector (1942-1943)
  - Special Deployment Unit R Inspector (1943-1944; Dietrich Allers 1944-1945)
    - (Deputy Hauptsturmführer Gottlieb Hering)
- German personnel (“T4” employees)
  - Action Reinhard extermination camps Belžec, Sobibór, Treblinka (1941-1943)
- German personnel (“T4” employees) in the special Deployment Unit R, Trieste, Fiume/Rijeka, Udine (1943-1945)

*Based on: HILBERG, Raul (1944). Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden. Frankfurt am Main. Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 957 (completed by the author)*

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**behind the iron curtain**
COMMAND AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE OF "OPERATION REINHARD"
IN GENERAL GOVERNMENT (1941–1943)*

A. Hitler

KdF (Berlin)
Ph. Bouhler,
V. Brack,
W. Blankenburg
D. Allers

Reich Leader of SS and head of Nazi Police (Berlin)
H. Himmler

HSSPF (GG)
F. W. Krüger

BdS (GG)
Dr. K. E. Schöngarth

General Governor (GG)
Dr. H. Frank
State Secretary Dr. (GG)
J. Bühler

BdS (GG)

RSHA (Berlin)
R. Heydrich
E. Kaltenbrunner
H. Müller
A. Eichmann

Districts (GG): governors
Krakow: O. Wächter, R. Wendler,
L. Losacker, C. L. von Burgsdorff; Radom:
E. Kund; Galicia: K. Lasch, O. Wächter;
Lublin: E. Zörner, L. Fischer, R. Wendler;
Warsaw: L. Fischer

SSPF (GG)
Krakow: J. Scherner
Radom: H. Boettcher
Galicia: F. Katzmann
Lublin: O. Globocnik
Warsaw: F. Sammern-Frankenegg

Action Reinhard Commander
(GG: Lublin)
O. Globocnik

Action Reinhard Inspector
(GG: Lublin)
Ch. Wirth: from July 1942

Head of the Chief Department of Action Reinhard
(GG: Lublin)
H. Höfle

Local Nazi civilian administration (GG)
– regional Marshal Authorities, district Marshal Authorities

Extermination camps
Bełżec
(GG: Lublin District)
Camp commander:
Ch. Wirth
G. Hering

Extermination camps
Sobibór
(GG: Lublin District)
Camp commander:
F. Stangl
F. Reichleitner

Extermination camps
Treblinka (GG: Warsaw District)
Camp commander:
Dr. I. Eberl, F. Stangl
K. Franz

Extermination camps
Poniatowa (labour)
Trawniki (labour, training –auxiliary non-German staff)
Lublin (labour)

Security Affairs
OrPo (GG)
A special service – ‘Order Police’

KdF (Berlin)
Ph. Bouhler,
V. Brack,
W. Blankenburg
D. Allers

KdF – Chancellery of the Fuehrer of the NSDAP (Kanzlei des Führers der NSDAP)
RSHA – Central Office for Reich Security (Reichssicherheitshauptamt)
HSSPF – Higher SS and Police Leader (Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer)
OrPo – Order Police (Ordnungspolizei)

Legend:
Issuing extermination orders
KdF supervision of T4 staff in Action Reinhard
Giving commands to RSHA
Giving commands for expulsion projects
Coordination and support for expulsion and extermination projects
KdF – General Government (general government)
SSPF – SS and Police Commander (SS- und Polizeiführer)
BdS – Commander of the Security Police and Security Service (Befehlsführer der Sicherheitspolizei und des Sicherheitsdienstes)

* Based on: RÜCKERL, Adalbert: Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungslager im Spiegel deutscher Strafprozesse. Munich. DTV, 349 (completed and modified by the author)
A Hitler empowered the ‘euthanasia’ appointee

P. Bouhler (Head of KdF)
and Dr. K. Brandt (Hitler’s personal physician)

Tasks: defining the range of victims, rules for identifying victims and expert opinions; authorisation of physicians to kill

Central Office II KdF (State and Party Affairs)
Leader: Oberbannfrister V. Bruck (cover name “Jennerwein”) official organisation, Deputy: W. Blankenburger (cover name “Brenner”)

Official premises: Reich Chancellery (Vedotstrasse)
Tasks: represent the Führer, non-medical staff, staff selection and deployment, inspection of ‘euthanasia’ centres

Offices
Central Office II a
Leader: W. Blankenburger (cover name “Brenner”)

Tasks: Stand-in for top medical personnel for official organisation, Organisation of “Action Tq”

Central Office II b
Leader: Dr. H. Hefelmans (deputy) & R. Vorberg (cover name “Hintertal”)

Tasks: Organising children’s euthanasia

Central Office II c

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF “PROGRAMME T4”

Reich Ministry of the Interior
State Commissioner Br. Conti
Dept. IV: Health and People Care
Oberbevollmächtigter Dr. Linden (the Reich Ministry of the Interior contact for KdF; from Oct 1941: Reich Appointee for Treatment and Care Institutions)

Reich Governor District Health Administrations (also Health Administration Reich District of Sudetenland)

Reich Committee for the Scientific Registration of Severe Hereditary Ailments, Evaluators: Prof. W. Catel, Dr. H. Heinze, Dr. E. Wentzler

Specialised children’s wards (as part of the State Hospitals and Nursing Homes)
Department of the Health Authorities (official physicians)
Further submission of official forms

Reich Governor District Health Administrations (also Health Administration Reich District of Sudetenland)

State Hospitals and Nursing Homes (partly combined with special children’s wards; including in the Sudetenland: Dobřany, Bad St. Ebstorf, etc.) as part of the “Action Brandt”

Selection and killing of children and adolescents

University and scientific institutions (e.g., Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, University Children’s Hospital Vienna)
Cooperation in experiments on humans
Supplying prepared tissues and skeletons

Reich Governor District Health Administrations (also Health Administration Reich District of Sudetenland)

Murdering concentration camp prisoners as part of “Action 14f13” in cooperation with the Concentration Camp Inspectorate of the Reich SS Leader, or with the SS Main Economic and Administrative Office, or with the concentration camps

1943–1944: murdering mentally ill “eastern workers” in cooperation with labour authorities

NOTES


3. G. Wagner (16 Aug 1888 – 25 Mar 1939), physician, 1929 NSDAP, 1932 Head of the National Socialist German Physicians Federation, 1934 Main Service Leader of the Main Office for National Health of the Reich Leadership of NSDAP, 1933 Head of the Reich Physicians Chamber and Reich Physician Leader, promoter of Nazi racial hygiene measures.


9. BArch Berlin, R 178, Box No 25, EVZI/25, Akte 2, Prof. Werner Catel's deposition before the District Court in Hannover on 14 May 1962, fol. 23. Quotations translated by the author.

10. The Blood Protection Act said, among other things: Section 1) Marriages between Jews and nationals of German or similar blood are forbidden. Marriages are invalid even if concluded abroad.


19. Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Wiesbaden ("HHStAW"), Staatsanwaltschaft bei dem Oberlandesgericht Frankfurt a. M. (ab 1945), Heyde, Werner u. a., Akte 89 a (hereinafter "Abt. 89 a") No 90-91a, record of deposition by Dr. Hans Hofelmann, Munich 31 Aug 1950, 9-11.

20. The Blood Protection Act said, among other things: Section 1) Marriages between Jews and nationals of German or similar blood are forbidden. Marriages are invalid even if concluded abroad.


22. Ibid., 84-116.


25. E. Wentzler (3 Sep 1891 – 9 Aug 1973), paediatrician, 1934-1945 on T4’s three medical reviewers for children's 'euthanasia', operated his own children's clinic after the war; repeatedly interrogated on 'euthanasia' crimes but never criminally prosecuted for them.


For more cf. e.g.: Wedekind, M. (2003).


For example, in Pirna, the flames emanating from the incorrectly built chimney of the Sonnenstein centre, towering on the hill behind the centre of the Saxon town, attracted the attention of the local citizens.

The project had to be halted in August 1941 due to public protests from ecclesiastical circles.

As found in Burleigh (2008), 322.

H. Ried (11 Nov 1895 – ?), 1919 Freikorps Epp, 1933 NSDAP, employed by the Accounting and Auditing Office of the NSDAP, 1934 Chief of the Accounting and Auditing Office of the NSDAP, 1936 Appointee of NSDAP’s Reich Treasurer for Inspection for the districts of Groß-Berlin, Kurmark and overseas NSDAP organisations, 1938 Special Appointee of NSDAP’s Reich Treasurer for the City of Berlin, 1943 member of the Reichstag.

T4 had a total of about 500 employees. Klee (2010), 121.


In addition to T4 main medicals reviewers (Obergutachter), a total of 40 to 50 physicians made the decisions, working for T4 as ‘rank-and-file’ evaluators until June 1943. They were also established experts with good reputations.

W. Heyde (25 Apr 1902 – 13 Feb 1964), professor of psychology and neurology at the University of Würzburg, 1933 NSDAP, 1938 SS, 1938 Commander of teh Medical Unit in the SS-Totenkopfverbände, 1939-1941 Chief Physician of T4, a witness in the Nuremberg Doctor’s Trial, worked as a physician under the pseudonym Fritz Sawade from 1950 until his arrest in 1959, committed suicide in prison in 1964.


As found in Burleigh (2008), 322.


Klee (2010), 123-84.

From a large number of titles on the history of killing centres, cf. e.g. Friedlander (1997), 152–190.

As found in Burleigh (2008), 322.


From a large number of titles on the history of killing centres, cf. e.g. Friedlander (1997), 152–190.


proctor (2009), 207.


Ibid., 501.

Klee (2010), 120–121.

F. X. Schwarz (27 Nov 1875 – 2 Dec 1947), 1922 NSDAP, 1938 treasurer of National Socialist Society for German Culture, 1933 mem-

ber of the Reichstag, from 1935 the Reich Leader responsible for all finance of NSDAP and from 1939 for the financing of T4, 1943 SS-Obergruppenführer, died in 1947 in an internment camp in Regensburg.

H. Ried (11 Nov 1895 – ?), 1919 Freikorps Epp, 1933 NSDAP, employed by the Accounting and Auditing Office of the NSDAP, 1934 Chief of the Accounting and Auditing Office of the NSDAP, 1936 Appointee of NSDAP’s Reich Treasurer for Inspection for the districts of Groß-Berlin, Kurmark and overseas NSDAP organisations, 1938 Special Appointee of NSDAP’s Reich Treasurer for the City of Berlin, 1943 member of the Reichstag.

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proctor (2009), 207.
AGAINST TOTALITY
Štěpánka Tower, location of the “Mánes” point, documentation picture of the 4th Directorate of the SNB, September 1978
Photo: SSA
"Tidy up here – I’ll lock up later"

The dismantling of Surveillance Directorate monitoring stations 1989–1990

Over many years the State Security (Státní bezpečnost, StB) built up a system of societal control entirely according to its own wishes and requirements. Its covert network of secret collaborators is unsurprisingly best known. However, a system of actual physical surveillance was also in place. Partial documentation on some of the posts used for that purpose has been preserved in the archival collection of the StB’s Surveillance Directorate. It chiefly contains organisational, technical and economic information. But linking it to particular cases of operative work is complicated.

PROKOP TOMEK

Without doubt it was if anything a marginal aspect of the StB’s work. At the same time, to the public such clandestine spots represented tangible evidence of their omnipresence. They were located in the public space and acted like a parasite on it. The State Security forced their establishment on organisations, enterprises and the owners of private buildings. This ultimately meant certain vulnerability. To society dismantling them represented revenge and redress.

The Surveillance Directorate, in 1989 code-named the 4th Directorate of the Sbor národní bezpečnosti (SNB, National Security Corps), was a department that provided on-demand specific, clearly-defined services for the State Security’s operative units. The directorate didn’t initiate any surveillance of individuals itself; according to its guidelines, it operated purely on commissions from the StB’s operative sections. Its methods included classic “escort” surveillance. Another method, dubbed responsive surveillance, involved the tracker waiting for the target on an anticipated route. For this form of surveillance in particular they required posts from which they could monitor the target’s movements.

The Surveillance Directorate defined such premises as "observation points" and they served one or more officers monitoring "selected targets". There were also rooms in buildings equipped with communication and operative technology. "Bases" were clandestine rooms serving as assembly points for trackers prepared for deployment in an operation. "Communication points" contained radio sets and other communications equipment. Surveillance units employed "places of concealment", which were: "observation points", "bases", "communications posts" and "spaces for the installation of visual technology". Masking places were set up in public buildings as well as private apartments. Their acquisition, registration and usage were carried out on the basis of instructions from the commander of the 4th Directorate. These "conspiratorial stations" – separate buildings, apartments and rooms – were not of the nature of the conspiratorial or loaned apartments used by the operative sections of the StB (in the sense of 1978 Ministry of the Interior guidelines) and were used by surveillance units for clandestine activities. There is no mention of them in the registries of the StB’s operative files. The terminology describing them developed and changed. In the latter period they were also spoken of as "support points", "technical points" and "television micro-centres". The preserved documentation suggests that the usage of that terminology fluctuated.

As the surveillance was chiefly focused on the movements of diplomats, the system of support points mainly existed in Prague. Base points were located around the embassies of Western states, meaning mostly in the Lesser Quarter and the Bubeneč district. Outside Prague a similar project focused on military facilities was set up. The "Route" system was intended to impede Western diplomats’ interest in such places throughout the state. In this case, however, it consisted of mobilising officers of the VB (Veřejné bezpečnosti, Public Security – regular police) and the VB Auxiliary Guard to monitor reported vehicles on identified roads. However, this text only devotes marginal attention to the "Route" system.

ROUTE SURVEILLANCE

The State Security began using the so-called route surveillance method in the first half of the 1970s. It was a network of carefully distributed monitoring posts that, using communications technology (principally telephones, meaning the "adversary" could not uncover any radio opera-
tions), reported on the movement of surveilled persons or vehicles. The collaborators thus passed the target on to one another without leaving their conspiratorial and clandestine posts. Less use was made of classic escort surveillance in which the target might detect the presence of trackers or even deliberately give them the slip. At the edge of the monitored area, or if the target turned off the anticipated route, a group spread out on particular sections connected by transmitters to those working the route would take over. Counter static responsive surveillance is route surveillance from fixed support points set up on streets commonly frequented by a number of objects where the movement of the object along the route is mutually passed on from individual points. This method is highly conspiratorial and used particularly in the surveillance of cadre spies. This definition is laid out in guidelines from 1978. In an older version of the same guidelines from 1972 route surveillance is presented as nothing more than a method used chiefly in vehicular surveillance when trackers patrol in automobiles (mobile support points) spread out on an anticipated route.

The first proposal to bring in new methods was drafted in 1971. It is stated in later appraisals that the idea was taken over, surprisingly, from "Bulgarian friends". In 1972–1973 support and observation points were created and the forces of the 4th Directorate of the Federal Ministry of the Interior were reorganised. The route surveillance system went into trial operation at the start of September 1973 and was gradually honed, modified and above all expanded.

The personnel deployed in the observation system were quite unique. "Covert route surveillance collaborators" were used at the posts. They were chiefly recruited as part-timers from among the ranks of ex-SNB men (pensioners). They were not of the nature of covert collaborators of the counterintelligence and they are not to be found in registries of the StB’s operative files. In view of their trustworthiness (by contrast with the secret collaborators of the StB’s counterintelligence), they were allowed access to classified information. These covert collaborators were deployed in the execution of a service (sic) at concealed spots on targets’ routes. Their tasks included passing on information about the latter’s actions to other personnel on the route.

The introduction of route surveillance was evidently a complete success. It allowed for greater conspiracy in surveillance, more effective controls and a higher number of monitored persons. In 1973 some 195 employees of "capitalist embassies" were surveilled 4,980 times, in 1974 204 "objects" 5,106 times and in the first half of 1975 204 "objects 2,524 times. The system was established primarily to monitor diplomats from Western states, specifically the USA, the UK, France, Japan and West Germany, whose embassies were concentrated in the Lesser Quarter. The StB didn’t just target diplomats; using this method they also "uncovered" Czechoslovak citizens who visited Western embassies.

The effectiveness of the method was restricted by daylight as artificial street lighting was at that time often poor and the observation points were mainly in towers and attics, i.e., high above the street. Obtaining residential and non-residential premises in buildings for these purposes was very complicated, which is why the support points tended to be placed in attics. Interestingly virtually all the work fitting out these simple, improvised rooms was carried out by skilled trackers. The shortage of free phone lines in the city centre caused difficulties; surprisingly this longstanding problem also affected the StB, even though they didn’t have to wait for many years for a line like regular citizens.

Route surveillance of Western embassies in 1989 was carried out by the 2nd Department of the 4th Directorate of the SNB, which had 103 officers. Its commander was Lieut. Col. Vladimír Lacina. However, "active" covert collaborators also played a major role in route surveillance. Their number is unknown but it must have been substantial.

The number of clandestine spaces used for surveillance gradually grew. They were also increasingly well-equipped with high quality closed-circuit television cameras. Television micro-centres were also created at support points. Shots from CCTV cameras located in numerous spots in Prague were relayed by cable to their TV monitors. At the end of 1975, a mere 15 observation points were in operation and only one contained TV equipment. However, more points were established and in 1978 the route contained 64 cameras! It is not known how many of them there were in 1989 but there were at least 45 functioning support points so there may have been far more cameras inside them. As a smokescreen, the 4th Directorate put it about that they were stations monitoring the impact that construction of the Metro was having on buildings, traffic control stations or fire facilities. For the most part the establishment, operation and modification of the support points took place without the cooperation of building owners, fire officers, staff of District Housing Management Enterprises or the leadership of various organisations.

For a certain period route monitoring was used not only in Prague but throughout the country in the form of the nationwide operation "Route". It was carried out by 1st departments of regional StB administrations from June 1987 with a view to systematically monitoring the movement and actions of diplomats, particularly in the vicinity of military areas and buildings. Operation "Route" was announced for a whole region or selected districts by commanding officers with the release of the registration numbers of monitored diplomatic vehicles. After the operation was announced, SNB, VKR (military counterintelligence) and even KBG and border guard service patrols were deployed at checkpoints that the surveilled car was expected to pass. The patrols at the checkpoints were to report whether the reported vehicle had passed them so that senior StB officers could use the data to map the movement of the target by evaluating the data. However, during monitoring operations the patrols frequently failed to register the reported cars...
and operation "Route" proved to be seriously flawed. In 1988 the operations "Stockholm" and "Washington" were prepared in modified form for the possible movement of teams carrying out inspections of the implementation of the conclusions of international intergovernmental treaties. Similar control projects from the end of the 1980s are known: operations "Journal" (a nationwide operation to monitor the movements of journalists from West Germany and travelling to CSSR) and "Return" (aimed at uncovering "visa foreigners" suspected of spending just a few hours on CSSR territory though their visas entitled them to stay longer); and "Return" (complex measures focused on émigrés from the CSSR living legally in West Germany and travelling to CSSR territory with the aim of uncovering whether they were hostile agents). The actual investigation was helmed by prosecutor Sokol, who looked into whether the unauthorised tapping of telephones and guests’ rooms constituted the crime of violation of the delivery of messages under paragraph 290/1b or damaging the rights of a second party under paragraph 290/1a of the Criminal Code.

Four investigative teams (the prosecutor, two prosecutor’s office investigators, a specialist authorised by the Federal Ministry of Transport and Communications of the CSSR and uniformed VB officers) carried out checks at the Paříž, Palace, Parkhotel, Alcron, Ambassador, Fórum, Panoráma and Flóra hotels. In each at least one unmarked room occupied by the FMV was uncovered. If the personnel were not present the investigators opened the doors by force. Technical devices were discovered in the rooms: monitors showing camera images from the hotel’s communal areas, video recorders, etc. Written materials and video cassettes were seized for subsequent evaluation by the prosecutor. The checks did not uncover tampering with the telephone network suggestive of wire-tapping. On 9 February 1990 the minister of trade and tourism, Vlasta Štěpová, sent the director of the state enterprise Čedok Praha a notification from the Czechoslovak General Prosecutor’s Office containing a request that FMV organs and the directors of the Interhotels reach agreement on the removal of equipment installed in hotels, vacating the occupied rooms and restricting the movements of FMV staff at the hotels.

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The "Red Army man" support point (SP) was set up in the Old Town, at Křižovnická no. 71/14, Prague 1, in spring 1973. It was a makeshift room in an attic. The 4th Directorate of the FMV set it up at its own expense with the support of the Prague 1 District Housing Management Enterprise. The building supervisor did not demand rent. The FMV paid for electricity with an annual lump sum of ČS stamped. The post was established for route surveillance on the right side of the river Vltava. The room afforded a view across náměstí Krasnoarmějčů (Red Army Men Sq., today náměstí Jana Palacha), the Mánes Bridge and the mouths of Klapová and Křižovnická streets. The observation post was legitimised as a control and measuring station for structural engineers studying the impact of the construction and operation of the Metro on the historic building. From April 1973 a lockable box in the room contained a Jupiter portable radio station, a speaker telephone, a regular telephone apparatus and binoculars in a case. The inventory also included a table, a small table, a chair, a coat stand, a radio receiver, an infra-red radiator, a heater, a table lamp, blankets and a fire extinguisher.

On 4 January 1990 a secret route surveillance collaborator discovered that somebody had violently broken in and carted off the technical equipment and furniture. In an effort to ensure the dissimulation continued, officers from the 4th Directorate of the SNB reported the break-in and theft to the local branch of the Public Security on St. Bartoloměják St.: It was clear from their entire process that the VB officers didn’t want anything to do with it in view of the conspiratorial SP and the fact FMV officers had reported the break-in and subsequent theft. At that time the security situation was very tense and VB officers were afraid to consult anybody. For that reason further dealings regarding the Red Army Man SP were terminated. We then attempted to report the break-in to the SP to the criminal service; again the talks were unsuccessful. From 2 February 1990 we were placed in the reserve and were unable to act on the matter in question. In view of the fact that we were permitted to go to work from 18 May 1990 and there was nothing to steal in the SP, talks took place at the municipal prosecutor’s office and it was ascertained that the SP had been decommissioned. The description of the situation suggests that the "Red
Army Man” SP was officially terminated on 15 January 1990. The “Slávie” support point was set up at Smetanovo nábřeží no. 1012/2 (the Lažanský Palace), in the building of the Faculty of Film and Television of the Academy of Performing Arts (AMU), in 1970. Staff from the Ministry of Education’s special tasks section and faculty staff leaders provided assistance. Again a provisional space, measuring three times three metres, it was built in the building’s tower by employees of the 4th Directorate of FMV. Electric cables were installed in the room, which was heated by a space heater in winter. The faculty did not charge for the power used and the StB did not pay rent. Surveillance Directorate collaborators presented themselves as officers of the transport department of the city branch of the VB. The spot afforded views of the 1 May (today Legions’) Bridge and the crossroads by the National Theatre.
behind the iron curtain

The circumstances surrounding the actual abolition of the SP are somewhat unclear. On arriving at 8:00 am on 8 January 1990 route surveillance covert collaborator Václav Krása discovered that the lock to the attic had been changed and that door had been pried open and demolished. A metal box in the room was undamaged but Ministry of the Interior service seals and an AMU stamp and seal had been added. An electric heater and table lamp remained in the room.

On 11 January an AMU treasurer and administrator informed the Surveillance Directorate that students had broken into the room by force. The StB officers requested, in view of the sensitive situation, that a uniformed VB officer from the Bartolomějská St. local station assist when they entered the building. The VB promised to investigate the situation. The administrator opened the door of the attic with the words “Tidy up here – I’ll lock up later,” and left. A group of three

The "Kajka" SP in pictures from 1978. The second captures the original interior.
Photo: SSA

The "Kamila" SP was located in the right dormer window of a building on Maltézské náměstí; otherwise also camera no. 7 from the "Conservatory" television mini-centre. Photo from September 1978.
Photo: SSA
officers from the 2nd Department of the 4th Administration and four covert route surveillance collaborators discovered that the door had been smashed in. An electrical infrared heater, a formica-topped table, two wooden upholstered chairs and one upholstered armchair were missing. At the request of AMU management, the support point was cleared out, officially terminated and the keys returned to the AMU building administrator on 17 January 1990.18

The “Karel” support point was established and paid for by the 4th Directorate of the FMV in the attics of the Municipal Court building at Spálená no. 6/2 in Prague 1 in 1976. It, too, was claimed to be for traffic management. From 1979 it housed the 11th TV mini-centre containing two cameras operated by the 2nd Department of the 4th Directorate of the SNB. It allowed for the monitoring of part of Myslíkova St. and the lower part of the square Karlovo náměstí to the mouth of Resslova St. The 4th Directorate of the FMV signed a lease with the Municipal Court administration on 20 August 1976, though the FMV didn’t actually pay rent. The post was evicted and terminated at the request of the chairman of the Municipal Court on 15 December 1989.18 Members of dissident Václav Benda’s family had spotted the camera in the tower of the building from their apartment on Karlovo náměstí and assumed it was monitoring visitors to their home.
Photos of the “Klárov” SP from period StB documents, including a picture of the location of the cameras.

Photo: SSA
The “Újezd” observation point was set up in May 1976 in the attic of a building at Újezd St. no. 412/17 in the Lesser Quarter. StB officers created the provisional spot with funding from the 4th Directorate of the FMV and permission from the District Housing Management Enterprise. Its purpose was route surveillance under the guise of traffic management, with collaborators passing themselves off as city branch VB officers. From there the confluence of Újezd and Vítězná streets was visible, as were the streets Říční, Plaská, Mělnická, Petřínská and part of the square náměstí Sovětských tankistů (Soviet Tankmen, today náměstí Kinských). There was no rent and the FMV paid a lump sum of CSK 150 a year for power.

According to the preserved documentation there was a violent breaking at the support point some time before 22 May 1990; the door was broken and there were holes in the walls. An infrared heater, a table, two propane butane cylinders and most likely technical equipment were missing. The inventory had also included a speaker phone, a Jupiter portable radio station, a VXW 100 portable radio station and binoculars with a case. The search for the cul-

against totalitarianism
 Pitt was led by the Prague 1 VB’s department of investigation, though the criminal prosecution was halted on 27 July 1990. The SP was terminated on 20 June 1990 and the keys returned to the building supervisor.  

Probably the best known structure of this type was the “Mánes” support point. Built at the expense of the 4th Directorate of the FMV, it was located on the fourth floor of the Štítov Tower in Prague 1 on the embankment Gottwaldovo (today Masarykovo) nábřeží no. 250/1. It was set up on 22 November 1973 on the orders of the commander of the Surveillance Directorate. The building offered views on all sides, meaning of Gottwaldovo nábřeží, the square Jiráskovo náměstí, the lower end of Resslova St., Jirásek Bridge and Engelsovo (today Rašínovo) nábřeží. The room had 220-volt electric wiring and a storage heater. A locked metal box contained a telephone, a Jupiter portable radio station, a VXW 100 portable radio station, a voltage regulator and binoculars with a case. It was put about that it served as a communications centre for the city VB’s river service. The covert route surveillance collaborators were meant to be relaying reports to the Prague city VB. The FMV signed a lease with the director of the Czech Visual Arts Fund (Český fond výtvarných umění) on 10 December 1973. The rent of CSK 475 a year was paid in two instalments, as was the electricity consumed.

The tower housed the 10th television micro-centre, operated by the 2nd Section of the 4th Directorate of the SNB. Three cameras were initially installed but two were subsequently removed. The last functioning camera was trained on Gottwaldovo nábřeží in the direction of the National Theatre. Though the support point was in view of the home of Václav Havel there is no mention in the records of it being used to monitor it. The post had different, very specific tasks. On 12 December the Czech Visual Arts Fund abrogated the contract on the temporary use of the Štítov Tower space in view of the necessary operational requirements of our organisation. Though the contractual notice period was six months, the letter requested the clearing out of the premises as quickly as possible, which would be to the benefit of the visual arts community.

A different source states that 12 people from the Civic Forum, Czechoslovak Television and a US TV station broke into the support point and filmed the interiors, facilities, some of the technical equipment and outward views. The premises were then viewed by other citizens and members of the Civic Forum. Likewise, our staff were locked up in the building of the Štítov (sic) Tower.

Surveillance Directorate officers Maj. Petr Šíma and Maj. Jiří Šebek made a recording of talks with municipal prosecutor Sokol, who inspected the 4th Directorate station on 2 February 1990. He then summoned both to the Municipal Prosecutor’s Office for an interview on 5 February. He inquired about the rooms in the attics at AMU and the Štítov Tower and was informed that they were used to protect the diplomatic corps and that their inventories included technical equipment such as telephones, back-up forms of communication, binoculars and anti-burglary devices. The purpose was supposedly to monitor the movements of diplomats and make sure violence was not committed against them. On 12 June 1990 the “Mánes” premises was evacuated, the support point terminated and the keys handed to the building administrator.

The “Kamila” technical point was located at the square Maltézské náměstí no. 537/4 in the Lesser Quarter. A camera mounted in a closed space built in the building’s attic monitored the rear entrance of the French Embassy. On 15 January 1990 PhDr. Petr Mašek and PhDr. Jitka Šimáňková (chief of the castle libraries department) wrote on behalf of the National Museum requesting that the Diplomatic Protection Officers of the Ministry of the Interior clear out the space. In view of the change of the CSSR’s foreign and domestic policy, we believe that the presence of your equipment at the Maltese Library in the Lesser Quarter is unnecessary. We therefore request the removal of that equipment and the return of the keys.

Above left: The “Rudolf” SP. Graffiti sprayers have framed a window arbitrarily broken through by the StB during modifications.

Photo: Author

It isn’t hard to find the spot where the “Újezd” SP was located. The roof of house no. 17 on the street has only one attic window.

“GeoFond” SP; a bay window on the first floor of a building on the corner of Sněmovní St. and Malostranské náměstí. Photo: Author
We will facilitate access to the premises in case of necessity on the basis of a personal request from the minister of the interior or foreign affairs. The station was then terminated and the equipment taken away.

The “Geofond” support point was created at the Central Geological Institute at Malostranské náměstí no. 7/19 in the Lesser Quarter on 1 February 1980 on the pretext of traffic control. It was on the first floor in a protruding corner construction with a view of the square Malostranské náměstí and Sněmovní St. It was borrowed indefinitely by the VB city branch, which paid a lump-sum for electricity but no rent. In 1987 the StB looked into a report that a doorman had referred to the covert collaborators as StB officers. He was dismissed as a result of the investigation. The post was scrapped on 18 January 1990 when at the request of the Civic Forum the owner abrogated the lease.

The support point “Kajka” (later “Fík”) in the tower of the St. Nicholas Church in the Lesser Quarter was likely established as early as 1965. The Main Fire Protection Administration paid the rent to the St. Nicholas Church Main Parish Office. It was shut down soon after the Velvet Revolution. The commander of the City of Prague Fire Department, Lieut. Col. Petrus, refused to further guarantee the support point under the codename “Klárov”. The building was administered by the State Planning Commission in the direction of the north-south highway. The lease, which the MV signed with the Prague gardens authority, was for one room on the first floor for traffic management purposes. Gardens authority staff required continued access to the tunnel’s floodgates on the ground floor. The lease, with rent set at CSK 2,600 a year, was signed on 1 May 1981. After modifications the support point went into operation in the second half of 1982. Though the contract forbade alterations to the interior or exterior appearance of the protected building, the StB divided the upper room with a partition made of concrete panels and smashed through a third window facing the Šverma Bridge. The building housed a micro-centre to which led cables from cameras covering the embankment. One problem was relatively frequent attempts by vandals and the curious to break into the secluded building and Rudolfova štola. The Prague Greenery Administration dissolved the lease with a letter dated 8 January 1990. The point was terminated and cleared out on 15 January 1990.

This has been a short presentation of the system of surveillance points in central Prague, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, aimed at outlining the nature and purpose of these improvised conspiratorial locations, what they contained, who operated them, how they were obtained and, last but not least, how they came to an end at the turn of 1989 and 1990. In many cases just partial records have been preserved; in others they were destroyed.

CONCLUSION

Like other parts of the State Security, the Surveillance Directorate was abolished on 15 February 1990 by an order – specifically order no. 16/1990 concerning societal and political changes – from Czechoslovak minister of the interior JUDr. Richard Sacher.

Its successor organisation was the Office of the FMV for the Protection of the Constitution and Democracy, to which the trackers were also transferred if a civic commission approved them for further service. However, support points in the form used by the 4th Directorate of the SNB were probably not employed or freshly established in the years that followed.

The circumstances surrounding the dismantling of the spying stations represented a certain redress to the population, who after years registered their existence. On the other hand, the Surveillance Directorate’s officers must have suffered a rare humiliation when, with the assistance of civilians, they were clearing out the facilities.
behind the iron curtain

NOTES


2 Ibid, RMV ČSSR č. 44 of 21 December 1978, Směrnice o činnosti útvarů sledování Státní bezpečnosti, čl. 50–52. See ibid.

3 Ibid, RMV ČSSR č. 15 of 28 September 1989, Směrnice o sledování a související kontrarozvědná opatření (Directives for surveillance and linked counterintelligence measures), čl. 3, letter (hereinafter only písmeno) b). See ibid.


10 According to preserved photographs the CCTV cameras were Sony video cameras. In the second half of the 1970s this was undoubtedly very expensive technology not generally accessible in Czechoslovakia. Incidentally, this was the prehistoric age of camera surveillance of public places. Naturally in technical terms only; the purpose was entirely different from today.

11 ABS, f. Objektové svazky – Hradec Králové (Object files – Hradec Králové, hereinafter only HK-OB), object file “Foreigner” reg. no. 89, part of file no. 12 (“Route”), 4. Oddělení I. odboru Správy StB Hradec Králové (4th Section of the 1st Department of the Hradec Králové StB Directorate).

12 Ibid, part of file no. 13, part no. 2, Methodology of organisation of security measures during visits on the territory of the CSSR in connection with conclusions of the Stockholm Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe, Federal Ministry of the Interior (hereinafter only FMV), Operation “Stockholm” + addenda System of activities of the StB, 50–71: Methodology of security measures during visits by inspection groups of the USA on the territory of the CSSR in connection with the fulfilment of a treaty between the CSSR, the GDR and the USSR on inspections and the Treaty between the USSR and the USA on the liquidation of medium and short range rockets, FMV, Operation “Washington”.

13 Ibid, files on the operations “Journal”, “Stop” and “Return”, StB section Svitavy.


16 Ibid, inv. j. 617, Support Point (hereinafter only OB) č. 69, Official record, 18 June 1990.


18 Ibid.

19 Ibid, inv. j. 633, OB č. 82.

20 Ibid, inv. j. 618, OB č. 70.


26 Ibid.

27 ABS, f. A 25, inv. j. 641, OB “Geofond”.

28 Ibid, inv. j. 625 OB “Kajka” (“Fík”).


30 Ibid.

31 ABS, f. A 25, inv. j. 644, OB “Rudolf”.

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THE STORY
OF THE 20TH CENTURY
Adolf Eichman’s wire to the Gestapo in Ostrava announcing that the transport will be heading to Nisko upon San.

Photo: National Archives (NA)
The first transports of European Jews in the history of the holocaust

The 18th of October 2014 marked the 75th anniversary of the departure of the very first transport of European Jews in the history of the holocaust — one that left Ostrava for Nisko upon San in the eastern part of the General Government where the Nazis planned to set up an extensive “reservation” for Jews displaced from the conquered territories and the whole of Germany. As part of the Nisko Plan¹, a total of seven transports with more than five thousand Jews departed from Ostrava, Katowice and Vienna in the latter half of October 1939. Their journey materialised even though, by the time of departure of the first transport, the top Nazi officials had dismissed the entire plan of establishing a Jewish reservation between the Rivers Vistula and Bug. The ensuing destinies of thousands of Jewish deportees varied; however, most of them were to die or suffer in Nazi as well as in Soviet prisons and camps.

JAN DVOŘÁK, JAN HORNÍK, ADAM HRADILEK

THE PLAN

Nazi Germany’s attack on Poland on 1 September 1939 triggered World War II. The Nazi troops progressed at a blitz pace — by early October 1939 the Nazis had occupied the entire western part of Poland following a brief period of resistance of Polish military forces. In turn, the eastern part of the Polish territory had gradually been taken by the Red Army since mid-September 1939.²

The occupation of western Poland effectively represented the first step towards the implementation of the Nazis’ territorial plans for germanising and colonising the eastern territories. In their plans for the future, only Germans were to live on the Polish territory annexed directly to the Third Reich; accordingly it was to be “purged” from non-German elements as soon as possible. The invaders had adapted their mode of operation to this goal since the first days of the occupation. Inhabitants rejecting germanisation or those whom the Nazis deemed unfit due to racial, political or other reasons were to be displaced or exterminated. Although all the ethnic groups living on the Polish territory were in for difficult times, the worst destiny was being prepared for Jews.

The Nazis pursued the full expulsion of Polish Jews from the very beginning, but their task was daunting — the annexed Polish territories were still home to almost two million Jews in 1939 — four times as many as in the Reich itself.³ The Nazis got to work with zeal, though, and soon the first plans for resolving the local Jewish question emerged.

One of such plans was to concentrate Jews in a certain area that would serve as an extensive “reservation” or “ghetto”. Accordingly, the top Nazi officials decided to set up the Jewish Reservation (Judenreservat) in the eastern part of occupied Poland, which was to gradually gather the “entire Jewry” in early October 1939. The primary “candidate” for such a territory was the swampy area around the city of Lublin (in the eastern part of the General Government); “advantageously”, the area already had a considerable density of Jewish population and was not intended for germanisation in the future.

The preparations for displacing Jews from the conquered Polish territories started in earnest following the order of the head of the Gestapo Heinrich Müller of 6 October 1939, under which some 70,000–80,000 Jews from the Katowice area were supposed to be relocated east of the Vistula. It included the possibility of relocating Jews from around Moravská Ostrava. The preparations for the very first transport probably started in Berlin on that very day — an instruction was issued to compile the lists of all Jews on record in Germany, the Protectorate and former Austria and to divide them by religious com-
munities: the Gestapo was to provide lists of arrested Jews of Polish nationality. The Jews intended for relocation were to be deprived of all property. On the following day, 7 October 1939, the decision that Vienna would be included in the initial transports was adopted at a meeting between the Head of the Reich Main Security Office Reinhard Heydrich and Hitler, probably at the Führer’s own request. Looking back at Hitler’s own history, it becomes obvious why he was eminently eager to “purge” Austria’s capital of Jews as soon as possible. At any rate, the preparations for transports intensified considerably from that moment on.

The Gestapo was in charge of the organisation in cooperation with the Central Offices for Jewish Emigration in Vienna and Prague. Heinrich Müller, the head of the Gestapo, entrusted the coordination of the project to Adolf Eichmann, the head of the Jewish Department of the Reich Main Security Office and the founder of both Central Offices. It was also Eichmann who, in a matter of days, personally selected the location for the first camp – a hill near the community of Zarzecze near Nisko upon San. The project was presented to the general public as a voluntary initiative of the respective Jewish religious communities.

THE TRANSPORTS

Based on Müller’s initial order, the territory of the Katowice government district was to be purged first, with the Ostrava area added to the deportation as part of the “purge” of Upper Silesia. There were other reasons for the inclusion of Jews from the Protectorate Ostrava area in the initial transports as well. The massive evacuation of Jews from the Katowice area required extensive financial and material resources, and the relatively affluent Jewish Community in Ostrava could provide financial backing to the project easier than communities in Upper Silesia – i.e., provide the construction material as well as qualified experts and craftspeople to build the camp. This is likely why Ostrava’s Jews were the first to be deported.

The Jewish Community in Ostrava, which organised the bulk of transport preparations (including the financial backing and technical issues), issued a request for all Jews aged over 14 to register immediately and complete the forms provided by Prague’s Central Office for Jewish Emigration based on the Gestapo order as early as on 11 October 1939.
Based on the registration results, which had to be reported by 14 October, there were 4,510 Jews (of which 2,232 were men) within the Ostrava community. The Gestapo in Ostrava then wrote the text of a notice whereby the Jewish Community requested all male Jews to appear at the Ostrava riding school on the morning of Tuesday 17 October to depart for training. The notice was printed in selected Ostrava dailies, usually on the front page, between 12 and 16 October. Those who would not show up faced severe punishment. As early as on 12 October, the Ostrava Jewish Community issued an instruction regarding the unified equipment of transport participants – the proposal for a “one-man outfit” totalled 55 items (including a suitcase or backpack, winter clothes, underwear, toiletries, dishes and a kerosene lamp).

Some Jews chose to go into hiding or run away to avoid deportation as soon as the departure notice had been published. Obviously, that made transport organisation difficult for the authorities in charge. The hastily organised plan had to include improvisation. As a result, the Jewish Community in Frýdek received the ad–fer order for all men aged over 14 just 20 hours before the departure – at noon on 16 October. There was no time led–BF to procure the outfits, so many of the Frýdek Jews came to Ostrava with no luggage at all on the morning of 17 October.

The final selection of the men for the transport in the Ostrava riding school near Don Bosco (St Joseph) Church involved a medical examination. Supervised by the Gestapo, Nazi doctors even declared men who were obviously elderly or sick as eligible. Following the medical “check”, the selected men were taken to the train station in Přívoz and herded into a train waiting there. They had to spend the entire following night in locked cars. Eventually, 901 Jews set out towards Bohumín on a train of 51 cars (including 29 cargo units containing construction material) on Wednesday 18 October at about 8.30 a.m. The train continued along the route Dziedzice, Auschwitz, Krakow, Tarnow, Rzeszow and Przeworsk until it reached its destination in Nisko upon San.

The second group of transports to Nisko were Jews from Upper Silesia for whom the entire project had been developed originally. The transport of the Upper Silesian Jews was prepared along with that from Moravská Ostrava. The departure of the first transport from Katowice was scheduled for 20 October 1939 and was initially intended to relocate 1,029 Jews aged 16 to 60 primarily from the vicinities of Katowice, Krolewska Huta, Chorzow and Bielsko. Prior to departure, the selected men were gathered in a gym near the Katowice station. Later reports indicate, however, that “approximately 875 male Jews” left with the first Katowice transport – substantially fewer than planned.

On the same day, 20 October 1939, the very first Vienna transport with at least 912 Jews led–BF the city’s As-pangbahnhof late in the evening. Since the Vienna transport also failed to provide enough “volunteers”, it included former prisoners from concentration camps (e.g. Dachau), who had no chance to emigrate, and Jews expelled from Burgenland.

The subsequent transports were prepared only after the top Nazi officials had ordered a halt to the Nisko Plan. Eichmann nevertheless managed to obtain the approval for the prepared displacement of at least several hundred other Jews. The second transport eventually left Os-
trava on 26 October 1939 in the evening and comprised about 400 Jews, mainly prisoners “supplied” by the Brno Gestapo and escapees from the first transport. It was coupled with the second Katowice transport comprising 1,000 people in Katowice and the combined train left for Nisko on 27 October, again in the evening. Although the lists of the participants in the transports from Katowice have not survived, unlike the Ostrava and Vienna deportation lists, it is estimated that the Katowice transports included at least 200 Jews from the Těšín (Cieszyn) area, i.e. from the part of it that had belonged to Czechoslovakia until the end of September 1938 (called Zaolzie by Poles, or Zaołżi in Czech). Indeed, both of the Ostrava transports included Jews coming from the Těšín area – many of those who had fled from the territory seized by Poland for the rest of the republic prior to the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia departed from Ostrava. The second Vienna transport with 669 people (Moser says there were 672 of them) left on 26 October and reached Nisko upon San three days later on 29 October. Although the third wave of transports was prepared in Katowice and Vienna as well, a train with 322 Jews “supplied” primarily from Prague only left Ostrava on 1 November. It did not reach its destination, however, because high water in the River San had broken the bridge near Zarzecze. The train was diverted to Sosnowiec in Upper Silesia where the deportees were accommodated in a temporary Jewish concentration camp and taken care of by the local Jewish community. The plan was to transport these men to Nisko but that never materialised as the entire project was discontinued. The Sosnowiec camp was dismissed in the spring of 1940. Some 60–80 prisoners were permitted to leave to join their relatives in the General Government and some 250 were transported to the Vyhne camp in Slovakia. Some of them managed to flee and save their lives by leaving early for a safe country – most often Palestine. The majority of them were sent to extermination camps in 1942, however.

**THE END OF THE NISKO PLAN**

The paradox of the Nisko Plan is that the top Nazi officials had already decided to suspend the deportations to Nisko as the first transport was leaving the station. Hitler decided (based on a consultation with Heinrich Himmler) that preference in eliminating Jews would be given to the Reichsgaus of Wartheland and West Prussia at a meeting in Berlin on 17 October 1939. The departures of the subsequent transports which were under preparation were allowed merely to maintain the prestige of the state police. On arrival in Nisko, a thorough selection was performed only with the first Ostrava transport, as it was necessary to gather experts to build and operate the Zarzecze camp. It soon became apparent that its optimum capacity as built would be about 500 prisoners. Even though all subsequently arriving people, except for a half of the first Ostrava transport and several dozen people from the subsequent transports, were expelled immediately, mostly towards the nearby German-Soviet border (there were more than four and a half thousand of those), almost one thousand prisoners remained in the camp at the end of October 1939. Their number was then radically reduced to about 500 on 20 November and after that it would just decrease slightly over time. According to the camp leaders these exiles were also to be sent to the Soviet territory. Although returning was forbidden under a threat of being shot, several groups dared turn back towards home.

Even those who were allowed to stay in the camp would flee over the course of the subsequent days, weeks and months. The camp guards, comprising approximately twenty SS men and security services, were not always adequately scrupulous about their duties. Prisoner escapes were recorded at all branches of the camp located in several villages north of Nisko. Those escapees also headed mostly towards the German-Soviet border. Crossing the demarcation line was only possible until Christmas 1939; after that the border was closed hermetically. Anyone who tried to cross it was sent back by the Soviet border guards and had to return to the towns and villages around the camp. As a result, many were reduced to barely surviving the ensuing months in poverty in the larger towns in Nazi-occupied Galicia where there still were numerous Jewish communities – e.g., in Ulanow, Przemysl, Tomaszow, Zamoście, Belzec and Lublin.

The camp in Zarzecze was eventually closed in April 1940 and some of its prisoners were allowed to return home. Based on the surviving statistics, an organised collective transport from Nisko brought back some 300 people to Ostrava, about 200 to Vienna and about 20 to the Těšín area. Dozens of others returned on their own, some quite possibly with the approval of authorities, prior to as well as after the date of departure of the return transport. The return home was not a happy ending for most of them, however. Over the course of the war, they were deported again to other Nazi concentration or extermination camps and few of them came back.

**IN SOVIET CAMPS**

Since only about every ninth prisoner was allowed to stay at the provisional concentration camp on the San, all others – more than four and a half thousand deportees – were expelled east, to the German-Soviet demarcation line, immediately on arrival in Nisko. The official border was only being demarcated at the time so there was still a “no-man’s land” between the rivers San and Bug. The journey itself towards the border was literally an ordeal for many – in particular older and sick people suffered during the difficult walks in late autumn and difficult swampy terrain, and some did not survive the hardships. Gangs of Polish and Ukrainian brigands, robbing the refugees, represented another threat.

Most exiles eventually obeyed the Nazi guards’ instructions to leave for the Soviet territory and tried to illegally cross the German-Soviet border. Some of them perished during attempts to cross the border rivers...
or were shot by Soviet or Nazi border guards that would fire without warning, especially at night. Others made it to the Soviet territory under more or less dramatic circumstances. Then they would continue to cities and towns on the territory of Galicia occupied by the Soviet Union (Stryi, Sambir, Drohobych, Stanislav, Buchach and mostly Lvov) where they could live in relative peace for several months. Even though the new German-Soviet border was guarded relatively well, especially on the Soviet side, some individuals and groups of Jews expelled from Nisko managed to return to the Soviet territory. In turn, others managed to get as far as Romania from the Soviet territory.\textsuperscript{22}

Soviet authorities started registering all foreigners in May 1940 with a view to clearing the borderland. Police patrols took those without correct documents away for interrogation. Like other refugees, Jews from Nisko were given three options to choose from: accept Soviet citizenship, return home or go abroad. Just a fraction opted for Soviet nationality; most decided to return home. Going abroad was an option open only for those who held the affidavit, a special document. Those who opted for Soviet nationality were usually given jobs in Soviet Galicia.\textsuperscript{23} All others who chose the remaining two alternatives were detained sooner or later and held as "socially dangerous individuals" facing between three and eight years in a labour camp in Siberia or in other places of forced exile. A substantial number of them were arrested again in the late spring or summer of 1940 and sentenced by a special NKVD jury mostly for three (illegal border crossing) to five years (espionage and other anti-Soviet activities) of hard labour in forced labour camps. Given the huge number of refugees arrested at the time, many people were deported to the camps even without a court verdict.\textsuperscript{24} Despite the fact that they often had to literally fight for their lives there, paradoxically - due to war developments - in the end they stood a better chance of survival than those who avoided the deportations to the GULAG and remained in Galicia at the time of arrival of Nazi forces. It is estimated that, once the deportations to Soviet camps had peaked in June 1940, less than 300 Czechoslovak Jews - Nisko refugees - remained in Galicia and Volhynia. Some evacuated; many died as the frontline progressed; others were murdered during the pogroms organised by the Ukrainian auxiliary forces that came to Lvov following the Wehrmacht in the summer of 1941. Others died in the gas chambers of the extermination camp in Belzec.\textsuperscript{25}

Just a handful of the "luckiest ones" managed to leave the GULAG during the war and join military units being formed in the Soviet Union. Following the Nazi attack on the USSR, Poles were the first to organise their international army. Some prisoners (primarily those coming from the Žižkov area) used this opportunity and, with a view to being released, enlisted as volunteers for the Polish forces. The top Soviet officials then announced an amnesty for Czechoslovak citizens - except for those sentenced for espionage - in early 1942. Czechoslovak Jews released from Soviet labour camps were among the very first volunteers of the Czechoslovak military unit that formed in Buzuluk in early 1942. For many of their peers, however, the amnesty came too late. Some never even learned of it and had to serve their sentences until the end. Many never returned to their homeland.

The voluntary enlistment in the Czechoslovak military unit in the USSR eventually saved some 350 Jews from the Ostrava and Frydek area who had been deported to Nisko upon the Anschluss of March 1938. As a result, most of them had to stay in Galicia for several years, helped by the "Czechoslovakian volunteers of Min. 298". The Vienna Jews were in a much more difficult position than Czechs or Poles, as they did not have their international military units in the Soviet Union. Most of them only spoke German and, in addition, Austria had become an integral part of the Reich after the Anschluss of March 1938. As a result, most of them had to stay in the camps. Therefore, just 73 people out of more than 1,500 deportees ultimately survived the war.\textsuperscript{26}
Deportees’ cameos based on NKVD documents

Between 2012 and 2014 members of the ÚSTR Oral History Group managed to obtain copies of hundreds of the NKVD’s investigation files on Czechoslovak citizens persecuted in the USSR from Ukrainian state archives and the Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). They include investigation files of Jews deported to Nisko upon San who came to the territory of the USSR and were arrested, accused of espionage or illegal border crossing and sentenced to many years of imprisonment in the GULAG camps. The following are cameos of people deported to Nisko from Ostrava, Katowice and Vienna, compiled on the basis of the above documents. Since the research is ongoing, this is just a sample selection.

Karel and Erich Egger

Karel Egger was born in Velké Karlovice near the current Czech-Slovak border on 28 November 1909. His father Viktor was an engine driver. Karel lived in Frýdek and worked as a driver in Ostrava. He and his brother Erich (born on 27 May 1915) and other Jews from Ostrava were supposed to join a transport to Nisko upon San at the end of October 1939 but they chose to flee. First they walked over to Slovakia through the forest, then crossed the border to occupied Poland. On 29 October they forded across the River San near Lesko on the new German-Soviet border. They were arrested by NKVD personnel in Lesko and transported to NKVD’s Prison No. 1 in Lvov where their interrogations started. Several months later, Karel Egger was taken to a NKVD prison in Poltava and his brother Erich to a prison in Nikolayevsk. The interrogations continued – they were suspected of being Nazi spies. Following ten months of detention, they were sentenced – by coincidence on the same day, 10 August 1940 – for illegal border crossing: Karel to three years and Erich to five years of slavery in the GULAG camps. The brothers reunited in the Samarlag camp on the River Volga near the Kazakhstan border where they worked on the construction site for a factory. Upon its completion in April 1941, Karel Egger was transported to one of the Ukhtpechlag camps in the subpolar region of northern Russia. Not much is known about the subsequent whereabouts of his brother Erich. The NKVD file only contains a mention to the effect that he died “in the place of serving sentence” on 30 March 1943. There is no knowledge of which of the GULAG camps it was.

Karel Egger was released from the camp on 26 January 1942 on the basis of amnesty and sent to the Czechoslovak military unit in Buzuluk where he undertook military training. He took part in the unit’s first combat action near Sokolovo as a corporal on 8 March 1943 and was captured by the Nazis. Nazis murdered the majority of Czechoslovak POWs of Jewish origin immediately or later in concentration camps. However, they used Karel Egger and four other captured Czechoslovaks for propaganda. They were transported to Prague in September 1943 and forced to relate the “naked truth” about the conditions in the Soviet camps and about the non-Czech nature of the Czechoslovak troop (comprising many Czechoslovak Ukrainians and Jews released from the GULAG) at a press conference for Protectorate journalists. Karel Egger described how the Soviets treated him as a Jew who was seeking a better environment for living in the Soviet Union than in the Protectorate. The prisoners’ accounts gave rise to a number of articles that filled the pages of the Protectorate press at that time. Their destinies were covered in detail in a propaganda brochure from 1943, Prisoners of War Speak Out. Unlike other Czech POWs who were forced to enlist in the Wehrmacht, Karel Egger was murdered by the Nazis in an unknown place once the propaganda project was over.

The Goldflam Brothers

Viktor (born on 17 November 1896), Otto (19 May 1899), Rudolf (23 June 1906) and Bedřich (17 February 1904) Goldflam were arrested by the Gestapo in Brno in September 1939 and interned in the prison at Spilberk Castle. They were transported to Nisko upon San on 18 October 1939. Immediately on arrival in Nisko, the SS guards led them among a group of about one hundred men from the
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transport towards the Soviet border across the River San. There, they ordered them to go towards the Soviet Union and warned that anyone who tried to return would be shot. The Goldflam brothers crossed the border to the territory occupied by the Soviet Union on 31 October 1939 near the community of Sinyava. From there they continued on to Lvov where they arrived on 9 November 1939. Viktor and Rudolf stayed in Lvov whereas Otto and Bedřich left for a nearby village to look for a job. Viktor was arrested by the NKVD on 27 May 1940 and sentenced on 10 February 1941 for “illegally crossing the border to the territory of the USSR where he dwelt without documents authorising him to stay for several months”.

Otto Goldflam was deported by the NKVD from the Lvov Oblast to Kiev in May 1940 and was on forced deployment on a construction site. Following the Nazi attack on the USSR, he was evacuated to Andijan, Uzbekistan on 7 July 1941 and worked in a garage until April 1942. All four brothers were lucky enough to live to see the amnesty for Czechoslovak citizens imprisoned in the USSR and they were released to join the forming Czechoslovak military unit in Buzuluk in 1942 – Rudolf and Viktor in February and Otto and Bedřich in late May. Side by side with other Czechoslovaks, they fought to free their country. Otto Goldflam, the father of the popular theatre artist and writer Arnošt Goldflam, was injured twice but he and his brothers lived to see the end of the war.

Marek Neuer

Marek Neuer was born in Rymanova Vola in Galicia on 24 September 1904. In 1914 his family sought refuge from pogroms and the war in Michalovce in Slovakia. He later lived in Brno and worked as a physician. The Gestapo arrested him as a Polish national in mid-September 1939 and imprisoned him in the prison in Brno’s Špilberk Castle. He and several other Jewish prisoners were taken to Ostrava in October and included in the second Ostrava transport headed for Nisko upon San. As a physician, he was not expelled towards the German-Soviet border on arrival but was allowed to stay near the camp. Nevertheless, on 8 December 1939 he crossed the border to the USSR along with a large group of prisoners and then stayed in Lvov for several months. That is where he was arrested on 14 March 1940. He was sentenced to three years in forced la-
bour camps for illegal border crossing in Chernigov on 13 July 1940. He reached the camp near Kandalaksha in the Murmansk Oblast on the Kola Peninsula by train and boat. Thanks to his profession he was appointed as the prisoners’ physician in the camp. There were 2,000 prisoners in the camp at the time and five of them were physicians. The camp was evacuated after the Nazi attack on the USSR in July 1941. Neuer was sent to North Ural to a camp near Solikamsk with a more benevolent regime where he worked as a physician again. He was released at the turn of 1941/1942 on the basis of the amnesty for Polish nationals. He briefly worked in a hospital in Bukhara, Uzbekistan and then left for Gudzar, Tajikistan and found a job again as a physician in a home for the elderly. His primary goal was to make it to Palestine. He abandoned the plan after the deterioration of Polish-Soviet relations after the unveiling of the Katyn Massacre in 1943; he went to Buzuluk and enlisted as a volunteer with the emerging Czechoslovak Army. He made it all the way to Czechoslovakia with the Czechoslovak battalion and became the commander of the Military Hospital in Slaný and later headed the Internal Medicine Ward of the Ústí nad Labem Hospital. He enrolled for the Jewish military organisation Hagana in the autumn of 1948. He left for Israel in early 1949 and worked as a physician there again. Marek Neuer died in 1972.

Max Bachrach

Max Bachrach was born in Hranice na Moravě on 14 December 1887. He lived in Moravská Ostrava with his wife and two daughters. He worked as a mining inspector in the local coal mines. He was deported to Nisko upon San on 18 October 1939 as part of the first Ostrava transport. He crossed the border to the USSR near Dakhnov on 25 October 1939. The officials at the border guard headquarters issued him with a temporary permit to stay on the Soviet territory. He lived in Lvov until 16 November 1939, then left for Buchach where he stayed until his arrest on 17 June 1940. He was charged with illegal border crossing and sent to the Unzhlag penitentiary labour camp in the Volga Region without a trial. He was released on 21 January 1943 but his subsequent whereabouts are unknown. His wife Helena and younger daughter Lilly perished in Auschwitz in 1944.
Kurt Rosenzweig

Kurt Rosenzweig was born in Těšín in 1923. His father, who died in 1940, had worked at a bank and his mother taught foreign languages. Kurt Rosenzweig was included in the second of the Katowice transports headed for Nisko upon San on 27 October 1939. On arrival, the Nazi guards along with other prisoners took him to the nearby community of Jaroczyn from where they were forced to cross the border to the Soviet Union. They did so near the village of Rudka where they were detained by the Soviet border guards and then sent to Sinyava for registration. There, they were searched, interrogated and finally ordered to leave the border zone within twenty-four hours. They walked to the nearest railway station, Rava-Ruska, and went on to Lvov. Rosenzweig registered as a refugee in Lvov and attempted to return to Těšín. In the meantime, he lived in a refugee shelter based in a former dancing school. A raid on refugees took place there on 27 June 1940 and Rosenzweig was arrested by the NKVD. Following three weeks in various prisons he was sent to the White Sea-Baltic labour camp. Following the Nazi attack on the USSR in June 1941, he relocated to the Kargopollag camp in the Arkhangelsk Oblast in the north of Russia. Only in 1942 he was notified that he had been sentenced to three years in penitentiary labour camps for illegal border crossing (the ruling of the Special Council of the NKVD was only issued on 18 November 1942). He had been recognised as partially disabled several months earlier.

He was not released until June 1944, after almost four years spent in the GULAG camps. From then on he lived in Bugulma in Tatarstan. He did not attempt to return to his homeland, as all of his relatives had perished in Auschwitz. He was granted Soviet citizenship at his own request in 1947. Rosenzweig lived to see his rehabilitation; he applied for it in November 1988 and a court in Lvov honoured his application on 25 January 1989.

Hugo Mandler

Hugo Mandler was born in Vienna on 2 May 1902. He worked at a photography lab and then as a car mechanic. He was interned in the Dachau concentration camp
based on his Jewish origin from 15 November 1938 to 15 July 1939. When released, he received a testimonial for obtaining a visa from the Dominican Republic consulate in Switzerland in the late summer but did not manage to collect it in Bern. He was included in the second Vienna transport in October 1939 and arrived in Nisko upon San on 26 October 1939. As a craftsman, he was not forced to cross over to the USSR immediately; he stayed in the camp with several other selected prisoners to participate in building the camp. When it was completed, he and others were expelled towards the German-Soviet border, which he crossed on 17 December 1939. He first went to Sinyava, then took a train to Lvov where he lived, without a permit to stay, for several months and searched for temporary jobs. The NKVD arrested him on 28 June 1940. During interrogations, the Soviet authorities wanted to know, inter alia, the tasks he was given by the Gestapo during his internment in Dachau and on leaving Nisko (sic).

Then he was accused of staying illegally in the USSR under Sections 80 and 33 of the Penal Code and deported to Volgolag near Rybinsk in the Yaroslavl Oblast. Not until 18 April 1942 was he sentenced by the Special Council of the NKVD as a socially dangerous element to 5 years in labour camps. The ruling could not be enforced, however, as Hugo Mandler had been released on the basis of the ordinance on amnesty for Polish citizens of 25 December 1941. There is no knowing how he managed to convince his jailors that he was a Polish national. His subsequent whereabouts are unknown.

Otto Fränkel

Otto Fränkel was born in Bratislava on 29 August 1894. He served in the Austro-Hungarian army as a lieutenant of artillery during WWI. After the inception of the Czecho- Slovak Republic, he applied for Austrian nationality in December 1920 and moved to Vienna where he subsequently graduated in law. He was an active member of the Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemet) in the 1930s. His origins led to his first brush with the Dachau concentration camp – he was briefly interned in protective detention from 12 November to 15 December 1938. He filed an application for emigration to Palestine in February 1939 but was rejected. To save his wife, he divorced in September 1939. He was deported to Nisko upon San on 26 October 1939 as part of the second Vienna transport. On arrival, he was expelled together with other prisoners to a nearby small community where they stayed for about three weeks. Then on 4 December 1939 he illegally crossed the border to the USSR. He made it to Lvov where he lived for the subsequent seven months. He underwent training to be a barber and tried to obtain a permit to emigrate to Palestine again. However, the NKVD arrested him in Lviv on 4 July 1940 on the grounds of his illegal stay on the territory of the USSR. He was sent to the Volgolag near Rybinsk in the Yaroslavl Oblast. Otto Fränkel was only sentenced in April 1942 for five years in penitentiary labour camps as a socially dangerous element. His subsequent whereabouts are not known.
Deportations to Nisko upon San
in the recollections of the survivors

Over the course of the past several years, members of the ÚSTR Oral History Group recorded the personal recollections of three people deported to Nisko upon San who had hailed from pre-war Czechoslovakia. By coincidence, all of them were included in the same transport – the second one that left Ostrava for Nisko on 26 October 1939 at 7 p.m. Bedřich Seliger was deported together with four hundred other Jewish prisoners.43 After a few hours’ ride, the transport stopped in Katowice where it was coupled to several dozen cars with a thousand Jews on board, concentrated from the various corners of the Nazi-occupied Upper Silesia region. The other prisoners included Oton Windholz44 from Ustroń and Leopold Presser45 from Těšín. The following pages contain excerpts from their recollections.46 The great majority of the deportees who came on this transport did not stay in the Zarzeczce camp, which was under construction, but were driven to the nearby German-Soviet demarcation line by the Nazi guards who forced them to cross over to the Soviet (formerly Polish) territory. Since the guarding of the camp was negligent, many of the few prisoners who stayed in or near the camp temporarily fled for the USSR in the upcoming days or weeks.

This is why the witnesses’ recollections of the Zarzeczce camp are rather limited and focus primarily on describing the escape to the USSR and the internment in the NKVD camps. As part of a reminder of the anniversary of the deportations to Nisko upon San, passages describing the developments beginning with the transport to Nisko and ending with the deportations to the labour camps in the USSR after arrest by the NKVD were excerpted from the interviews (B. Seliger’s recollections end with the departure to the Soviet territory in search of a job).

Bedřich Seliger was born in Prostějov on 19 June 1940. His father made his living as a ready-to-wear clothes retailer and his mother was a housewife with three children. Following primary school, Bedřich studied at the Prostějov High School and graduated in 1938. While still a student he got involved in socialist youth activities and formed an informal socialist club with his schoolmates. They met even ad–BFer the establishment of the Protectorate to the UK, he never led–BF. On a false accusation of keeping Marxist literature at home, Bedřich Seliger was arrested by the Gestapo in early October 1939 and taken to the prison in Brno’s Špilberk Castle. Two months later, he and other Jewish prisoners were deported to Ostrava.

Leopold Presser (Yehuda Parma today) was born in Jasenieca in Poland near the Czech-Polish border on 31 July 1922 and he grew up in Český Těšín. He and his siblings went to a Czech primary school and were involved in the Český Těšín Makkabi association and the Boy Scouts. He went on to study at the Český Těšín High School. When Poland claimed the Czechoslovak part of the Těšín area during the Munich crisis, the boys from several youth organisations in Český Těšín were involved in setting up border patrols. Leopold Presser was a member of a patrol guarding the border by the River Olše (Olza). This is why he and dozens of other students were ejected from the high school following the Polish occupation of the Czech part of the Těšín Region (“Zaolží”) in October. He decided to seek his elder brother Egon in Ostrava. He participated in Aliyat Noar, an organisation that prepared for the emigration of Jewish people to Palestine while working at a steel mill. When the Nazi forces arrived in Ostrava on 14 March 1939 he was dismissed immediately on the grounds of his Jewish origins and struggled to return to his parents in Těšín. World War II broke out in September 1939 and Nazi troops quickly invaded the Těšín area. Shortly thereafter, Leopold with his father Artur and other Těšín Jews were included in a transport to Nisko upon San.

Oton Windholz (his current name is Otto Winecki) was born on 29 March 1923 in Ustroń in Poland near the Czechoslovak border; his mother came from Michálkovice near Ostrava where he would often go to visit his relatives as a child. As elsewhere on the Polish territory occupied by the Nazis, all men aged sixteen to sixty in Ustroń had to report for forced labour – cleaning walkways, landscaping, digging army trenches and so forth. After several weeks of exhausting and humiliating work, Otto Windholz with his brother and father were included in a transport to Nisko upon San.

TRANSPORT TO NISKO UPON SAN

B. Seliger: One fine day, a Nazi officer came to our dormitory (cell) and told us to write back home immediately for them to send us suitcases with winter stuff – underwear, shoes and so on because we would relocate for labour deployment. So we wrote the letters. My mum sent me a really big suitcase. There was a winter coat, shoes, lots of underwear and sweaters in it. Then they took us to Ostrava on flatbed trucks as was customary back in the day. They put us on a train in

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Ostrava but we did not know where we were going.

O. Winecki: The Judenrat in Ustron told us to pack up and be ready at five in the morning. We could take one suitcase each and they took us to Bielsko because the railway bridge in Skoczów had been destroyed by the retreating Polish army. They took us to Bielsko on horse-drawn carriages. A train was sidelined there; we heard it had come from Ostrava. It was a long train and it was full of, shall we say, passengers – other Jews from Ostrava and around. They put us on the train, and it was still a normal train with passenger carriages.

We arrived in Katowice and they put everyone into factory (cargo) cars, about fifty people in one car. The transport included our relatives from Český Těšín and Ostrava, friends from Ustron and from Těšín, Bielsko, Jablunkov, Mosty u Jablunkova and Bohumin. My father’s family was large – he was one of seven siblings. But my mother’s grandfather in Michálkovice had one of seven siblings. But my mother’s grandfather in Michálkovice had thirteen children.

Y. Parma: A Gestapo order came in October to the effect that all Jews aged 16 to 60 had to come to the main station in Těšín on 28 October with backpacks, personal belongings, clothes and food for three days. We all came there at seven a.m. It was horrible – hundreds of Jewish families came to the station to see their children and husbands off. My father was 18 and I was 17. My mother, brothers and sister all came to say goodbye. It was very moving. That was the last time I ever saw some of them. They stuffed maybe fifty people to every car, we were stuck like fish in a can and you couldn’t move. There was hay on the floor and one bucket for a toilet. There were small air vents on top but it stank in there. Then we went to Bielsko and then to Katowice. About a thousand Jews in all, not only from Český Těšín but also from Bohumin etc. The Nazis wanted to purge the area of Jews but took only men for the time being. Women and children stayed. It was a big worry for everyone but I didn’t understand much of what was going on. [...] The train stopped by a field, the doors opened and the Nazis ordered us to get off. We had to stand in a row, face to the train, drop our trousers and then they ordered us to shit – to defecate. Everybody was surprised if someone actually succeeded in doing so. That was so humiliating. Today you cannot understand how they could treat us so inhumanely.

NISKO – ZARZECZE CAMP

O. Winecki: SS men were waiting for us on the platform. They opened the doors and one or two would walk car to car with a cap and say: “Wer mit dem lieben Herr Gott nicht näher Freundschaft machen wird, soll das Gold und Geld abgeben”, which meant “if you don’t want to meet your Maker right now, hand over all of your money, jewels and gold.” They collected it in the caps. Then they unloaded us. Luggage – suitcases and backpacks – were in the first two or three carriages. They put them on horse-drawn carts and herded us towards the San. We lost two suitcases in the hurry. A pontoon bridge was set up on the San at the time because the railway bridge was defunct. Then we came to the camp in Nisko. At that time, though, there was no camp at all yet, there was something like one house and two or three wooden huts. We spent the night there, sleeping on the ground.

B. Seliger: We were lucky in the camp in that we were guarded by Wehrmacht soldiers who celebrated the victory over Poland, the successful Blitzkrieg every day. There were some provisional huts already that we lived in. We didn’t know how it would be when real frosty weather would come; we were confused. And nothing happened for quite some time there, though we worked pretty hard; we levelled the ground and cleared trees including the roots. We worked really hard physically. There were about two to three hundred of us. Not just from Ostrava but also from Brno, Prague and so on. They needed mostly young people who could tackle the work. In fact, they selected only young people for this slavery back in Brno, and only if an old man had made his bed incorrectly or something they picked him too as a punishment.

Y. Parma: When we reached Nisko my father and I found that this was the second transport and that my brother was included in the first transport from Ostrava. When we came to Nisko [the camp by the village of Zarzecze near Nisko] no huts were ready yet; they were still under construction. We saw a lot of mess around there, which was strange for Germans. So the group that I was in with my father relocated to the nearby village of Jaroczyn. We would do basically nothing there. Older and more experienced men knew or learned from the locals or from the Polish army deserters that we were close to the Soviet border; that there was a river there; and that the Soviet Army was on the other side. We decided not to stay under the Nazis and to try to flee instead.

ESCAPE TO THE USSR

B. Seliger: We were virtually unguarded. A conversation between Nazi guards – they talked quite loudly – revealed that some prisoners had indeed fled. When they started bringing in wire mesh fences, barbed wire and so on, basically everyone understood that we were about to build our own concentration camp. At the time, we had quite a few opportunities to meet, have a chat and try to guess what would happen next. I joined such a group of six. I didn’t know any of them, not even by name – they must have been from Ostrava. We agreed that when a clear night came we would pack up our suitcase and leave because basically no one was guarding us. And that clear night came once. One man in the group told us to pack up and leave sometime between one and two in the morning when the Nazis would be fast asleep. So we did. That was after about two months in the camp, shortly before Christmas 1939.

We knew we had to go east. We had no problem maintaining our direction based on the azimuth. Then we came to a wide road and when the morning came we were surprised to find that we were not alone there – people just kept flowing in both directions. We dropped into a group – part Poles and part Ukrainians, carrying some things from their homes for their relatives in Lwó.
behind the iron curtain

They knew who we were; there was no point keeping it secret. They said they had met others like us – we were not the first. They told us the border was not far away. We walked tens of kilometres through no-man’s land between the Soviets and the Nazis. Then we saw a Nazi patrol. We knew that if they were from our camp they could be after us and that we would die – that was a certainty. When they came close we found they were not from our camp. One Pole who spoke decent German took out his documents. None of us had any documents on us. He explained that we were all coming from this village and going to see our relatives. We had been there several times before and we still had some stuff on this side of the line. At that moment, insane fear took hold of me – what if anyone in our group betrays us? A Ukrainian or a Pole – they all knew we were Jews and no Ukrainians or Poles loved Jews very much. But no one spoke – not a peep. Maybe the one who spoke to the Nazis had such great authority that no one dared – if they did it would mean sentencing six people to death… there was nothing else to be done, they would shoot us dead right there. So that was the first miracle where I survived, and on it went.

We walked for about eight more kilometres and came to a brook that had almost no water so we could cross it easily. The Pole said we should split into smaller groups and try to cross at various points. We thought that was reasonable. The six of us stayed together as one small group and we set out towards the brook with assurance. Suddenly we saw a plume that Russians wore on their winter caps – we called it the ‘antenna’ – on the other side. Then the Russian soldier got up from his shelter, took out his submachine gun and said: “Go the other way, you are not allowed here.” What could we do – we turned round and hid behind a bush. But we saw that patrols were replaced every few hours. About two hours later, another Russian appeared there, lifted his gun up and waved at us to go. That’s how we crossed the border. He even told us – though we didn’t understand a word of Russian – so he gestured that there was a farm nearby where we could stay overnight. We went to the farm and really, there were some very kind people. We lay on straw and they even gave us a piece of bread and tea. The next day we went to the station from where trains went to Lviv. We got on a train – no tickets, no money, no documents – nobody had anything. The train started moving and the conductor came. One of us had a piece of paper in his pocket and gave it to him. The conductor took a look, said thank you and gave it back… To this day, I don’t know if he knew what was happening and wanted to help us, or if he was just illiterate and believed that it was a group ticket for six people. The man who gave it to the conductor later told us that it was a coal delivery note. We eventually reached Lviv this way.

Y. Parma: We formed a group, about fifty people. I guess I was the youngest. A German mounted patrol stopped us on our way. There were many people going through at the time so they did not check them thoroughly. They just took some jewellery from us. With the help of some locals we crossed the River Tanew on a boat. That’s how we got to the other side, and there were Soviet soldiers – border guards who captured us. At gunpoint, we had to form a group and never step out of line as we marched. After walking for several kilometres we reached the district town of Sinyava. They accommodated us in a school, gave us water and some soup. But maybe they thought we were spies or traffickers, so they started interrogating each of us. I saw my brother in the school yard the next day. What a surprise it was to reunite with him! He too heard, on arriving in Nisko, that they were going to build a camp there and so he and others fled and reached Sinyava. During the questioning my father showed the investigators his Czechoslovak passport with his children’s names written in it. The Soviet officer treated Czechoslovaks differently. Then they gave us a permit to go to Lviv by train.

O. Winocki: We stayed in Zarzecze for one night and we immediately figured out that there was no future for us there. It was not guarded too strictly; the fence was not completed so I went over it and into the forest with my father and brother at night. We walked
through the forest towards the Russian border at night and we would hide in villages in local cottages and farmhouses during the daytime. Right at the border, we met other people from the transport who fled similarly to us. The border between the Soviet and Nazi occupation zones was a river. We didn’t know the local terrain but there were Ukrainian traffickers who knew that trafficking refugees across the river was good business. My father paid for the three of us; there were about twenty-five of us in all. We had to wait for two or three days because the nights were clear and the moon was bright. When the moon set, we came to the river and started fording with our luggage on our heads. Suddenly, about four border guards came running on the Russian side with rifles with bayonets and started yelling: “Go back!” On the other side, the German border guards heard it and came too. As they forced us back, one of us who could speak Russian because he had been in captivity in Russia during World War One told them that we didn’t care, just shoot because the others [Germans] will shoot too. One of our men was walking back and the Nazis shot him in the middle of the river. He stayed there. The shot attracted an officer of the Russian border guard. He came over riding a horse and our interpreter told him to let us go to their side because we were running away from those murderers. He then ordered his men to let us in. They took us to the border guard station and then they took us to the prison in Sinyava the next day. We were there for a day or two, and then they told us: “Get lost! Don’t ever come back!” So we walked to the train station and left for Lviv.

B. Seliger: The situation in Lviv was abnormal – so many refugees. The number of people there may have tripled or so. Luckily, the help for refugees was organised perfectly. Not only did they give us food – they also gave us a small amount of money and a card. It was not an official identity document, just a card of the helping organisation. I was lucky in that I met a man who asked who I was. He was a Jew and when he found that I had completed a piano course, he told me that they had an upright piano at home and that I should come for lunch and pay them back by teaching their daughter to play the piano. He wrote the address down for me. I came there the next day, had a wonderful lunch like no other refugee had, and then I would do this three times a week. On the other days I ate at the organisation where I was registered and slept in a school.

Posters appeared in the town, saying that refugees would be registered by the security authorities – the NKVD. The posters contained the initial letters of surnames with a date and place to report to. So, under the letter S, I got my address to come to and the date. There was this typical Russian – tall and fat, and his rank was Major. He told me to complete several forms. Since I did not know the Cyrillic script then, he generously offered to complete them for me. My place and date of birth, my education, my father’s, mother’s and sisters’ occupations and who knows what else he wrote down. Then he asked what my father did. I remember what I said: “He goes round with goods,” as in he was sales representative. The Major said: “Is he a coachman?” I said he was. Suddenly, that gave me a wonderful ‘cadre profile’ that helped me a lot in the future. All of a sudden, in the middle of the interrogation, he left and came back with a piece of paper and asked: “So you were born and lived in the town of Prostějov?” I said yes. He started asking me who had the biggest photography studio in Prostějov, so I said “Ševčík”. Who has a bookstore near the town hall? I said the name. And, what street is the court in? Havlíčkova, of course – our house was less than a hundred metres from the court house. He said: “Correct.” He cross-checked if I told the truth to make sure I was not an agent. But I did convince him and the result was that he told me to come back in two weeks to collect an ID and to bring two photographs. Based on that interrogation, I got a pass authorising me to stay on the territory of the USSR and get a job. That was immensely important.

Y. Parma: Lviv was a big city but it was utterly overcrowded with refugees at the time. You could not get lodging anywhere. In addition, it was tough winter back then, with temperatures...
of ten, maybe fifteen below zero, and we were exhausted. Eventually we got to Rahodemitska Street, which had dorms for students and academia members. The floor of the hall was occupied but we found a spot. My brother and I lay down under the piano and we could push my father to the wall. Luckily it was warm in there. But when we tried to get up we would hit our heads on the piano.

We started looking for a job. There was a centre where refugees would gather – the passage of the Café de la Paix; there were black marketers there and you could sell or buy all sorts of things. You could get food there too. There was a tough winter coming so we decided to go from house to house and help out with firewood. We bought a saw and an axe and peddled our work around, and got food instead of money in exchange. We could not speak Russian, and we learned, and for theussian so we started learning, and for the time being we would just gesture. We had to do some refugees from the transport in that were potential enemies to the Soviet Union so they should better be kept in Siberia instead of on the then border. The Soviets suspected every refugee of being a spy. Our time came in the summer. The militia came at night and banged on the door. They ordered us to get dressed, take our luggage and follow them. We protested saying that we had a permit to stay and work, that we were Czechs – Czechoslovak nationals. They answered: “Never mind, never mind. We will sort it out there.” They put us – the whole family – on trucks and took us to the station. We rode the train for three weeks across the entire Soviet Union; Jews, Poles with various destinies, even Leopold – a Czech from Bohumin. They gave us food every time they refilled the locomotive with water. I don’t remember what it was – maybe soup. Then we went on to the north. Once we were told that we’d had our lunch at midnight. But it was day – it was not dark. Then they put us on a boat on the River Irtysh. We sailed northwards slowly, very slowly. Finally they put us on smaller boats, about thirty people each. We went for one more day until we reached this forced labour camp called Sajma – there were three huts there. They took about fifty people – men and women, all together, plank beds on three levels. The commander welcomed us: “You have come to a colony, a place to work. Just as you never see your ears, you will never see your home again. You will dig the ground, build your houses and then live here.” Aside from him there were maybe three or four guards. We later learned that we were maybe a thousand kilometres away from the railway. There were no roads there – just the taiga.

of ten, maybe fifteen below zero, and we were exhausted. Eventually we got to Rahodemitska Street, which had dorms for students and academia members. The floor of the hall was occupied but we found a spot. My brother and I lay down under the piano and we could push my father to the wall. Luckily it was warm in there. But when we tried to get up we would hit our heads on the piano.

We started looking for a job. There was a centre where refugees would gather – the passage of the Café de la Paix; there were black marketers there and you could sell or buy all sorts of things. You could get food there too. There was a tough winter coming so we decided to go from house to house and help out with firewood. We bought a saw and an axe and peddled our work around, and got food instead of money in exchange. We could not speak Russian, and we learned, and for the time being we would just gesture. We had to do some refugees from the transport in that were potential enemies to the Soviet Union so they should better be kept in Siberia instead of on the then border. The Soviets suspected every refugee of being a spy. Our time came in the summer. The militia came at night and banged on the door. They ordered us to get dressed, take our luggage and follow them. We protested saying that we had a permit to stay and work, that we were Czechs – Czechoslovak nationals. They answered: “Never mind, never mind. We will sort it out there.” They put us – the whole family – on trucks and took us to the station. We rode the train for three weeks across the entire Soviet Union; Jews, Poles with various destinies, even Leopold – a Czech from Bohumin. They gave us food every time they refilled the locomotive with water. I don’t remember what it was – maybe soup. Then we went on to the north. Once we were told that we’d had our lunch at midnight. But it was day – it was not dark. Then they put us on a boat on the River Irtysh. We sailed northwards slowly, very slowly. Finally they put us on smaller boats, about thirty people each. We went for one more day until we reached this forced labour camp called Sajma – there were three huts there. They took about fifty people – men and women, all together, plank beds on three levels. The commander welcomed us: “You have come to a colony, a place to work. Just as you never see your ears, you will never see your home again. You will dig the ground, build your houses and then live here.” Aside from him there were maybe three or four guards. We later learned that we were maybe a thousand kilometres away from the railway. There were no roads there – just the taiga.

O. Winecki: We came to the NKVD in Lvov as refugees. We got a room from a local Jew near St Anthony’s Square. Our father started working and we the boys had no idea what to do, so we just lazied around. Sometime in April, a German military repatriation committee came and set up office in Lvov. They said that whoever of the refugees currently in Lvov wanted to go back to their relatives on the German side could register with the committee. Since our father’s wife stayed in Ustroni as did all of our other relatives, our father registered with the committee and said we wanted to return. After a few weeks, it became known that the German repatriation committee gave all the lists of the people who applied to return to the German side to the NKVD. As a result, the NKVD had its work done for it because they got all personal information – addresses and everything. So the NKVD action started. They would come to people at night and put them on trucks. They took them to the station, put them on trains and the trains went east. We hid for several weeks. Our father worked in a factory and there was a grain warehouse. So we hid in the warehouse for two or three weeks.

ARREST

O. Winecki: Then we found that all our friends from the Těšín region and Ostrava had been taken away already, and my father concluded that there was no point keeping on hiding – they would find us anyway eventually. So we were at home, bags packed, and they came knocking on our door at two in the morning. “This is the NKVD!” We weren’t surprised, really, because we were prepared. They took us on board a truck and then to the NKVD. We stayed there overnight. They never interrogated or tried us – there was no trial. Nothing. My father had registered for returning to Germany, which they understood to mean he hated the USSR. The Russian for it was “Ne blagodarnojzhny!” [Not desirable]. They simply assumed that all these people were potential enemies to the Soviet Union so they should better be kept in Siberia instead of on the then border with Germany. Trucks came the next morning and took our entire group to the station. A train of cargo cars was prepared there and we boarded. We left Lvov sometime in the evening. We rode for seven or eight days towards the River Irtysh where they put us on a boat. Or was it Tobol? I can’t remember. So they took us to Tobolsk. From there we sailed down the Tobol, Ob and Konda to a NKVD labour camp near Khanty-Mansiysk. When we came ashore and they lined us up by the river, our NKVD man Shulov told us: “This is your Poland, this is your Warsau. Get used to it. If you don’t, you will die.”

Y. Parma: There was action all the time. They would send entire families to Siberia. The Soviets suspected every refugee of being a spy. Our time came in the summer. The militia came at night and banged on the door. They ordered us to get dressed, take our luggage and follow them. We protested saying that we had a permit to stay and work, that we were Czechs – Czechoslovak nationals. They answered: “Never mind, never mind. We will sort it out there.” They put us – the whole family – on trucks and took us to the station. We rode the train for three weeks across the entire Soviet Union; Jews, Poles with various destinies, even Leopold – a Czech from Bohumin. They gave us food every time they refilled the locomotive with water. I don’t remember what it was – maybe soup. Then we went on to the north. Once we were told that we’d had our lunch at midnight. But it was day – it was not dark. Then they put us on a boat on the River Irtysh. We sailed northwards slowly, very slowly. Finally they put us on smaller boats, about thirty people each. We went for one more day until we reached this forced labour camp called Sajma – there were three huts there. They took about fifty people – men and women, all together, plank beds on three levels. The commander welcomed us: “You have come to a colony, a place to work. Just as you never see your ears, you will never see your home again. You will dig the ground, build your houses and then live here.” Aside from him there were maybe three or four guards. We later learned that we were maybe a thousand kilometres away from the railway. There were no roads there – just the taiga.
the story of the 20th century

FURTHER WHEREABOUTS

Bedřich Seliger, unlike most other refugees from Nisko, was fortunate enough to receive a job permit and find a job at a bakery in Bolekhov near Lviv. As a result, he did not face the threat of arrest and subsequent deportation to the Siberian labour camps, as most refugees did. Following the Nazi attack on the USSR in June 1941, he and other civilians were evacuated away from the progressing frontline all the way to Tashkent, Uzbekistan where he worked in a cooperative for several months. Later in 1941 he read in a newspaper that the Czechoslovak military unit was being formed in Buzuluk and decided to join it immediately - in fact, he was one of the first six soldiers to enlist in Buzuluk. As the war went on, he took the entire journey of our eastern unit as the commander of a mine launcher team. During the war his entire family perished in Nazi concentration camps.

Bedřich Seliger was employed at the military headquarters in Olomouc until 1947. When he left the military he settled in Teplice and worked in managerial positions in lacework and textiles factories and glassworks in Western and Northern Bohemia. He died on 27 November 2012.

Yehuda Parma reunited with almost all of the members of his family in the Soviet labour camp - his sister and cousin and their husbands arrived with the next transport. All Polish nationals including about three hundred Polish Jews were released from the camp in June 1941, but the commander refused to release Czechoslovak nationals, despite the amnesty. As a result, during a New Year's Eve celebration, several men decided to flee with the help of "kulaks" living in exile in the camp’s vicinity. Then they enlisted at the local military headquarters in the town of Khanty-Mansiysk some thirty kilometres away from the camp. Except for Leopold’s father, they were all recognised as eligible for military service and were allowed to leave for Buzuluk where they arrived in early February 1942. It took one year to get the rest of the family to Buzuluk. The father died as a result of physical exhaustion shortly after arrival. As a member of a reconnaissance platoon under the Second Infantry Squad led by First Lieutenant Jan Kudlíč, Yehuda Parma took part in the first combat action of the First Independent Czechoslovak Battalion in the USSR in March 1943 - in the Battle of Sokolovo where his elder brother Egon was killed. He continued as a reconnaissance soldier of the Czechoslovak military unit until the end of WWII. He stayed in the Czechoslovak Army after the war as a reconnaissance officer and in 1948 he was involved significantly in organising and training Jewish volunteers, with whom he later left for Israel. He briefly worked in the Israeli armed forces and then he was a police officer until retirement. He now lives in a suburb of Tel Aviv.

Otto Winecki was released from the Verchniye baraki penitentiary colony near Khanty-Mansiysk under the amnesty for Polish nationals announced after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. He was sent to work at a cooperative farm and his brother Alfred worked on a construction site. His father Josef was seriously injured while performing forest work and hospitalised in Khanty-Mansiysk. Otto and his brother applied for release to the newly formed Polish military force in the USSR and were released in November 1943. They joined the artillery unit but Otto was sent to a military academy in May 1944. On returning home, he found that most of his relatives had been murdered in Auschwitz. He stayed in the Polish military until 1947, then worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He stayed in Prague with his family between 1960 and 1965 as an official of Poland’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Due to another surge of anti-Semitism in Poland in the late 1960s, he fled with his family to Vienna and then to Australia in May 1968. He died on 26 November 2015 in Melbourne.
NOTES

1 Quite a lot of attention has been paid to the transports of Jews to Nisko upon San in domestic and international literature. The Ni-
sko Project was the subject of two international conferences and several historical papers and studies. In this context, we should
mention Nesládková, L. (ed.) (1995). Akce Nisko v historii "konečného řešení židovské otázky" – k 55. výročí první hromadné de-
portace evropských Židů. Mezinárodní vědecká konference. Sborník referátů. Ostrava: Rondo. For international authors, the works by Seev
Goshen, an Israeli historian and a participant in the first Ostrava transport, should be mentioned: Goshen, S. (1981). Eichmann und
jahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, Jahrgang 40, Heft 1, 95-106. Of Czech studies, those written by Mecislav Borák should be mentioned:

2 Nazi Germany and the USSR divided Poland between them under a secret protocol based on the known Ribbentrop-Molotov pact,
i.e., a treaty of non-aggression between Nazi Germany and the communist USSR signed by the two mentioned Ministers of Foreign
affairs of the respective countries in Moscow on 23 August 1939.

3 The final decision on the administration of the occupied Polish territory was eventually made by Hitler himself – the "Edict of the
Fuehrer and Reich Chancellor concerning Organization and Administration of Eastern Territories" of 8 October 1939 took effect on
26 October and ended the period of military administration on the occupied territory. New districts were made in the Greater Ger-
man Reich – Reichsgau West Prussia (later Danzig-West Prussia) and Poznan (Warthegau), and the Silesia Province was formed
from Lower and Upper Silesia. The rest of Poland became the General Government.

4 Regarding the solution to the Jewish question on Nazi-occupied territories, newer publications include Gruner, W. – Osterloh,
am Main – New York: Campus Verlag.

5 Borák (2009), 48-49.

organizované deportace Židů z Vídně. Historica. Revue pro historii a příbuzné vědy, year 3, issue 1, 44-57.


8 Borák (2009), 86.


10 ibid., 102-103.

11 Moser (1989), 120.

12 Borák (2009), 104-105.

13 Surviving documents indicate that 70 men from Nový Bohumín, 60 from Orlová and 28 from Třinec were detained and transported
to Polish territory (i.e., to Nisko) on 26 or 27 October. State District Archive in Karviná, collection Nový Bohumín Town Archive,
box 14, inventory unit. 123, List of Deported Jews made on 21 November 1939; State District Archive in Frýdek-Místek, collection
Trinec Town Archive, box 11, inventory unit 96, List of Jews in Trinec, 18 September 1939.

14 Moser (1989), 121.

15 Dvořák (2012), 53.


17 Borák (2009), 100.

18 ibid., 132.

19 Moser (1989), 121.


21 ibid., 119.

22 ibid., 123.

23 Moser (1989), 121-122.

Problémy, year 5, issue 1, 106.

25 Borák (2009), 128.

26 ibid., 221.

27 ibid., 229.

28 Dvořák (2012), 56.

29 State Archive of Lviv Oblast (Derzhavnyi arkhiv Lvivskoy oblasti – hereinad–BFer “DALO”), collection Kriminalnye spravy – (1939-1950),
collection code P-3258, vol. 16694.

30 ibid., vol. 18175.

31 Roland, H. (1943). Váleční zajatci uspořádaji. Podle úředních dokumentů sestaveno z příkazu Německého státního ministerstva pro
Čechy a Moravu. Prague: Orbis.

behind the iron curtain
A request for rehabilitation sent by K. Rosenzweig from Bugulma in Tatarstan to a court in Lvov in 1988

Photo: DALO
Республиканская прокуратура УССР

Уважаемые товарищи!

Прошу оказать содействие в расследовании моего, с моей точки зрения, незаконного ареста и заключения в 1940-44 гг.

Я проживал до 1939 года на территории Чехословакии. В этом году после начала германской войны я был в 16-летнем возрасте вместе с другими евреями выслан немецко-фашистскими властями на советскую границу. Остальные члены моей семьи были в последствии уничтожены в концлагере Освенцим.

В конце ноября 1939 я в составе большой группы беженцев прешел границу СССР в районе Свецна Львовской области. После допроса работником НКВД и обыска мне, как и другим, было предложено покинуть пограничную зону в течение суток, добравшись до ближайшей железнодорожной станции Пава-Русская, я уехал во Львов. Там был размещен в общежитии для беженцев по адресу Старый Рынок, 30 в бывшей школе танцев.

27 июня 1940 года ночью вместе со всеми проживавшими там беженцами был арестован работниками НКВД и после трехнедельного содержания под стражей (в приспособленной для этого школе), беги каких-либо объяснений был отправлен в Беломорско-Балтийский лагерь. В 1941 году после начала войны был перевезен в Каргопольский архангельской области.

В 1942 году мне было объявлено, что решением тройки НКВД я осужден за нелегальный переход посторонними по соответствующей статье УК УССР к трем годам лишения свободы. Однако был освобожден только в июне 1944 года, т.е. через почти четыре года.

С этого времени я проживаю в Татарской АССР, получив по моей просьбе советское гражданство в 1947 г.

Прошу проверить указанные факты с целью пересмотра дела и реабилитации.

С уважением,

Розенцвайг Курт Юсфович, 1923 г.р., армейский г. Бугульма, ул. Красная, д. 29, кв. 2.

25/ХI 1988 г.
The story of a dilatory informer

Robert Sylten – State Security Service (StB) collaborator in Israel

Robert Sylten was never a publicly known or important person. His actions did not make a significant mark on history either. Yet his story certainly cannot be described as commonplace – it dramatically reflected the turbulent history of the 20th century. When watching the fateful twists of Sylten’s life, we can also clearly see some practices of totalitarian regimes.

JAN DVOŘÁK

PERIPETEIAS OF A NORMAL LIFE

He was born as Robert Silberstein on 3 August 1902 in Orlová. He came from a seven-member Jewish family – his father, Herman Silberstein, was employed as a warehouse manager in the brewery in Radvance, based in Orlová, for many years and later became a private entrepreneur. At first, his business was relatively successful, but due to the economic crisis of the early 1930s he went bankrupt, and to cover debts he even had to sell the family house. However, this solved the dismal financial situation of the family only temporarily, and he was forced to find work in neighbouring Poland; he took a job at a distillery in Katowice.

His second son, Robert, completed five grades of general national school in Orlová and four classes of the Orlová gymnasm. In 1918, he went to study chemistry at the Technical University in Vienna, where he acquired the title of engineer five years later. In 1924, Robert Sylten had to return to Poland due to conscription. He completed his fourteen-month military service in the division (military) hospital in Opava. Around this time, he married Melanie (Mellita). In August 1925, their first daughter, Ingeborg, was born, followed by Ruth exactly five years later. In 1926, Robert Silberstein was allowed to change his surname to Sylten – the reasons which led him to this renaming and to the choice of surname that sounded unusual in Central Europe are not known.

After military service, he returned to Katowice, where he continued his previous job. However, he was dismissed from the soap factory during the Great Depression in the early 1930s and returned to Czechoslovakia again. The impacts of the economic crisis on the domestic economy were also significant at that time and he, therefore, remained unemployed or reliant on short-term and unstable temporary jobs for a long time. In this context, we could mention an interesting recollection of his close friend from childhood Erich Šarf (Scharf), who many years later assessed Sylten’s traits in communication with StB members: although he described Sylten’s personality as entirely positive – he considered Sylten highly intelligent and educated - he could not help having a dig at his old friend, mainly because of his alleged “entrepreneurship” and “greed”. As far as I know, Sylten was accustomed from his childhood to having enough of everything. In the beginning, his father earned quite a lot of money. During the economic crisis, when he didn’t get any support from his parents, Sylten started dealing a lot. He sold and bought everything that he could get to and that could earn him some money. [...] His biggest hobby is chess, in which he managed to find new acquaintances to get some benefit. During the economic crisis he played chess for money. He always found a partner who even paid for a game. At that time people said that Sylten plays chess for money, 5 crowns for each game. This is when I got the impression that Sylten was very stingy with money. But he was able to use money very sparingly. In conversations Sylten never tried to show that he was something more than the one he was talking to or interacting with. Using his great intelligence, he was able to win over many friends and good acquaintances.3

After some time, Robert Sylten found a job as an insurance agent in Ostrava – he acquired life and fire policies and earned extra money selling books of several Ostrava publishing houses. However, as his brother Jan Skála (Silberstein) said after years, his brother’s family lived in very poor social conditions at the time.4 In 1937, therefore, he decided to move the
whole family to Brno. In March of that year, their third child – son Peer – was born. However, Sylten did not manage to find a qualified job in the new home either, so he had to work as an insurance agent again. He remained in Brno until August 1939. It was then that the low standard of living and perhaps even his adventurous nature first inspired him to take extraordinary actions. According to his later statement, from 1938 to 1939, during his stay in Brno, he collaborated with members of the Czechoslovak military intelligence service, e.g. with his wife’s cousin, First Lieutenant Holzner, whom he informed of engineers of German nationality working in arms factories in Brno that he was in contact with. Sylten did not sign any promise of collaboration at the time, and he always informed Holzner orally. However, after Holzner left for Britain following the occupation in March 1939, they never met again.3

ESCAPE FROM PERSECUTION

After the Nazi occupation of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, a considerable number of Czechoslovak citizens decided to escape from their occupied homeland. Due to the Nazi racial policy, the largest group consisted of refugees of Jewish origin. Most refugees, also due to geographical proximity and material possibilities, went first to Poland, mostly to Krakow and Katowice, where they tried to obtain visas – mainly to the United States or Great Britain; some of them intended to go to the Soviet Union.5

In mid-August 1939, Robert Sylten decided to take the same step. However, he left his family in Brno. First, for about two weeks, he stayed in Katowice, and after 1 September 1939, when Germany invaded Poland, he went further east, to Lviv.7 The eastern part of the Polish territory had, however, been successively occupied by the Soviet Red Army since 17 September 1939.8 In the preserved file of the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD),9 he talks about the circumstances of his departure to the territory occupied by the Soviets in detail: It wasn’t possible to live in Katowice any longer, as the German troops quickly moved forward. I escaped to the town of Brody9, where I spent seven days. As I didn’t find any work, I decided to go to Lviv. There, I registered with the employment office. But I spent a month and a half in Lviv, and I had no job, so then I stayed in Borschiv10 for two weeks, but there wasn’t any work either, and I sold everything I had with me (two pairs of shoes, a coat, a watch). I had nothing to live on, so I decided to go to Bucharest, Romania, to my wife.11 The main inspiration to go to Romania was his wife’s initiative. During his stay in Lviv he had learned from her telegram that she had asked for permission to go to Bucharest, where her brother Hans and uncle Heinrich lived. Between 10 and 12 December 1939, he reportedly even received a letter from her from Bucharest. First, he officially applied at the Lviv NKVD for permission to go to Romania: The NKVD took four photos, completed a questionnaire and told me that permission to leave would be granted in four months. But I had nothing to live on, so I decided to leave illegally, he said later, during an interrogation. On 26 December 1939, he took a train from Lviv to the Rozhiv station, from where he walked to the nearby border with Romania. However, in Popelniki, which lay directly by the border, he was detained by locals the following day, about 150 metres from the border, and handed over to members of the Kolomyia border section of the NKVD.12 After his arrest, he was taken to the NKVD headquarters in Kolomyia, where he underwent the first interrogation. After two weeks, he was transferred to a prison in Stanislav (now Ivano-Frankivsk). On 6 February 1940, the Stanislav investigator, Second Lieutenant of State Security Burkalyov, brought final charges against Sylten for attempting to illegally cross the state border of the USSR to Romania.13 Sylten was subsequently taken to the prison in Vinnytsia. On 29 June 1940, he was sentenced to five years of forced labour by the Special Board of the NKVD.14 The uniqueness of Sylten’s case lay in the fact that the overwhelming majority of refugees (among them many Czechoslovaks) were condemned by the Soviet authorities because of their illegal arrival in the territory of the USSR, while Sylten was sentenced, paradoxically, to severe punishment for attempted illegal departure from the USSR.

IN THE GULAG

In the autumn of 1940, Robert Sylten was deported to one of the forced labour camps Kniazh-Pogost (Sevzhdorlag)15, which was located in the Komi Republic in northern Russia. As evidenced by the preserved reports of the Czechoslovak Military Mission in the USSR from 1942 to 1943, mapping the number of Czechoslovaks imprisoned in Soviet forced labour camps, the local lager (camp) complex held many Czechoslovaks – primarily Jews and Rusyns, but also several Czechs.16 Most of the prisoners were employed in the construction of the railway line between Kotlas and Vorkuta, on the 728 km long section of Kotlas – Ust – Kozhva.17 Robert Sylten first worked in the camp as a forest worker, then in a shoemaking workshop and eventually as a chemist in a soap factory, where he remained until 12 February 1942.18 An interesting story is related to his nearly two-year stay in the camp: after his return to Czechoslovakia in 1945, he allegedly told his brother that in the local camp he helped members of the Soviet security service to "liquidate" a German spy.19

The amnesty for Czechoslovak citizens detained in the USSR was declared in late 1941, but it was only at the beginning of January 1942 that the State Defence Committee of the USSR agreed with the release of former Czechoslovak citizens if they would enter the nascent Czechoslovak Military Unit in the USSR.20 This possibility was, of course, also used by Robert Sylten. Although he was released from the camp in late February 1942, he did report for duty in Buzuluk until the beginning of May 1942. This can be most likely explained by dilatoriness of some camp commandants in releasing foreign nationals.21 After arriving in Buzu-
Robert Sylten was deeply affected by the news. In this respect, the later recollection of his brother is far more credible: *I remember that shortly after the de-mobilization, when my brother found out that his family had been killed, he was mentally devastated for a very long time. In this connection, his resistance and hatred towards the guardsmen and other followers of Germans increased considerably.* The question remains how to measure the human suffering and hatred towards the perpetrators.

**INGE AND HEINZ**

Like most European Jews who managed to survive all the hardships of the Second World War, Robert Sylten had to cope with the loss of his loved ones for the rest of his life. Until his death, he probably knew no details of the fate of his family and mistakenly believed that his wife and children died in the extermination camp at Auschwitz. However, the reality was different, and especially the fate of his eldest daughter, Ingeborg, remains unique in many ways, yet equally tragic. His wife Melanie and all three children were first deported by the Nazis on 28 January 1942 in transport U, No. 199, from Brno to the Theresienstadt ghetto, and from there, on 1 September of that year, in transport Be, No. 218, with thousands of other Jews to Raasiku in Estonia, where they arrived on 5 September 1942.

As was the case in extermination camps, upon arrival at the local station they had to go through a selection process which decided on the life or death of each of the newly arrived. Like 800 other people from the Theresienstadt transport, Sylten’s wife Melanie, younger daughter Ruth and son Peer were not selected and, on the same day, they were shot in nearby woods at Kalevi-Liiva by a squad composed of members of the Estonian Security Police and the SS. Inge was spared for the time being and included in a two-hundred-member group of young and employable prisoners (only 45 women survived the war), who were finally transported to the Jägala concentration camp. At the end of 1942 and in the first half of the following year – i.e. before its closing in August 1943 – many local prisoners were transferred to the central prison in Estonia’s capital Tallinn (Ger. Reval). During the autumn, most of the prisoners (including Inge) were moved to Ereda, one of several newly established camps in north-east Estonia.

According to the testimonies of surviving prisoners, Inge was exceptionally beautiful, and uncharacteristically blond for a Jewess. Immediately after her arrival at Ereda, she was noticed by the feared commander of the camp, Heinz Drosihn, who reportedly almost instantly fell in love with her. In the following weeks and months, he tried make her life in the camp considerably easier. The emotional relationship between the two eventually became so strong that it even had a significant positive effect on Drosihn’s behaviour towards the prisoners, so he, among other things, stopped using corporal punishment.
trauma. After some time he managed to find a job at Pick a spol., in a soap factory in Žilina, where he soon made friends with the owner, Gejza Pick.33 Sylten was also popular among his colleagues and other workers.33 In December 1948, he remarried. Even then he was not politically active, but according to a later testimony of his brother Jan he welcomed the “February victory” in 1948. Yet in early 1949 he and his employer Gejza Pick (whose family company had been nationalized) decided to go to Israel, where Pick wanted to establish his own factory that would be managed by Sylten. Sylten’s decision to move to Israel was to a great degree influenced by his second wife. However, the reality was not nearly so rosy after they arrived in Israel – Sylten could not find a good job, or even a decent flat. He and his wife first settled in Jerusalem, where Robert worked as a clerk at the town office for two years. Then he became a chemist in a plant specializing in the production of artificial fertilizers and processing of kitchen waste. Later, he tried to start a private business and for some time dealt in building materials. However, his business was not very successful, and his company went bankrupt around the time of the second Arab-Israeli war (Suez Crisis) in 1956. Nevertheless, he soon managed to find a fairly well-paid job as a chemist in phosphate plants at Beersheba in the Negev desert, where he worked as deputy head of the laboratory. He and his wife had two children at the time.34 As a chemist, he had a decent salary, which allowed him to take out a bank loan and buy a flat in Ramat Gan.35 Yet the reportedly pressing financial situation forced him to accept an offer of the Czechoslovak intelligence service.

**New Beginnings**

Like other surviving Jews and those affected by the tragedy of the Holocaust, Robert Sylten eventually had no choice but to try to cope with his life after the war. In the early 1950s, he and his family moved to Israel, where he found a job at Pick a spol., a soap factory in Žilina, where he soon met Gejza Pick, the owner of the company. Sylten became popular among his colleagues and other workers.

In December 1948, Sylten and his employer Gejza Pick decided to go to Israel, where Pick wanted to establish his own factory that would be managed by Sylten. Sylten’s decision to move to Israel was to a great degree influenced by his second wife. However, the reality was not nearly so rosy after they arrived in Israel. Sylten could not find a good job, or even a decent flat. He and his wife first settled in Jerusalem, where Robert worked as a clerk at the town office for two years. Then he became a chemist in a plant specializing in the production of artificial fertilizers and processing of kitchen waste. Later, he tried to start a private business and for some time dealt in building materials.

Although the diplomatic relations were normalized for a short time in 1956 and the Israeli embassy started operating in Prague again, the situation deteriorated the very next year again, when an employee of the Israeli embassy in Prague, Moshe Schatz, was accused of spying and deported. At that time, the STB suspected not only him, but also other employees of the Israeli embassy of involvement in providing financial support to persons of Jewish origin and organizing illegal escapes of some individuals from the Czechoslovak Republic. Several Czechoslovak Jews were arrested, but according to Israel it was based on false accusations.40 In April 1957, Secretary of the Israeli Embassy Shlomo Kaddar was also declared persona non grata, so he had to leave Czechoslovakia as well.41 Although in the rest of the 1950s and 1960s the state and party bod-
ies declared disinterest in improving Czechoslovak-Israeli relations, and anti-Israel propaganda continued to be fuelled in the local society; the Czechoslovak intelligence service did not cease to be interested in the situation in the Middle East, trying to build an agency network (i.e. a network of secret collaborators) primarily among former compatriots. Its interest in Robert Sylten dates from the end of 1957.\textsuperscript{43} The idea of using him for collaboration came most likely from his brother Jan Skála\textsuperscript{44}, who was a collaborator of the Žilina Regional Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior at that time, under the code name "Milan". Based on the correspondence with his brother, he believed that his brother maintained "progressive thinking" after his departure to Israel, expressing a warm relationship to his homeland. What seemed valuable to him was his close contact with other former compatriots.\textsuperscript{45} The members of Section 7 of the Žilina Regional Headquarters of the Ministry of the Interior therefore made a proposal in early 1958 to acquire Robert Sylten for collaboration.\textsuperscript{46} From January to June 1958, they questioned the collaborator "Milan" to provide as much information as possible about his brother’s past, leading him to deepen their mutual correspondence. In late May and early June 1958, the members of the Žilina Regional Headquarters of the Ministry of the Interior also gathered information about Robert Sylten from his former colleagues from the company Pick and the aforementioned Sylten’s friend from his youth, Colonel of the Czechoslovak People’s Army Evžen Šarf.\textsuperscript{47} On 14 February 1959, First Lieutenant Josef Beneš\textsuperscript{48} (senior officer of Department 1 of Section 6 of Directorate I of the Ministry of the Interior / foreign counterintelligence) finally made a proposal for recruitment ("verbóvka") of Robert Sylten, who was to be used in particular to obtain reports on the economic and political relations between the Western powers (meaning the USA and the FRG) and Israel. According to the information of the Czechoslovak intelligence service members, specialists from the FRG also operated in the Negev, where he was employed. Furthermore, the intelligence service members imagined that he would penetrate into an organization called the League of Israel-Czechoslovakia Friendship (abbr. HOC, an organization of expatriates from the Czechoslovak Republic in Israel)\textsuperscript{49} and, thanks to his contacts, he would report relevant information not only about the life of Czechoslovak emigrants in Israel but, for example, also about Nazi collaborators.\textsuperscript{50}

The Czechoslovak intelligence service were particularly interested in Sylten’s contacts with former compatriots - the aforementioned friend Gejza Pick reportedly maintained contacts with a number of people from top economic and political circles of the Israeli state, and his wife, Herta, née Melkenstein, was also a close relative of Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion.\textsuperscript{51} Sylten was supposed to be motivated for collaboration not only because of his strong aversion to Nazism (killing of his family and participation in the anti-Nazi struggle) and sympathies for both Czechoslovakia and the USSR, but especially financial rewards and other material benefits. After the proposal was approved by the then Interior Minister Barák, a dossier of a secret collaborator codenamed "Robert" was established.\textsuperscript{52}

From January until the end of July 1959, in several personal meetings which were held every week in the "Pioneer" cultural centre in Žilina, his brother was instructed by members of the StB (two of the meetings were also attended by First Lieutenant Beneš) on mutual correspondence and, in connection with the coming meeting of the two brothers in Vienna, also on the procedure for starting collaboration.\textsuperscript{53} Originally, the brothers were to meet in March 1959, but due to complications (Robert could not gather the necessary finances to travel to Europe) the scheduled meeting finally took place in early August 1959. Upon arrival in Vienna on 10 August 1959, Robert Sylten first met his brother Jan, who, according to the plan, proposed that he meet his "friend from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs" - i.e. First Lieutenant Beneš. Two days later, in the presence of his brother, Robert met Beneš and, after some hesitation, his recruitment ("verbóvka") was successful. Fearing a potential disclosure, Robert agreed to collaborate only under the condition that his activity would not be directed against the interests of Israel (although he did not sympathize with Prime Minister Ben Gurion’s policy).\textsuperscript{54} At several other meetings in the following two days (in Viennese cafés, pubs and parks), First Lieutenant Beneš tried to question Sylten on the topics of major interests for the Czechoslovak intelligence service - especially on Israel’s economic and political relations with the West and on Sylten’s contacts in political circles of the Israeli state. When talking to Beneš, Sylten boasted that he had many contacts in particular among the officials of Israel’s leading political parties – Mapai\textsuperscript{55}, the General Zionists\textsuperscript{56} and the Progressive Party\textsuperscript{57}, as well as in the trade union organization Histadrut\textsuperscript{58} and at the Ministry of Development.\textsuperscript{59} Therefore, Beneš assigned him a task to obtain any information related to political and economic agreements between Israel and the Western powers, i.e. with their effort to penetrate economically into Israel (names of experts and specialists, as well as places and times of their stays in Israel). He was to report his findings in letters to his brother to Czechoslovakia and soon in
personal contact with the superior officer in Israel. In November 1959 that Robert indicated in a letter to his brother that he "longed for friends" – i.e. that he wanted to establish collaboration. In the following weeks, he was therefore contacted by the resident of the Czechoslovak intelligence service in Israel Captain Havlík. Their first meeting occurred on 26 January 1960, in a park near the Dan hotel in Tel Aviv. In the following months, they had eight more meetings – they took place either in a park near the Dan hotel or in the Ben Yehuda café. During these meetings, Havlík assigned tasks to Sylten to make contacts with officials of the Mapai party (and to join it) and of the General Zionists, to identify ways of economic penetration of the USA and FRG into Israel, to select functionaries of the Israel-Czechoslovakia Friendship League and Czechoslovak immigrants in Israel, etc. The tasks assigned to him through Havlík were the same as those in the original proposal. The members of the Czechoslovak residency in Israel certainly also liked to use Sylten’s services, because according to their superiors’ assessment they did not have sufficient operative results.

However, it was soon clear to them that the promising collaboration would not meet their original expectations. From the beginning, Sylten approached fulfilment of tasks in a rather lax way, which of course was not satisfying for the intelligence service members. The collaboration sometimes seemed rather humorous: at one of the meetings, Sylten presented the Czechoslovak intelligence service with an offer to purchase an invention related to protecting people from the effects of high speeds during space flights. At that point Havlík considered the proposal as suspicious. Finally, Sylten gave him a piece of paper with the calculations, but the experts from the Scientific and Technological Intelligence Service (VTR) assessed them as amateurish, and probably rightly suspected Sylten of deliberately trying to monetize a worthless thing. This was also revealed in his later assessment – according to Havlík, he apparently exhibited certain extremes in behaviour, naivety associated with Jewish foxiness (!) and a fear of contact with us paralyzed (sic) by a desire for money. Havlík also questioned the reliability of his other reports and urged caution during their assessment.

It was only after the last mutual meeting, which took place on 7 April 1960, that he admitted that Sylten’s approach to collaboration and task fulfilment somewhat improved: He abandons a transparent way of thinking, and although he tends to fulfil the tasks in an unsystematic manner, it is clear his attitude to task fulfilment is far more serious (he realized that his initial method was unlikely to succeed). He strives for conspiracy; for example, he brought the last report in a clutch pencil. He expressed gratitude for the loan to buy a flat. However, the reliability of Sylten’s reports was to continue to be closely examined.

After Captain Havlík left Israel, his supervision was assumed by Captain Cidlinsky. However, Sylten only met Cidlinsky once, because he was suddenly expelled from Israel in connection with disclosure of a collaborator in Operation “Capo” – an operation of the Czechoslovak intelligence service for further “examination” of the aforementioned Israeli diplomat Shlomo Kaddar, which was terminated after his departure from Czechoslovakia in 1957.

In any case, after Cidlinsky’s departure further contact with Sylten was discontinued (although it was not expected that this would be the definitive end). Sylten’s active collaboration with the Czechoslovak intelligence service ultimately lasted only six months – from December 1959 to May 1960. When in November 1962 the intelligence service members considered its effectiveness, obvious disappointment prevailed in their assessment. During the whole period, Sylten only provided some second-rate political-economic and scientific-technical information, which, however, was not up to standard and, from the intelligence point of view, did not lead to anything substantial. It was mainly information relating to the production and export of Israeli phosphates (including a list of people who were involved in the production – chemists, technical officers, directors, leaders of chemical plants) that was passed to the VTR. His laxity was criticized again: ... he fulfilled the assigned tasks in a rather superficial way, he lacked initiative – he did not fulfill other special tasks and did not show discipline and bravery, constantly fearing the possibility of disclosure. The assessment also included Havlík’s peculiar characterization of Sylten’s behaviour: He showed naivety, not appropriate to his education, associated with Jewish foxiness, fear of contact, as well as a desire for money. In total, in personal meetings, he was paid 1,300 Israeli pounds (Israeli liras, IL), including IL 300 as rewards and IL 1,000 as a loan to buy a flat. However, by 1962 Sylten had not repaid the loan.

TERMINATION OF COLLABORATION

After deportation of Captain Cidlinsky from Israel in August 1960, no contacts were maintained with Sylten until the end of July 1962. It had to do with the fact that the residency of the Czechoslovak intelligence service in Israel had been cancelled. Despite the poor results of the previous collaboration, the contact to Sylten was still attractive for the Czechoslovak intelligence service, and it intended to use it in the future. The important thing was that there was no indica-
tion that the collaboration had been disclosed to foreign intelligence services, especially to the Israeli counterintelligence service. Therefore, the Czechoslovak intelligence service took certain steps to re-establish the contact in the summer of 1962. In July, Robert Sylten was contacted in Israel by his brother Jan, who was visiting his son Milan. Robert accepted the offer of further collaboration and agreed with his brother on the possibilities of the new connection. However, the collaboration was never renewed, because the Czechoslovak residency was not restored. In 1984, Robert Sylten’s dossier was archived and, in the 1980s, shredded.

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, the author of the article did not manage to determine the exact date and place of Robert Sylten’s death. Sylten reportedly died in the 1980s in Tel Aviv. Even his daughter from his second marriage, Ruth, who was for some time in contact with the filmmaker Lukáš Přibyl, did not know many of the twists and turns of her father’s life – of too many dramas for one human life. Although they also stemmed from personal and often ill-considered decisions, fuelled certainly also by his lifelong thirst for adventure, their consequences for Sylten were usually tragic. As tragic as a substantial part of the history of Central and Eastern Europe in the 20th century, when the Nazi regime was replaced by the Communist regime, i.e. by a substantially similar totalitarianism, “at the helm”. Robert Sylten was unable to break free from their traps for virtually his whole life – his whole family was murdered on racial grounds by the henchmen of Nazism, whose persecution he fled, and then he was unjustly imprisoned by the Communists (Bolsheviks) only to work for them later. Unfortunately, we will never know more about the real reasons that led Robert Sylten to make this decision.

NOTES

1 Security Services Archive (SSA), f. (collection) Main Intelligence Service Directorate (hereinafter referred to as Directorate I of the National Security Corps), svazek reg. č. (dossier registration number) 42801, Questionnaire. One of the questionnaires indicates that Robert Sylten was born on 3 August 1904. According to a later explanation of his older brother, Milan, Robert used the year 1902 because of his second wife, who was 20 years younger.

2 Erich Scharf (born 10 March 1905). A Czechoslovak army officer already in the First Republic. In March 1942, he was drafted in Buzuluk, subsequently promoted to the rank of lieutenant and appointed a field company commander. At the end of the 1950s, as a colonel, he was employed at the Regional Military Directorate in Ostrava. In StB materials, apparently mistakenly referred to as Evžen Šarf.


4 Ibid., Žilina Regional Headquarters of the Ministry of the Interior, Agency report (i.e. secret collaborator report), 13 March 1958. It contains a detailed biography of Robert Sylten prepared by his brother Jan Škalá (codenamed “Milan”).

5 Ibid., Record of recruitment (“verbovka”), prepared by First Lieutenant Beneš, 20 August 1959.


8 Poland was divided between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union based on a secret protocol that resulted from the well-known Ribbentrop–Molotov agreement, a non-aggression pact between Nazi Germany and the communist Soviet Union signed by the appointed Foreign Ministers of Germany and the USSR in Moscow on 23 August 1939.

9 State Archives of the Transcarpathian Region (Derzhavniy arkhiv Zakarpatskoi oblasti, herein referred to as DAZO), f. 2558 (1939–1994), Robert Sylten’s investigation file. In the NKVD file, his surname is incorrectly transcribed as Sulten.

10 Brody – a town in eastern Galicia, about 90 km northeast of Lviv.

11 Borschiv – a town in eastern Galicia, about 100 km southeast of Lviv.


13 At that moment, he had a pocket watch, 30 roubles, 75 złotys and a wallet, which was subsequently seized.

14 The indictment reads as follows: ... R. G. SULTEN (sic) is a resident of the town of Brno (sic) /Czechoslovakia/, on 18 September 1938 he came from Czechoslovakia to Poland, and until 27 December lived in Kotowice (sic), Brody and Lviv. Since SULTEN did not want to stay in the territory of the USSR, he decided to escape to Romania, and for this purpose he came to the town of Kolomyja. In the evening of 27 December, he attempted to illegally cross the border to Romania, but was detained by border guards. (translated into Czech by the author.) This record, full of mistakes, which are copied from previous documents, suggests both the fact that the author (investigator) did not know the correct names of major Czechoslovak and Polish towns, and was not even aware of the fact that Lviv and Brody were already part of the USSR at that time, as well as negligence (or intentional deception) in studying the materials related to Robert Sylten’s case. Moreover, the statement “did not want to stay in the territory of the USSR” was simplified and aggravating.

15 Ibid., Indictment of Robert Sylten by the UNKVD in Stanislav, 6 February 1940.

16 Sevzheldorlag (abbr. from Russian Severnyy zheleznodorozhnyy ispravitelno-trudovoy lager or the Northern Railway Corrective Labour Camp) was established on 10 May 1938. Its administration was initially based in the Ust-Vym District in the settlement of Knyazhpogost (written also as Knyazh-Pogost), and later in the Zheleznodorozhny District, in the village (later town) of Zhelez-
nashornby (since 1985 Yemva) on the Vym river. As of 1 January 1945, 26,340 people were imprisoned there; as of 1 January 1944, there were 8,893 people; as of 1 January 1941, there were 86,626 people; and as of 1 January 1942, there were 53,344 people. For more details, see Bystrov, V. (2006). Průvodce říši zla. Názvoslový a mistopisný slovník visí než 2000 koncentračních, nápravněpracovních, zvláštních, ugrobních, zajateckých, internačních a prověřovacích filtračních táborů a zvláštních osad, zřízených od dvacátých do šedesátých let dvacátého století v Sovětském svazu, a táborů, které Sovětský svaz provozoval v letech 1939–1950 v jiných zemích. Prague: Academia, 504–505.

MCA – MHA, f. 3, inv. č. (inventory number) 31, sv. (dossier) 1, List of NKVD camps with a brief characterization of the condition, indicating the course of recruitment to the Czechoslovak Military Unit.


According to the reports from the released volunteers coming to Buzuluk, nine Czechoslovak citizens who wanted to join the Czechoslovak Army were released in the Knyazh-Pogost camp and equipped for departure in late January 1942. At the last moment – when leaving – they were detained and returned, and their release documents were taken away from them. As these prisoners were not accused of spying (the amnesty did not apply to prisoners accused of spying), Chief of the Czechoslovak Military Mission, General Píka, asked the Czechoslovak Embassy in Kuibyshev at the beginning of March 1942 for the earliest possible intervention for their release. MCA – MHA, f. Czechoslovak Military Mission in the USSR, k. 3, inv. č. 31, Vol. 1, Chief of the Czechoslovak Military Mission in the USSR H. Píka’s communication to the Embassy of the Czechoslovak Republic in Kuibyshev, 6 March 1942.


For more details on the StB's Operation "Dana", directed against the activities of Czechoslovak Jews and Israeli embassy diplomats in Czechoslovakia, which resulted in mass arrests in the spring of 1957, see Šmok, M. (2011). Každý žid je sionista a každý sionista je špión! Paměť a dějiny – when leaving – they were detained and returned, and their release documents were taken away from them. As these prisoners were not accused of spying (the amnesty did not apply to prisoners accused of spying), Chief of the Czechoslovak Military Mission, General Píka, asked the Czechoslovak Embassy in Kuibyshev at the beginning of March 1942 for the earliest possible intervention for their release. MCA – MHA, f. Czechoslovak Military Mission in the USSR, k. 3, inv. č. 31, Vol. 1, Chief of the Czechoslovak Military Mission in the USSR H. Píka’s communication to the Embassy of the Czechoslovak Republic in Kuibyshev, 6 March 1942.


For more details on the history of Theresienstadt transport Be to Estonia, see ibid., 215–245.


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Gejza Pick owned a factory for the production of detergents and cosmetics in Žilina from 1938. During the Aryanization of Jewish family: Sylten was married and had 3 children, but they did not return from the concentration camp.


Ibid., Agency report, 2 January 1958. National Security Corps materials only contain the following remark on the fate of his pre-war family: Sylten was married and had 3 children, but they did not return from the concentration camp.


For more details on the transports to Estonia, see ibid., 215–245.

Gejza Pick owned a factory for the production of detergents and cosmetics in Žilina from 1938. During the Aryanization of Jewish property in the Slovak State, his close friend and colleague Viktor Ruttkay agreed that as a person of Aryan origin he would become its fictional owner. In addition, Ruttkay actively participated in the rescue of the Pick family during deportation in 1942. In his request submitted to the Ministry of Economy, he stated that Gejza Pick was essential as the director for management and operation of the company. On this basis, a work permit was issued for Pick that saved him and his family from the first wave of deportations. In late January 1944, shortly before the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising, the Pick family and the Weil family, their relatives, decided to escape. However, for Gejza’s mother, the escape was too difficult, and therefore she remained in Žilina. Viktor Ruttkay hid her in the back room of his flat. The other members of the Pick family hid in the homes of Ruttkay’s relatives in Čepčín near Martin until liberation. In May 1945, they returned to Žilina, whereupon Gejza Pick again started a business with Viktor Ruttkay. In September 2004, Victor and Emma Ruttkay were awarded the official Israeli title of Righteous Among the Nations by the State of Israel. Source: http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=4440735 (quoted as of 25 November 2015).

with his parents from Germany to Holland, where he studied law and philosophy at the University of Utrecht. In 1933, he went to Palestine to continue his studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In 1938 to 1945, he served as commander of the underground military organization Haganah and after that, until the founding of an independent state of Israel, as a collaborator of the Jewish Agency. In 1945, he entered the service of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he worked in the department for Western Europe. In 1949, he was appointed First Secretary of the Israeli Embassy in Paris and later, in the same position, he was transferred to Brussels. When the Israeli Ambassador Arieh Kubový was declared persona non grata after Slánský’s trial in 1955 and had to leave Czechoslovakia, Kadář started working in Prague as a chargé d’affaires – a permanent diplomat, and after a short-term normalization of diplomatic relations in 1956, he was promoted to ambassador. However, in the following year, the StB took action against selected members of the Czechoslovak Jewish community and deported the Israeli embassy employees. Shlomo Kaddar was suspected of espionage, but this activity was not proved. However, he was declared persona non grata, left Czechoslovakia, and returned to the Israeli Foreign Ministry. After the Six Day War in 1967, he joined the city council in Jerusalem.

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SSA, Special Section I of the Ministry of the Interior, svazek reg. č. 4124, report of 19 September 1957.

Jan’s son Milan Skála also lived in Israel. He had gone there in 1948 and was employed as a workshop manager in an engineering company near Tel Aviv.


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Ibid., svazek reg. č. 4124 – Operation "Cape".

Ibid., Record of the questioning of Josef Kačírek, Ondrej Zubor, Viktor Ruttkay and Colonel of the Czechoslovak People’s Army Evžen Sarf for Operation Robert, 26 May 1958.


In 1948, shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel, the Israel–Czechoslovakia Friendship League was founded in Tel Aviv by many public figures such as Chanan Rosen, Artur Kraus, Dr. Chaim Kugel and Max Brod. The aim of the League was to develop the Czech–Israeli relations. For example, it ensured Israel’s participation in planting a rose garden in Lidice and in other cultural events, organized group tours from Israel to Czechoslovakia, etc. The organization operated for 23 years, but in 1967 its activity was suspended. It was only in connection with the political changes in Czechoslovakia that it renewed its activity on 22 February 1990 and was renamed to the Israel–Czechoslovakia Friendship Society. See http://www.mvzc.cz/pj/cz/encyklopedie_statu/blizky_vychod/israel/krajane/-mzv-publish-cz-zahranicni_vztahy-krajane_v_zahraniči-krajane_ve_svete-historie_krajani-index_11.html (quoted as of 25 November 2015).

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Ibid., Memorandum, 13 February 1959.

Ibid., Minister of the Interior R. Barák’s approval, 14 February 1959; ibid., Addendum to memorandum, 13 June 1962.

Ibid., Record of a meeting with collaborator Milan, 30 July 1959; ibid., Plan of questioning of and assigning tasks to Robert.

Ibid., Record of questioning of Josef Kačírek, Ondrej Zubor, Viktor Ruttkay and Colonel of the Czechoslovak People’s Army Evžen Sarf for Operation Robert, 26 May 1958.

Ibid., Record of the questioning of Josef Kačírek, Ondrej Zubor, Viktor Ruttkay and Colonel of the Czechoslovak People’s Army Evžen Sarf for Operation Robert, 26 May 1958.

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Progressive Party (Miflaga Progresivit), a liberal-progressive party consisting of mostly Jewish immigrants from Central Europe.

General Zionists (HaTzionim HaKlaliym), centrists within the Zionist movement. As a party, they were the predecessor of today’s parties Likud and Kadima.


Ibid., Memorandum, 13 February 1959.

Ibid., Minister of the Interior R. Barák’s approval, 14 February 1959; ibid., Addendum to memorandum, 13 June 1962.

First Lieutenant Beneš depicted Robert Sylten as an intelligent person of polite manners who likes being with other people and who is able to gain their trust with his behaviour. Beneš also stated that in his spare time Sylten is a social person and an avid chess, bridge and billiards player. He is able to obtain new contacts, which he can then use for his own benefit.


Ibid., Žilina Regional Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior, Record of a meeting with collaborator Milan, 27 November 1959.

The chief of residency in Tel Aviv was First Lieutenant Havlík (alias “Havlík”), his deputy was Lieutenant Krejčí (attaché), and the residency officer was Lieutenant Žďársky. SSA, registry; Section V, č. (reference number) A/1-00 130/53-58, in Prague on 9 March 1956, To the Personnel Section of Directorate I of the Ministry of the Interior.


a story from the 20th century
October 1955 to May 1960, he served as a resident at the residency in Israel, namely in the legalization of the 2nd envoy secretary and, at the end of his stay, of the 1st envoy secretary. After returning from Israel, he was first appointed the senior officer and, at the end of 1960, he was appointed the chief of the departments of Section 8 of Reserve II of Directorate I of the Ministry of the Interior. From May 1964 to August 1967, he worked at the residency in Jakarta, Indonesia, in the legalization function of the 1st ambassadorial secretary. SSA, f. Personnel files of Ministry of the Interior employees, personnel file of Václav Louda, ev. č. 5584/22.

64 Ibid., f. Directorate I of the National Security Corps, svazek reg. č. 42601, Assessment of an agent codenamed Robert, 1 November 1962.


66 Ibid., Extract from a telegram from Tel Aviv, 18 January 1960.

67 The Scientific and Technological Intelligence Service conducted industrial espionage and, therefore, was tasked mainly with monitoring fields such as atomistics, missiles, low-current electrical engineering and chemistry. The Czechoslovak Scientific and Technological Intelligence Service was part of Directorate I of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

68 Ibid., Captain Havlík’s report, 10 April 1960.


71 Ibid., Assessment of an agent codenamed Robert, 1 November 1962.

МИНИСТЕРСТВО ВНУТРЕННИХ ДЕЛ СССР

УПРАВЛЕНИЕ МВД по Станиславской области

УЧЕНО В 1962 ГОДУ

ДЕЛО № 48835

По обвинению СУЛТЕН

РОБЕРТА ГЕРМАНОВИЧА

ПОСТ. 16-80 УК УССР

Начато " " 195 г. В ______ томах

Окончено " " 195 г. Том №

Архив № 1840

Сдано в архив " " 195 г.

С-4515

33198
Aerial view of the Nikolaj camp, 1952. In November 1955 there were about 700 prisoners with sentences exceeding 10 years in the camp. The camp was situated at an altitude of 900m, one kilometre north of Jáchymov. Prisoners mined uranium in the Eduard shaft located less than one kilometre west of the camp.

Photo: NIKM
Escape by tunnel from the Nikolaj camp

It is Sunday afternoon, 6 November 1955. A raw autumn day. Anton Tomík’s hand has just touched the back of a wooden fence separating the guards’ barracks and the prisoners’ camp. The boarded fence runs roughly in the middle of the Nikolaj camp. Nikolaj lies one kilometre north of the town of Jáchymov in the Krušné Mountains, in the area of which prisoners extract uranium ore to be exported to the USSR.

JAN HORNÍK

The Nikolaj penal labour camp was established in November 1951 and abolished in July 1958. It was set up on the site of a forced labour camp which had been shut down in February 1951. Nikolaj was one of the bigger camps. In September 1952, a year after it was founded, it contained 900 prisoners, while in autumn 1955 there were about 700. In that period the camp was under the command of First Lieutenant Jaroslav Slánský. Intended for prisoners with sentences of over 10 years, the camp was located at an altitude of 900m above sea level and temperatures fell to as low as minus 20 degrees Celsius in winter. Prisoners walked a distance of around one kilometre to the Eduard shaft, where they worked, tied by steel rope into a marching unit; referred to as the “bus”, it was formed by up to several hundred prisoners marching in fives.

On 6 November Anton Tomík is finishing a narrow tunnel leading about a metre under the ground. It is just outside a three-metre corridor made of barbed wire through which work groups walk to the shaft. Behind the corridor there is a fence made of barbed wire, 2.5 metres in height, which runs around the camp. Every eight metres there is a lamp post. The so-called shooting range, 10 metres wide, is marked out in front of the barbed wire. In the corners the camp is guarded by six-metre towers manned by guards armed with machine guns.

Although the tunnel has been completed, it does not automatically mean freedom. The escape route leads into yet another fenced area. Nevertheless, the work of a dozen prisoners over several months is nearing an end. Tomík sends a message to Otto Drozd, who is guarding the other end of the tunnel, that the work has been completed. However, he stays in the tunnel for now in order to be able to monitor what is going on in the barracks area. Tomík’s situation is made easier by a shallow ditch running along the boarded fence that allows him to lie just below the surface.

Drozd passes the information to the other inmates. They immediately call a meeting. Unfortunately, one member of the group, Josef Guliš, has been placed in solitary confinement two days previously. But they cannot wait for him; they could be exposed. Only yesterday, an inspection was carried out in building five, where guards tore up planks as if they knew something was afoot. The prisoners agree that they will escape that very night. They will meet after 6 pm in the joinery workshop where the tunnel begins. In a work shirt and cotton trousers, Tomík collects his things and goes back to the workshop. Other people are also making their way there slowly. Some have never met before; for the sake of confidentiality, no-one in the group knows all the other members. Among them are also Václav Ratajšký and Arpád Troja, who have not participated in digging the tunnel. František Meres has told them about the underground passage just before the escape.

They take just a few things with them. Some have chocolate or a tin which they have bought at the camp shop, cigarettes and even two bottles of spirit. They have one map between them which they have torn out of an atlas and a little camp money; some even have regular money, which they were able to get from the civilian staff at the shaft.

At around 7 pm, 10 escapees have gathered in the workshop. One by one they squeeze into the tunnel – the passage only allows one person to crawl in at a time. Tomík goes first, followed by Mereš, then Viliam Gápel and the others. The last two are Otto Drozd and Miroslav Dostál. Dostál locks the workshop from inside and shuts the trap door behind him.

After Tomík sneaks out of the tunnel, he pushes himself into a shallow ditch behind the boarded fence and, lying on his back, starts to gingerly crawl towards the eastern tower. He has to cover about 50 metres, then turn 90 degrees right and continue along the fence to the corner in the guards’ area by the path at the edge of the wood. The others quietly fol-
low – this is the most critical moment of the escape. If one of the guards in the barracks went out near the fence to smoke, it would be all up.

Luckily, the first half of the stretch they have to cover is hidden by the wooden fence. The lights illuminating the corridors of the shooting zone are facing the other side, so the fence casts a long shadow over the ditch. In addition, the guard in the tower focuses his attention on the grounds of the camp. Who would expect escapees to choose to dig into another fenced area instead of the wood?

They also make it across the second 50-metre stretch without any problems. Now they only have to cut the wires. They succeed in doing so. Tomík crawls under the fence and is free. Just a few more metres across the path and he will be able to hide in the forests of the Krušné Mountains. It is about 8 pm, pitch dark and the Nikolaj camp can be seen between the trees. The others emerge one by one, a total of eight men. But 10 escaped via the workshop! Someone is Kupczok and František Mereš. One, a total of eight men. But 10 escaped via the workshop! Someone is Kupczok and František Mereš. Eventually, 10 made it out of the workshop, concealing the story of the 20th century

The escape plan had been conceived three months previously. Its main initiator was Adolf Ruš, who worked in the camp’s joinery workshop. He had the workshop keys and was thus able to organize the digging of the tunnel without attracting attention. Ruš first considered fleeing with inmate Drozd. Initially they considered making their escape via the shaft trolley, in which they would hide covered in rubble, but in the end they decided on the tunnel. In mid-August, Ruš himself cut out a hole in the floor of the workshop, concealing it with sawdust. Soon a group of five prisoners got together, with Drozd and Ruš joined by Viliam Gápel, Jan Kupczok and František Mereš. When Gápel first started digging about 30 centimetres had been completed and he managed to deepen it by about 15 centimetres the first time. The work was only just starting in August. Gradually other men joined the group, which accelerated the digging but also increased the risk of discovery. Vojtěch Kučera and Miroslav Dostál became part of the group through Drozd in September. Dostál himself later brought in Jiří Hrdina. Josef Šebo learned about the tunnel during a visit to the workshop. He acquired an iron pole for digging and later also installed an electrical light in the tunnel. In the end they replaced the electrical light with a lamp and a flashlight procured by Anton Tomík. Tomík was brought to the group by Gápel, also in September. The same month Guliš became the last member to join the group, through Mereš. It was he who ripped the map of Czechoslovakia out of the atlas in the camp library. It was not until the end of the month that Ignác Hazucha learned about the tunnel, although he, like Ruš, also worked in the workshop. However, he did not enjoy much trust among prisoners so they tried to keep the whole thing secret from him. Those worries were justified, it later turned out, but they were also lucky.

They all participated in digging the passage to the best of their abilities. It was primarily Ruš who coordinated the digging; later he was assisted by Mereš. Some only worked a few times while others, such as Kupczok, came to help up to ten times. They stored the soil removed in the workshop’s loft. The work proceeded a little slower than they planned. Tomík ended up in the sick bay for some time in October, while Šebo, Hrdina and Kučera in the end decided to give up on the plan.

The escape plot could have failed at the very last moment due to the presence of an informer in the group. This was the abovementioned Ignác Hazucha, who wrote an anonymous denunciation concerning the planned escape two days before it happened, on 4 November, and placed it in a “requests and complaints” box. In his letter he only wrote: Watch out for an escape from Nikolaj, adding no details. It appears he was trying to be on the safe side and have an alibi in case they were caught. During subsequent interrogations he claimed that if he had added his signature and concrete details he would have faced reprisals from other inmates. The wardens carried out a random inspection based on the denunciation. As mentioned above, they even tore out the planks in one of the buildings. However, they did not find the tunnel.

At the very last moment, on the day of the escape, Ratajšák and Troja joined the group. They had already tried to escape in September through a connecting corridor to the Rovnost shaft but got lost and had to come back after two hours. Once they had learned about the tunnel from Mereš, they did not hesitate and immediately decided to join the group.

THE GROUP BREAKS UP

The group of eight is heading north at some speed. It is about 8 in the evening. They do not know that Dostál and Drozd, who were the last to leave the tunnel, have decided to make a run for it on their own after crawling behind the fence. They are heading south along the Rovnost shaft in the direction of the town of Ostrov. Later they turn east. They hope to reach the nearby village of Vítišov, where Dostál worked on a state farm in 1950.

Meanwhile, the main group passes the Eduard shaft before turning south towards Karlovy Vary. They are marching in hilly terrain. The weather is favourable. It is foggy and drizzling, which means the scent trail will fade and hounds will not be able to follow them further than one kilometre west of the camp.

They allow themselves a longer pause only after the dawn. At night they were able to cover about 15 kilometres, following a straight line from Nikolaj to the vicinity of the village of Sadov. There they cover themselves with fallen leaves and rest. As transpires later, they were able to march far enough during the first night to make it out of an inner, guarded zone their pursuers had set up immediately the next day.

It is a quiet night in the camp, but everything changes with the morn-
ing line-up. After the guards realise 10 prisoners out of about 700 are missing they raise the alarm at 6:45 am. At 7:05 am, hounds are deployed to track the escapees, while Interior Guard units start creating the first pursuit zone. The guards are at their places within an hour of the alarm being raised, standing at intervals of 100 to 200 metres and within each other’s view. The first ring consists of about 400 Ministry of the Interior officers, while about 40 kilometres of the state border with the GDR are closed off by the Border Guard. Soon mobile patrols start combing the area inside the zone.

However, the conjecture that the escapees have headed for the border or are wandering in the surrounding woods proves wrong. The main group is already resting in the forest close to Sadov, while Drozd and Dostál are somewhere east of Ostrov, probably already safe beyond the Ohře River.

Moreover, the pursuers have no idea whether the escapees have divided into more groups and if so of how many.

More and more units are deployed in the operation. A mechanised battalion of the Interior Guard comprising 350 men is called from Prague. In the direction of Plzeň and Mariánské Lázně all crossings and bridges over the Ohře between Stráž nad Ohří and Loket are manned in the morning. The Public Security concentrates on the Karlovy Vary–Prague road. Soon a total of 957 members of the Camps Administration of the Ministry of the Interior are deployed, armed with 70 light machine guns, 270 automatic guns, 85 handguns and 532 rifles. At the same time the commanders of the operation make operative reserves of another 235 men.

Unfortunately, the main group runs out of luck on the very first afternoon. Between 2 pm and 3 pm a for-
group, saying they will try to board a train to Slovakia. Only five men remain of the original 10: Hazucha, Tomík, Kupczok, Gápel and Ruš. It is less than 24 hours since they assem- bled in the forest outside Nikolaj as free men.

In the meantime, headquarters receives a message at 4:15 pm that two or three suspicious persons have been observed near the village of Děpoltovice (northwest of Sadov).⁷⁷ This may have been Ratajský and Troja, who have separated from the main group. A total of 77 men are sent to the area to search it and set up another well-guarded north-south line. Yet again to no avail. After the forest- warfare, the main group sets off again. At around 9:30 pm they have seen a suspicious group of people in the forest near Sadov, HQ sent more troops to the area. However, they only find three pouches and a miner’s coat. But they have at least acquired the first tangible evidence documenting the escapees’ movements.

At 8 pm the 1st mechanised bat- talion of the Interior Guard with 350 men arrives in Jesenice (about 50 kilometres east of Karlovy Vary) from Prague. Its task is to create an impen- trable line between Strojetice and Plasy along the river Střela, in case the escapees head south-east. A similar, shorter line, much closer to Karlovy Vary, is also created by another rifle company on the road between Bochov and Toužim.⁷⁸

About 30 kilometres north of Stro- jetice, the northernmost part of the guarded line, is Víšťov, where Drozd and Dostál are headed after they have turned east near Ostrov in the direc- tion of Žatec. In this way they remain outside the area of the main search and at this moment have the greatest chance of escape.

Although they are split into four groups and almost 1,000 men are searching for them, after 24 hours all 10 men are still free. Hidden by the darkness, they continue in their at- tempt to flee their pursuers.

**SHOOTOUT IN LOKET**

Since early on Tuesday morning Interior Guard units have been combing the Krušné Mountains from mount Plešivec north to the border – in vain. At 11 am, a pla- toon of the mechanised battalion sets up another screen along the Ostrov – Moříčov – Velichov axis. At the same time the manhunt is fo- cused east of Sadov, where the lost Mereš is hiding. After the pouches are found near Sadov, another company blocks the line Ostrov – Nová Víška – Bor – Pulovice so that by the evening Mereš has his pursuers behind him, in the south he would have to cross the guarded Ohře and directly in front he has the 3rd rifle company. Moreover, a short way bey- ond the river, to the north-east, the way is blocked by the barrier near Moříčov.⁷⁹ The only way to escape from the tight encirclement would be to head north to the mountains. The mountains are teeming with pursuers and Mereš is running out of time, though he is as yet unaware of his hopeless situation.

In the meantime, the main group continues to the south at night, in the dark as to where exactly they are. At the break of day they again hide and wait for nightfall. In the evening, Tomík even dares to walk to a nearby railway stop to find out where they are. In the booth he finds a sweater and about 50 crowns and takes both.⁸⁰ He learns they are somewhere near Loket. He even goes to buy a dozen or so buns.

At roughly the same time Dostál and Drozd arrive in Víšťov (about 35 kilometres from Jáchymov) and beg for some food at a cottage on the edge of the village. A certain Hrouda lives in the house with his family. Dostál and Drozd confide in him that they are runaway prisoners and after receiving some food continue in the direction of Žatec. Even though Dostál asked Hrouda about the for- mer administrator of the farm, Josef Prášil, they decide not to visit him in the end.⁸¹

Late in the evening on Tuesday, when it is already dark, the main group sets off again. At around 9:30 pm they come to the railway bridge in Loket after walking along the tracks. Since the first day the bridge, like all other bridges across the Ohře, has been guarded. When they try to cross it a guard from the other side of the bridge shouts: Halt! However, all five decide to ignore this and start running down towards the railway embankment. The guards open fire. They all do their best to get away. Kupczok, who has been shot in the leg, remains lying on the road under the embankment. He is the first to be captured. Tomík and Ruš have also been shot but manage to escape. Ruš has suffered only a slight arm injury but Tomík’s wound is serious. He manages to hide at the hedge by a playground and then faints. Gápel also runs towards the playground.

Eight dog handlers are sent to the location of the shooting at once. Before long, Gápel is tracked down hid- ing in the lavatory by the playground. While he is taken away, a dog smells Tomík, who is lying unconscious nearby. Two more escapees have been caught. It is shortly before mid- night.⁸²

The remaining two members of the group, Ruš and Hazucha, are more fortunate. They manage to get further from the railway bridge. Ruš runs along a road for a while, before forcing a brook a few metres across and hiding in a thicket. There he lies for about an hour, nursing his injured forearm. When he thinks the danger is over he returns through the brook, crosses the rail tracks and ventures into the forest. Luckily, his arm is not bleeding and Ruš continues towards Prague.⁸³ Hazucha, who was not in- jured in the shootout, runs in the same direction across the rail tracks. He then continues through the forest in a southeast direction.

**HALF OF ESCAPEES CAPTURED**

At about 1 am headquarters sends another 80 men to the Loket area. They are immediately deployed around the railway and the road running from Loket to Horní Slav- kov in the south. They will search the area until morning.

Meanwhile, Mereš’s escape is quickly coming to an end. He is still moving around near Sadov and in the dark paths along the rail tracks by Nová Víška to Ostrov. Soldiers of the 3rd motorised company have been...
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lurking there since the evening. At 12:30 am they catch sight of him and ask him to present his documents. Mereš immediately gives himself up. Hazucha’s situation southeast of Loket is very similar. During the night he is able to cover about six kilometres in the forest, but at 11 am he is intercepted by a guard on a path in the wood near Bošířany.

It is Wednesday morning, 9 November, and half of the escapees have been captured. Two have been shot, Tomík seriously.

Still on the run are Dostál and Drozd, who split off from the main group just after leaving the camp; Ruš, who was the only one who managed to flee the raid near Loket; and Ratajský and Troja, who decided to continue on their own shortly after the incident near Sadov. Apart from Ruš, all of them are now moving about in a less strictly searched area near Žatec and Chomutov.

Ratajský and Troja are able to reach Chomutov within two days, after being helped by a certain Růžena Švejdová and Miroslav Šebek in the village of Zaječice on 9 November. (If they were helped to cover the distance from Sadov to Chomutov – about 60 kilometres – by being given a lift by car, they did not confess to it during interrogations.) They provide them with food and civilian clothes, offering them a choice of coats and trousers, as well as berets. The two aim to proceed in the direction of Prague following high voltage wires. Unfortunately, after a while they get confused and instead of going towards Prague go back to Chomutov. They wander in the country for about two days, hiding in haystacks in daylight hours.

After a stop in Víťov, Dostál and Drozd continue towards Podbořany and Žatec, at some point crossing paths with Ratajský and Troja, who were heading more towards the north. They are also unsure of their exact location. On 9 November they manage to get some food at a farm about 15 kilometres past Žatec and even receive a loaf of bread to take with them. After that they go south, heading for Střezov near Příbram, where Dostál’s fiancée lives.

OPERATION JÁCHYMMOV ENDS

After the success near Loket, the manhunt involving 1,000 soldiers and policemen continues with checks of civilian reports, though they are slowly transitioning to waiting mode. On Thursday 10 November, following a report, the commanders send more than 100 men east of the village of Bor, located a few kilometres south of Ostrov, but they come up empty-handed. The commanders of the operation soon arrive at the conclusion that by now the remaining escapees must be outside the closed area of the search and at 5 pm issue an order for all units to withdraw to barrack and lodging houses, where they remain on standby.

Ratajský and Troja are now somewhere near Chomutov. On 11 November they meet two young men near a haystack who warn them that the StB are searching for them, even exaggerating a little by adding that several prisoners have been shot dead while on the run. The following day, after five days of trudging, Ratajský and Troja decide to turn themselves in to the police voluntarily. They are
very near Chomutov. At 6:15 pm on 12 November they are "arrested" in Droužkovice. The same day the commanders of the operation send the 1st motorised battalion of the Interior Guard back to Prague.

Dostál and Drozd have been walking towards Beroun since 10 November. Two days later they pass a crossroads with a signpost saying "Křivoklá 12 km". They move only at night, during the day hiding in woods or haystacks. In one village some brave people again offer them food. They are helped in this way four times altogether, in the last case also receiving 10 crowns. From Beroun they turn southwest, passing Králův Dvůr and continuing on to Zdice. Here they even dare to walk into a shop and buy bread and cigarettes with the money they have been given. After that they continue south, roughly following the river Litavka, with Příbram about 30 kilometres ahead of them. On 14 November at 6.30 pm, however, they are stopped by a Public Security patrol. Thus their escape ends after a whole week of holding out.

Ruš, the main initiator and organiser of the escape, is the last of them to still run. Since the shootout near Loket on 8 November he has been heading towards Prague. About five kilometres from Votice he is intercepted by a Public Security patrol. He still has the keys of the joinery workshop at the Nikolaj camp on him.30

After 13 days, the operation ends with victory for the security forces. All 10 escapees have been caught.

MILD PUNISHMENT

In the course of their interrogations the investigators learnt that a total of 15 people were involved in the preparations of the escape. If anyone else had been involved, their names did not come up during the interrogations. Since the regional prosecutor halted the prosecutions of Mereš, Kučera and Votava at the investigation stage, 12 prisoners were in the end taken to court. Mereš’s prosecution was discontinued due to his original sentence of 25 years, while in the cases of Kučera and Votava there was insufficient evidence of criminal activity.31

The escapees’ first hearing was held behind closed doors on 8 March 1956 before a people’s court in Cheb, under Karlovy Vary Regional Court. The panel was chaired by JUDr. Miloš Studlhárek and the state was represented by Jaroslav Krupauer.32 The sentences ranged from a few months to two years. Everyone involved in the escape was sentenced for obstructing administrative decision pursuant to Section 171, letter b), Criminal Code. Tomík received an additional sentence for committing theft by stealing a sweater and 50 crowns. The prisoners who merely assisted in preparations of the escape – Šebo, Hrdina and Guliš – were sentenced to nine, eight and seven months, respectively, for assisting the obstruction of administrative decision pursuant to Section 7, Para 2, Section 172, letter b), Criminal Code.

However, the prosecutor was not satisfied with the verdicts and immediately filed an appeal against the sentences of all the prisoners who had actually escaped from the camp. The appeal trial was held at the Supreme Court in Prague on 8 June 1956, again in camera. This time the panel was headed by Dr. František Vladík and the state representative was Dr. Hruban.33 The court did indeed increase the sentences imposed, though only by a few months on average. Ruš and Drozd were given three years; Gápel, Tomík Kupczok and Dostál got two and a half years; and Hazucha, Ratajšký and Troja received one and a half years. The escapees never returned to the Nikolaj camp, having been sent to different prisons outside Jáchymov.

According to official statistics, a total of 584 prisoners escaped from the camps in Jáchymov in 1949-1959, of which 31 were shot to death while on the run. The most tragic case was the escape of 12 prisoners from the shaft No. 14 in the Slavkov region in October 1951, which only three survived.34 For instance, in the summer of 1954, Zdeněk Otruba made his escape from Nikolaj managing to sneak off from the marching formation harnessed by a rope, the so-called bus. However, after a week he was caught near Chomutov.35 The majority of breakouts ended in failure.
I only managed to shout “he’s shooting”
Anton Tomík on the tunnel, a forester and a gun wound

Who started with the tunnel?
I believe it was Ruš and Drozd. They cut out a hole in the workshop floor and in order to hide it from the guards always covered it in sawdust. But we did not know who was digging the tunnel in the group and when. The two of them were the only ones who knew. I was not even able to recognize them all in court. The decision was to dig towards the guards’ fenced area. It was extremely risky but at the same time totally unexpected.

How long did the tunnel need to be?
It was something like 15 to 18 metres long, just behind the wire corridor for the guards. Beyond the corridor stood a three-metre boarded fence that prevented us from looking inside the barracks. I calculated the length using the Pythagorean theorem. I drilled a hole in the wall of the workshop in order to find the perpendicular and estimated the other two sides.

How did the digging proceed?
We worked in twos. One of us was digging, the other was on guard. Often the wardens would suddenly call a line-up. When I joined, two or three metres of the tunnel had already been done. To be on the safe side, a rope was tied to my leg so the others could pull me out in case I passed out.

What did the tunnel look like? Did you use timber supports?
No. The soil was full of stones. One metre below the surface the soil was dry. The digger filled up a bag which was then pulled into the workshop using a rope. We put the soil removed into the loft. The joiners made shelves there to make it firmer. I think we could have dug out a small truck full of soil. The tunnel was about 60 centimetres in diameter. We did it all with our bare hands. Later I was able to procure a battery powered lamp.

Did you weigh up the exact time of the escape? If it had snowed, you would have been easily tracked by your pursuers.
The original plan was to escape in September, when there is fruit in the trees. But after some unrest in camps in the spring of 1955 there were continuous line-ups and we weren’t able to dig the tunnel without interruption. Consequently, the work was delayed until late October. I broke my big toe in October and had to spend two weeks in the infirmary. Inmate Gápel came to visit me once and told me he had tried to break through the end of the tunnel too soon. They made a probe and found out they were still in the guards’ corridor. They knew because of the white pebbles that started pouring into the tunnel. They had to plug the hole with clay. There were still two metres to dig.

The second time you estimated the end of the tunnel correctly?
It was actually me who was digging at the very end, when it was my turn after I had been released from the infirmary. We completed the tunnel on a Sunday. I knew I was near the end when I saw grass roots. After I had made a small opening, I touched the rear part of the wooden fence. Then I enlarged the hole leading into a narrow ditch behind the fence and spent a long time observing the surroundings. After the evening line-up we gathered in the workshop.

But the tunnel only led to the area of the guards’ barracks. You were still inside the fence. How did you get out?
First we had to crawl to the edge of the fence under the watchtower and continue along the fence to get to the corner of the camp and the path. I went first. We were crawling on our backs and the last one had to sprinkle some paprika to throw off the dogs. Luckily, the guard in the corner tower was focused on the two corridors around the camp and didn’t look back. There was also some shade to cover us, cast by the wooden fence. He was in fact unable to see us. Fortunately nobody coughed either; that
would have been the end of us. When we had reached the path after crawling for about a half an hour, it could have been some 100 metres, I had to cut the two lowest barbed wires. After I had cut the first, a sound rang out like a string snapping. The guard on the tower was alerted but soon relaxed as he didn’t expect something might be going on inside the barrack area. Finally, we had to cover some 20 metres to reach the wood.

How did you orientate yourselves?

We had a map but also some of us were familiar with the terrain. First we used the mountain Klínovec for orientation, as it was lit and also visible from the camp. We headed toward Karlovy Vary. I think at night we were also able to see the Karlovy Vary airport. One of us always walked in front as a decoy in case we encountered someone. We took turns. We walked without stopping until the break of dawn. After the night’s march we hid in a hole full of leaves in the forest.

On the very first day a forester chanced on you. How did it happen?

I was on guard and all of a sudden I saw a gun barrel pointing at me. The rest of us couldn’t be seen because they were covered in leaves. By then there were only eight of us. I only managed to shout “he’s shooting” and for the first time in my life did a backwards somersault. They all jumped up and scattered in the woods. When we met again, one of us was missing. After that I found a sweater and 50 or 100 crowns in the pocket in a shack near Loket. I even ventured to buy some food. Later I was charged with a theft for that.

How long did you manage to run?

On just the second day the rest of our group ran into an ambush. Soldiers were lying in a ditch by a bridge and opened fire. I was shot and passed out. I have no recollection of that day, I don’t know what happened. I came round for a while when a dog licked my face. After that I only know that they threw me onto a truck. I came round again in the main camp, Vyškanov. I was totally exhausted.

What plans did you have if the escape was successful?

We did not really believe that we would be able to cross the border. But we hoped they would transfer us and we would be able to escape the hell of Jáchymov. We mostly wanted to get to our families, in my case to Slovakia.
behind the iron curtain

At night, the main group heads for Sadov.

Drozd and Dostál head to Vintířov on their own.

Mereš alone heads towards Podlesí.

The rest of the main group walks towards Loket.

Ratajský and Troja separate from the main group and head to Zaječice near Most.

Ruš, who has been shot in the elbow, heads in the direction of Prague.

Hazucha heads to Buková hill near Bošířany.

Incident with forester on 7 November at 2:30 pm

Shootout on the bridge on 8 November at 9:30 pm

Camp Nikolaj

Places of arrest

1. 8 Nov.
   - Jan Kupczok - sustained a minor injury near the bridge in Loket at 9:30 pm
   - Viliam Gápel - tracked down at the playground in Loket at 11:30 pm
   - Anton Tomík - seriously wounded after being shot, found by a dog-handler unconscious at a playground in Loket at 11:30 pm

2. 9 Nov.
   - František Mereš - captured near Nová Víska at 12:30 am
   - Ignác Hazucha - arrested near Bohuňany at 10:00 am

3. 9 Nov.

4. 12 Nov.
   - Václav Ratajšek and Arpád Troja - turned themselves in voluntarily in Droužkovice near Chomutov at 6:15 pm

5. 14 Nov.
   - Miroslav Dostál, Otto Drozd - captured on the road to Libomyšl at 8:15 pm

6. 19 Nov.
   - Adolf Ruš - arrested on the road near Olbramovice at 9:30 am

1. At night, the main group heads for Sadov.
2. Drozd and Dostál head to Vintířov on their own.
4. The rest of the main group walks towards Loket.
5. Ratajšek and Troja separate from the main group and head to Zaječice near Most.
6. Ruš, who has been shot in the elbow, heads in the direction of Prague.
7. Hazucha heads to Buková hill near Bohuňany.
A total of 10 prisoners were directly involved in the escape by tunnel on 6 November 1955. In the end, 12 prisoners were prosecuted. František Mereš’s sentence was already so high that the prosecutor decided not to put him on trial. At the time of the escape, Josef Guliš was in solitary confinement so he remained in the camp. Two other prisoners changed their minds during the preparation phase.

MIROSLAV DOSTAL was born on 13 January 1931 in Mířetín near Hlinsko. In 1946–1948 he studied at agricultural secondary school and from 1949 worked as a trainee on a farm in Bystře near Polička. He worked as a clerk at state farms until 1953. After that he was drafted into the army; however, in 1954 he deserted as he was planning to emigrate to Austria illegally. After a few months he was caught in January 1955 and in May sentenced to 12 years for high treason. Prior to that he had been sentenced seven times, receiving penalties ranging from several months to one year. Ad–BFer the escape from Nikolaj he was caught along with Dostál on 14 November 1955 between Libomyšl and Lochovice. He received an additional sentence of three years.

VILIAM GÁPEL was born on 21 August 1928 in Rohožnice, Slovakia. After the war he trained to be a butcher and found employment with the Rakouský butcher’s company in Banská Bystrica. He later relocated to Bratislava. In 1950–1952 he underwent military service. In July 1952 he was arrested and accused of passing information concerning military objects at Kbely airport in Prague. In November 1952 he was convicted on charges of espionage. After the escape from Nikolaj he was arrested after a shootout in the town of Loket and sentenced to an additional two and a half years in prison.

OTTO DROZD was born on 18 December 1923 in Lyžbice near Český Těšín, where he attended secondary school. From 1939 he worked in a steel plant in Třinec as a labourer and lathe operator. In 1940 he was sent to work as a forced worker in Germany and in 1942 was drafted into the Wehrmacht. After military training he fought in Denmark and in France, where he was captured by the Americans in February 1945. In April he volunteered to join the Czechoslovak Army in the United Kingdom. After demobilization he again started to work at the steelworks in Třinec in 1946 and was eventually promoted to the position of draftsman-designer. In 1950 he joined the resistance group of František Gorný (as did Ruš), which had links to the CIC. He was arrested in December 1951 and in September 1952 sentenced to 13 years for espionage. After the escape from Nikolaj he was caught along with Dostál on 14 November 1955 between Libomyšl and Lochovice. He received an additional sentence of three years.

JOSEF GULIŠ was born on 10 March 1912 in the village of Unín in Slovakia. After three years of secondary school he trained to become a butcher. In 1932–1934 he underwent military service. During the war he rented a small butcher’s shop in his native village. In 1944 he was drafted into the German army and deployed in Poland. He deserted and joined the partisans. However, he was caught and the end of the war saw him in prison in Vienna. In the Nikolaj camp he served a four-year sentence for theft which he received on 18 March 1954. Prior to that, he had received at least 10 sentences for the same crime. He did not participate in digging the tunnel but acquired a map of Czechoslovakia which he had torn out of an atlas. On 4 November 1955 he was put in solitary confinement for several days and therefore could not take part in the escape. He was sentenced to seven months imprisonment for participating in the preparations.

IGNÁC HAZUCHA was born on 24 May 1912 in Dobrá Voda near Trnava. After secondary school he trained to become a cabinetmaker while from 1940 he worked in Banská Bystrica as a carpenter on tunnel construction projects. In 1942 he completed military service in Slovakia. In June 1943 he was sent to fight at the front in the USSR but the following month deserted and joined the partisans. He was wounded and in February 1944 volunteered to join the Czechoslovak unit in Efremov. After the war he worked on a collective farm. In August 1949 he was arrested and in May 1951 sentenced to 16 years for high treason. After the escape he was caught near Bošířany one day after the shootout in Loket. He received an additional sentence of one and a half years.

JIŘÍ HRDINA was born on 6 December 1931 in Prague. He studied for two years at secondary school. After the war he became a member of the scouting organization Junák. He worked as a worker in a textile factory. In September 1950 he was arrested and in February 1952 was condemned to eight years for high treason and espionage. He took part in the digging of the tunnel about three times. However, he did not take part in the es-
cape. He received eight months of additional imprisonment.

**JAN KUPCZOK** was born on 20 November 1920 in Jablunkov into the family of a small farmer. Before and during the war he worked on his family’s farm. In 1944 he was drafted into the Wehrmacht and deployed in the west of Germany. In January 1945 he was wounded and taken captive by the US Army. In April, after he had recovered, he joined as a volunteer the Czechoslovak Army in the United Kingdom, with which he returned home after the war. After his 1946 demobilization he worked as a labourer in the steelworks in Třinec. As a member of the illegal group SEN he was arrested in February 1952 and in August 1952 sentenced to 15 years for high treason. During the escape from Nikolaj he was shot in the leg and a year later sentenced to 15 years for murder. Together with Ratajšek they separately planned an escape from Nikolaj via a connecting shaft through Rovnost. They tried to locate it at the end of September, but got lost and gave up after two hours. They joined the escape through the tunnel at the last minute. Troja was captured along with Ratajšek on 12 November in Droužkovice near Chomutov after they had turned themselves in voluntarily. He was sentenced to an additional three years.

**ARPÁD TROJA** was born on 14 May 1925 in Ladmovec near Kráľovský Chlumec in Slovakia. He had seven years of elementary school. In June 1954 he was arrested and a year later sentenced to 15 years for espionage. He was the main initiator of the escape from Nikolaj. During the escape he sustained a minor injury in a shootout near Loket. He was the last one captured, in Olbramovice near Votice, on 19 November. He was sentenced to an additional three years.

**JOSEF ŠEBO** was born on 30 March 1927 in Opoj in Slovakia. He worked as a lifeguard in boat transportation. In 1949-1951 he underwent military service. In August 1952 he was arrested due to his membership in an illegal group and for attempting to illegally cross the border. In May 1953 he was sentenced to 12 years. He was initially involved in the preparations for the escape. He helped with digging the tunnel on about four occasions and also provided a lamp and an iron pole to facilitate the digging. Later, however, he changed his mind. He was sentenced to nine months for his involvement in the preparations.
NOTES
2 As of April 1952, the prison authority in Ostrov registered a total of 9,524 prisoners, 12,788 as of May 1952, 14,115 as of January 1953 and 13,980 as of January 1974. At the end of 1959, there were still around 4,000 prisoners in the Jáchymov camps. A total of 18 penal camps were established. Cf. Bursík, T. (2009). Přišli jsme na svět proto, aby nás pronásledovali. Prague: ÚSTR. 51; Petrášová, L. Vězeňské tábory v Jáchymovských uranových dolech 1949–1961. In: Za svobodu a demokracii III. 56 and 80.
3 Petrášová, 61.
4 ABS, f. (collection) Správa vnější stráže (hereinafter as 2434), parcel 33, Operace Jáchymov, 2.
6 ABS, f. 2343, parcel 33, Operace Jáchymov, 2.
9 Ibid., Lawsuit, 30 December 1955.
13 ABS, f. 2434, parcel 33, Operation Jáchymov, 7.
14 Ibid., 7–8.
15 Ibid., 4–5.
16 Ibid., 9.
17 Ibid., 9.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 10.
23 Ibid., Protocol of the testimony of Adolf Ruš, 19 November 1955.
24 Ibid., Protocol on the capture, 16 December 1955.
27 ABS, f. 2434, parcel 33, Operation Jáchymov, 11.
30 Ibid., A list of things confiscated from Ruš upon arrest, 13 November 1955.
35 Šedivý, F. (2003), 69.

A section of a map showing the deployment of troops on 7–10 November during a manhunt for the escapees under "Operation Jáchymov". Photo: SSA
The Gulag Online virtual museum presents the basic form and dimensions of Soviet repression through a virtual reconstruction of a Gulag camp, life stories of former prisoners, objects, documents and texts. Individual documented locations and the stories of survivors are shown on an interactive map. The map allows for switching between various layers – satellite images, detailed military maps.

The Gulag Online is a project of the Gulag.cz association, whose activities include mapping and documenting abandoned camps in the former USSR, and the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, which as part of its research tracks the fates of Czechoslovak citizens persecuted in the USSR.