

## ***WE'RE GOING TO DROP LEAFLETS FROM A PLANE!***

**Břetislav Loubal (\*1931)**

Břetislav Loubal liked flying. And freedom. Immediately after the war he started getting together with friends at the newly established Aero Club in Tišnov. He was still at secondary school at the time. "I loved flying more than anything," he recalls today. However, the February 1948 coup came along soon after and the young men started thinking about how to restore freedom.

Among Loubal's friends in Tišnov was the older, more experienced Jan Simandl, who became the leader of a resistance group. They started with leaflets as early as March 1948. Loubal produced the frames on a mimeograph. "It was made from old furniture. The hinges were from a piece of leather, the roller from a darkroom. I made the frames myself," he says. The regime was not yet controlling everything, so it was still possible to get dye for a duplicating machine. Simandl had the main say in the group. Aged 35 in 1948, he had experience from military service in the First Republic. During the war he escaped from forced labour in Berlin. After the war he became chairman of the Tišnov Social Democratic Party and following the February coup he and friends distributed leaflets they had received from Prague headquarters from Blažej Vilím, the party's general secretary. The first leaflets they circulated bore the title "Beware of Communist domination". The group started to be known as "Jan". "We didn't give it any name ourselves. Somebody else must have called us that, maybe later the StB themselves. In the group there was Jan Simandl and Jan Sigmund, so two Jans. That may have given rise to it," Loubal says. He had the idea in 1950 that once he had done several dozen flights on a glider he could drop the leaflets from a plane. He usually flew from an airfield in the Brno district of Medlánky, which was nearby. Delivering leaflets there was easy. However, every plane had a distinctive marking and flying was only permitted by day. Loubal would immediately have drawn attention to himself! It was merely an unrealisable idea, a wonderful vision of how to bring leaflets to people from the skies.

Břetislav Loubal was born on 26 June 1931 in Tišnov, where his parents worked and he attended elementary and secondary school. He grew up in a family he himself describes as completely ordinary. "I was from a white-collar family. My father worked for the

financial authority and mum was at home, which was the norm then. A totally ordinary family.” Loubal’s father was a National Socialist and a Christian.

He was friends with Oldřich Pospíšil and Jan Sigmund and the three were still minors when the Communists took over. At grammar school he was taught by Professor Jan Kosík, who had attended lectures by T.G. Masaryk while at university in Prague. Kosík didn’t hide his sympathies for Masaryk and the students loved him. He had a major influence on them, fostering in them a sense of responsibility for their sorely tested country. In close contact with Kosík was Jan Simandl, the oldest member of a resistance group that Loubal was also part of, and its natural leader. Simandl sought counsel from Kosík on the group’s plans, though the latter did not take part in its activities.

Naturally they were all keen to take action and the simplest way to start was with leaflets. However, it was necessary to proceed cautiously and gloves were always worn when distributing them, so fingerprints wouldn’t give them away. The gloves were black. Deliveries were made by night and they always distributed the entire batch, returning home empty-handed.

“We wrote the leaflets on a typewriter belonging to the teacher and education worker Jan Brabec, who hadn’t a clue about it,” Loubal says. The leaflets were created in the small summerhouse of the Tišnov sanatorium, where Brabec had an office. Containing a typewriter. “We used to go to the sanatorium late at night when there was no-one there and we wrote the texts right there,” Loubal recalls. The leaflets were written on the sanatorium typewriter and duplicated on the machine at Loubal’s place. They distributed them after 10 pm.

Though the leaflets did attract attention the group was not uncovered and the members started to contemplate what to do next. They wanted to acquire weapons. The teenagers thought the third world war was on its way and they didn’t just want to look on. “We would definitely have taken up arms. What the Communists were doing was on our minds. Naturally I knew that wasn’t what democracy looked like,” Loubal says. He had a 7.65 mm pistol with a modified butt that a friend had found for him. Simandl also had a gun. It was agreed that their acquaintance Bohumil Špaček from the Zbrojovka weapons plant would make them a silencer. Loubal decided to try out the silencer right away. He and his friend Oldřich Pospíšil found an abandoned spot outside the city. A quarry. The silencer worked well. But they still needed a connection with abroad: a transmitter. That was more difficult. They found a war-time device left behind by the Germans but it didn’t work.

In the meantime they agreed to try to build a hideout at a cottage outside the town. It was between the villages of Železné and Jamné. Pospíšil, Simandl, Loubal and Sigmund met

most frequently at the cottage. In case the secret police surrounded it they decided to construct a secret corridor leading to a nearby low and dense forest. The entrance was to be through the bottom of a wardrobe, so it wouldn't be discovered during a routine search. However, digging was difficult and they also had to spread the material they had dug up around the area. It was important to be inconspicuous, though they discovered that nobody had seen them in any case. They dug out just one metre of the corridor and never completed it.

The resistance was constantly expanding, however, and too many people were starting to be aware of its anti-regime activities. The StB also had a network of informers in Tišnov. Arrests began, though somewhat haphazardly. Jan Simandl, whose views were known in the town, was the first to be arrested. According to the report, they came for him on 6 April 1950. Loubal was still free. However, he too was arrested a little later. They came for him at the school. It was 13 September 1950. During a class the door opened and the caretaker was standing there. He told Loubal he was to go to the director. But the caretaker had been forced to the door by secret police officers standing behind him. On both sides of the door. "They immediately grabbed me, so I couldn't escape," says Loubal. He was aware he had couldn't have anyway. "I couldn't jump out the window – the classroom was on the third floor," he explains. They put him in a car and drove to his home. They searched everywhere, turning the house upside down. But they didn't find the mimeograph. He had managed to destroy it in time. His first interrogation took place at his home and then, surprisingly, they let him go. "I think they didn't take me to the jail right away because they needed to follow all the threads," he says.

However, they came for him a second time on 25 October 1950. At home. At 2 pm local police officers showed up. "They said the gentlemen had come from Brno and they wanted to ask me something. That I was to go with them. I had no alternative but to go," Loubal says. They drove him to Brno, where he was placed in custody. He was charged together with Simandl and Sigmund. Things didn't go so badly for him. The state court sentenced him to "only" a year in prison.

While behind bars Loubal was taken to a mine in Oslavany to dig coal. "I worked in a mine there. We lived in wooden barracks. The work was terribly dusty," he recalls. Simandl was also there. "Of course we immediately started thinking about escaping," Loubal says.

The escape was planned for 8 July 1951. Their aim was to hide in a handcart used to take coal to the surface. "At the surface the cart automatically turns, and it would dump out the coal and us. We would roll down and run to a car where a driver was already prepared," Loubal says. He even managed to smuggle out a letter outlining the escape plan. But then everything went wrong. Security measures were stepped up everywhere

after an attack at a school in Babice on 2 July 1951 in which three Communist functionaries were killed. Loubal and Simandl were transferred. "Instead of us going down the shaft, two trucks took us to a labour camp. We were put in chains. Each of us sat in one truck, on the deck, our hands bound behind our back. On the floor in front of me sat a warden, his back to the cabin, with a cocked machine gun. They took us to Brno, to the Cejl prison. There they couldn't drive through the gate so with our hands bound we had to jump, with our boots shackled, onto the cobblestones. It was a shock for passers-by," Loubal says.

As he had been given an additional eight months for the escape attempt he was finally released on 25 June 1952. "The arrest, the imprisonment, wasn't the worst. We never gave up. That's also why we tried to escape. I constantly believed communism would collapse. Constantly. I had grown up in Sokol and the scouts and that gave us a certain courage and connection to the homeland. But what troubled me most was what I caused my parents by my actions. If I were in their shoes... There was also a certain sense of responsibility for what I had caused them."

*Text by Luděk Navara*