

WE WERE MEANT TO FORM A RESISTANCE GROUP

Miloš Procházka (*1928)

He underwent the toughest training that a future cross-border agent could require. “They trained us for six months. We learned how to handle explosives, for instance. Using azimuths we reached a tunnel where we laid dummy charges. It was about us showing we could form a resistance group that would be able to carry out operations in the case of war,” says Miloš Procházka of his British intelligence service training at the turn of 1950 and 1951. There was an expectation of war at that time and the public on both sides of the Iron Curtain didn’t know what awaited Europe. Naturally Miloš Procházka underwent the training in the West, at Carinthia, which was at that time in the British occupied zone of Austria. When not doing exercises in the field he lived at a barracks in Klagenfurt. Following the training he was tasked with crossing the Iron Curtain, into his native Czechoslovakia. He was to go in a pair, along with Cyril Sláma. The two were acquainted from Želešice near Brno and knew each other well. But the mission didn’t go according to plan. People in Czechoslovakia were afraid. “I had the sense that if we had asked for something nobody would have lifted a finger for us. I really had my fill of it. It was no walk in the park,” he says. In the end both returned to the Western side of the Iron Curtain and Procházka refused any further missions. He resolved to stop working with the British intelligence service and to escape its influence moved to Brazil and later to Canada. He didn’t return to his homeland until after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Miloš Procházka was born in Veverská Bítýška in the Brno area. He later settled at Želešice, outside Brno, where he got to know Jaroslav Salajka and the Sláma brothers, Cyril and Věroslav.

Salajka smuggled refugees into Austria, was betrayed and ended up at a prison camp in Blansko. When he succeeded in escaping he headed back to Želešice, to Procházka’s. He had broken out with another prisoner, ex-RAF aviator Ivo Tonder. Procházka offered to accommodate them for the night. He put them in the attic. “I found them some civilian clothes,” Procházka says. Ivo Tonder was a war hero, an aviator who was shot down in a dogfight and was then sent to the Sagan POW camp, where he took part in the legendary Great Escape in March 1944. The escape went down in history. Hitler had several officers executed, a brutal act that provoked an outcry around the world. After the Great Escape Tonder survived Nazi repression and following the war he married Jiřina Ascherová, a Czech woman living in the UK, on his return to England. They came back to Czechoslovakia together. However, in the wake of the Communist takeover of February 1948 he was

persecuted as an RAF flyer. He was arrested trying to escape. He succeeded in breaking out of the prison camp in Blansko with Salajka and the two found shelter with Procházka in Želešice.

They were later looked after by Věroslav Sláma, Procházka's acquaintance from Želešice. He took them to the Austrian border, from where both crossed into the West. There, near Valtice, they had an open path across the Iron Curtain.

Salajka later returned and began building a network of collaborators able to provide reports to the West and to smuggle out others in danger from the Communist secret police. Miloš Procházka became involved in those activities, working closely with the group. One of his first tasks was to get Tonder's wife out. At first the mission failed but later Jiřina Tonderová did reach Austria and subsequently England, where she was happily reunited with her husband. Meanwhile the group had expanded, even though Salajka had returned and been replaced by a new agent: Jan Brejcha, code name Tomáš Oliva. He lived with the seamstress Božena Majerová in Brno. The StB later named the group after her as "Majerová et al". Another agent was Josef Kolísko, code name Josef Kafka

They had a transmitter, which they got across the border on 28 April 1950 and moved from place to place. Initially it transmitted from Procházka's place in Želešice. The first foreign contact was made on 14 July 1950. For safety reasons the transmitter was moved around as much as possible. For a time it was also kept at Božena Majerová's home in Brno.

However, the secret police were onto the group. Some of them managed to escape at the last moment, with Jan Brejcha, Cyril Sláma and Miloš Procházka fortunate enough to reach Austria. The remainder ended up in prison and one, Leopold Doležal, was even hanged. The unfortunate agent Kolísko died after a shootout with the StB in Modřice...

However, Cyril Sláma and Miloš Procházka became involved in more intelligence adventures in the British zone in Austria. The Czechoslovak Intelligence Office (CIO), an advisory group with UK intelligence, was headed by Col. Karel J. Procházka (no relation of Miloš Procházka's). After his escape from Czechoslovakia he was contacted by General Sergej Ingr, former minister of defence in the Czechoslovak exile government in London, who was creating an intelligence service targeting Communist Czechoslovakia. From 1950 the CIO began setting up branches in Central Europe. Agents were readied for missions in Czechoslovakia at a base in Carinthia, in the British occupation zone. Procházka and Cyril Sláma also underwent tough training there before being dispatched once again across the Iron Curtain. They crossed the border on the night of 2 and 3 April 1951, using a tried and tested route near Valtice in Southern Moravia. They were equipped with a transmitter, an encryption key, invisible ink and false papers. Each also had a capsule of poison, in case

the worst came to the worst. “We were to bite on the capsule if we got into an impossible situation,” says Procházka.

However, the situation in Czechoslovakia had changed in the interim. People were worried and fear was omnipresent. “We couldn’t find anybody who wanted to cooperate with us. Sometimes they did welcome us, but they said we were just to eat and then leave again quickly. They gave us one hour, for instance. I had the sense that if we had asked for something nobody would have lifted a finger for us,” says Procházka

Procházka proposed that they return. But Cyril Sláma wished to continue and refused. So they carried on into Slovakia, where they had more contacts. Procházka was using the code name Oldřich Novotný. They managed to find their contacts in Slovakia, handed over the transmitter and returned to Austria. In the end they crossed the frontier smoothly, despite the fact the arranged car wasn’t waiting at the border. They had to make their own way. In Vienna Sláma decided to return to Czechoslovakia. Procházka refused. There was no way he was going back across the Iron Curtain!

“When Cyril Sláma said goodbye he said he’d be back soon. By Christmas apparently. I saw him off and he departed,” says Procházka. But he didn’t return by Christmas. It was far later. And in peculiar circumstances. He had been betrayed in Czechoslovakia and the Czechoslovak intelligence had recruited him, sending him back as a double agent. Procházka remembers meeting him for the last time in Austria and says Sláma confessed to him. He said he had been arrested, that he had surrendered, and they had let him go once he signed on as a collaborator. “I never saw Cyril again,” says Procházka.

Procházka attempted to break from British intelligence. Once an agent, always an agent, the saying goes. Procházka was well aware of this and wished to sever ties at all costs. He left for Brazil. “I don’t remember that period in Brazil with fondness,” he said later. In the end he managed to move to Canada, which was far better. When the Communist regime fell he returned a few years later to his homeland, and to Želešice. “What saddens me the most is what my departure caused my loved ones,” he said in 2016.

Text by Luděk Navara