

FIVE MEN JUMPED ON ME AND THE GAME WAS UP

Miroslav Kopt (*1935)

Miroslav Kopt was born in Prague on 13 July 1935. At that time, however, his family were living in Košice in Slovakia, where his father had a construction firm. Following the Hungarian occupation of the southern borderland area in 1938, the family were forced to flee. They settled in Prague's Kobylisy, in view of the district's infamous Nazi execution grounds. *"One time my mum and I were on a walk and passed a line of trucks. We heard some people singing 'Beautiful Bohemia, My Bohemia'. They were taking them to be executed. That left an impression on me as a boy."*

After the war Kopt came into contact with the scouts and joined the Junák scouts in 1948. When he was harassed at school after the 1948 takeover by the new headmaster, a committed Communist, his anti-regime sentiment, inherited from his parents, intensified further. He and his friend František Holý began copying out and circulating anti-Communist flyers. Kopt brought one to his uncle František Bohdal, who had been involved in the resistance. His uncle soon asked him for help, tasking Miroslav and his friend with watching two buildings in Vinohrady at night. *"If a large number of people appeared, we were to ring the bell twice. Only years later did I learn that Dr. Ladislav Karel Feierabend, the former finance minister, and his family, were living there."* Albeit unwittingly, Kopt had carried out his first serious resistance activity.

In 1949, the family moved to Vršovice, where he got to know the scout formation Ostříž, which comprised scout groups from all over Prague. They continued producing flyers and also sent threatening letters to Communist functionaries, carried out minor acts of sabotage in the Prague area, collected information on Communists and later also began to gather weapons. As their activities grew, infiltration of the scouting network intensified in 1952. Arrests were made and the StB also came for Miroslav Kopt. He received a six-month sentence. However, thanks to a presidential amnesty announced by the new president following Klement Gottwald's death in 1953, he did not have to serve it.

Kopt concluded that to defeat communism for good the resistance would need to become more professional. He began taking an interest in intelligence techniques. *"I studied resistance literature from the war. An instruction book from a section of the Communist International for training their agents also found its way into my hands."* Kopt formed his own resistance group, codename Tonda, which was not directly linked

to the scouts. In 1954 an allied group led by Miroslav Oberman were arrested and the StB began tightening the noose relentlessly. Kopt decided to escape across the border. However, just before he set off, in November 1954, he was arrested. *“I went to work to hand in a sick note so I’d get a few days’ head start. At the office five men jumped on me and the game was up.”*

Brutal interrogations at secret police HQ on Bartolomějská St. ensued. *“The first interrogation lasted around three days.”* Kopt was falsely accused of murder and faced a possible death sentence. His father was also brought in and forced to sign to become a collaborator; otherwise Miroslav would have been hanged. Kopt didn’t confess and in the trial that followed was sentenced to 10 years for treason. Once the verdict was announced his father ceased collaborating with the StB.

First Kopt went to the infirmary at Pankrác prison, where he recovered from the consequences of his investigation. He was then sent to the Nikolaj labour camp in the Jáchymov area, where he remained until 1956. At the camp he met other scouts and ex-wartime resistance men. He got involved with a group that tried to carry out intelligence work, including monitoring uranium mining. They also managed to construct four working radio receivers. *“For instance, we managed to acquire virtually the entire transcript of Khrushchev’s famous speech at the 20th congress of the CPSU, which Radio Free Europe broadcast.”* Underground university courses were also organised at the camp, with books smuggled in via the civilian staff.

At the end of 1956, Kopt was moved to the Rovnost camp. There, shortly before an amnesty in May 1960, the StB launched an investigation into his intelligence activities in prison. They were planning to charge him and others with conspiring against the regime. However, the investigation came to nothing and Kopt walked free after six years. While in jail he had received 29 disciplinary punishments. *“I spent most Christmases in correction.”* The StB tried to get him to become a collaborator prior to his release but he steadfastly refused.

As soon as he got home Kopt received his military service call-up orders. He spent two years with other political prisoners in a construction platoon. In the mid-1960s he again became involved in illegal scouting activities. When Junák was revived in 1968–1970 he was officially employed in its management. With the advent of normalisation, however, he stepped down and organised scouts that refused to compromise with the regime. Until the fall of communism he was in touch with staff at Radio Free Europe. He was also in close contact with German scouts, with whose help he got banned literature, intelligence and political information out of Czechoslovakia. The StB watched him constantly until the mid-1980s.

During the Velvet Revolution in November 1989, Miroslav Kopt and some friends pushed for the revival of the K 231 club and he was briefly politically active as a Civic Forum MP. In March 1990, he joined the Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Democracy at the Federal Ministry of the Interior, where he carried out security screenings of staff at the Second Directorate of the StB. He worked in counter-intelligence until 1999.

Text by Jan Horník