

THE FACT THEY LOCKED US UP PROBABLY SAVED OUR LIVES

Eduard Marek (*1917)

“They found Lederer at my place. I ‘only’ got 10 years, though the prosecutor had proposed life during my trial in 1950.”

When the StB arrested Eduard Marek in the summer of 1949, he was the last remaining free member of a 20-person resistance cell formed by a group of friends, who named it Dr. Edvard Beneš, following the 1948 Communist coup. The group’s anti-Communist activities entailed providing assistance to the regime’s victims and their families and organising border crossings. They were in contact with Slacha, a group of people-smugglers in Most. The betrayal of Richard Lederer, who Marek knew as a boy in Žižkov prior to his arrival from France, led the secret police to the group. *“The fact they locked us up probably saved our lives, because otherwise our activities would have gone further,”* says Marek. His wife was also convicted, receiving an 11-year term, half of which she served. Their five-year-old son, also Eduard, was placed in a children’s home in Počernice, before being taken in by an aunt.

When Eduard Marek found himself in jail it was for the second time in his life. He had been convicted during the war of helping Jews, in particular his friend F. Reitman, who owned – as did Marek – a real estate agency. He ran errands for Reitman, who was unable to walk the streets due to being forced to wear a yellow Star of David. He wasn’t Marek’s only Jewish friend. *“Then they arrested a woman and they forced her to confess that I had helped them. My lawyer told me this would be two years in a concentration camp.”* The Gestapo arrested Marek in early May 1942. The interrogations passed without violence. Fortunately, they occurred a few weeks before the assassination of Heydrich. Marek was saved in court by the claim they had merely done business together. He was sentenced to three months, which he served at Pankrác and in Jihlava, where he worked on a farm.

When Marek was imprisoned during WWII he had just turned 25. He was born in Prague’s Žižkov on 17 March 1917 as the sixth child in the family of blacksmith Antonín Marek, who had moved to the capital from Lipnice. Eduard Marek fell in love with scouting in his youth and it remained a lifelong passion. At 17 he joined the Roman Catholic scout group Legio Angelica. A year later he made his scout’s oath and became head of Legio Angelica’s Storks company in Žižkov.

During the First Republic Marek attended secondary school and evening courses at a business academy, which paved the way to a career in real estate. Before he could start to work he joined the T.G. Masaryk 1st Aviation Regiment at Prague's Kbely airfield as a volunteer. After basic training he attended a school for enlistees in Cheb. He then moved with the regiment to Hradec Králové and was there when the second mobilisation of the Czech Army occurred. The young soldiers were disappointed Czechoslovakia had not defended itself against Hitler. However, Marek now regards capitulation as the correct decision. *"Today we know of course it would have meant the destruction of the nation. The Germans would have murdered us."* After demobilisation he returned to Žižkov, where he headed his father's real estate company.

As outlined above, Marek was arrested, convicted and given a three-month term for aiding Jews. He was also forced to close the real estate office. He later found work in accounts at the Prague firm Bananas, where virtually all of the former members of his aviation regiment were employed. Marek was unwilling to quit scouting and, as the Junák scouts had been banned during the war, illegally served as a youth leader at the Workers' Gymnastics Association in Žižkov. The Junáks were hidden by Josef Langhammer, then representative of the Board of Trustees for the Education of Youth.

In May 1945 Marek took part in the Prague Uprising, relaying messages between the police in Karlín and General Kutlvašr's HQ. He also helped arm fighters and organised their transport to help Czech Radio. A number of trucks were sent from Karlín. After the war Marek was called up for six-month military service and later renewed his real estate work. He was also able to finally devote himself fully and freely to scouting. He and his friend Alois Vlach set up a Junák group named the Torch in Žižkov and soon afterwards he was made district Junák leader in Karlín.

After February 1948, however, a new totalitarianism arrived. Eduard Marek was invited by the Communist regime to incorporate his company into the Pioneers. His refusal led to him being banned. However, he didn't throw in the towel. He and his scouting friends got involved in the anti-Communist resistance, forming the above mentioned Dr. Edvard Beneš group. Once again he was jail-bound. He was convicted in 1950 and sent to the uranium mines.

He began serving his term in Horní Slavkov, where labour camps and shafts were being built. After two years he was transferred for three months to the Bory prison, where at least he didn't have to work. *"In my mind I built a scouts centre on Rohanský Island. I found a pencil and drew it all on toilet paper. I managed to smuggle the sketches home."* A move to the Mariánská camp in the Jáchymov area followed. There he met other

Junáks, with whom he continued to do scouting. Some new members even signed up at the camp. Underwear was used to create a flag on which to swear allegiance. *“When we moved from Mariánská to the Eva mine, you walked through a small wood. We even lit a little fire there, where oaths were made.”*

In 1956, after seven years, Eduard Marek was conditionally released. He returned to Prague, where he worked as a labourer in construction. He again began scouting illegally, under cover of various sports organisations. At the time of the Prague Spring he revived Junák in Karlín and was elected chairman of the Prague 2 Junák district council. He was active in K 231. Before the abolition of Junák in 1970 he organised the final summer scout camps. When Junák was revived again in December 1989 he was once more elected chairman of the Prague 2 district council. He became a member of the honorary Svojsík company and the Velen Fanderlik company and was involved in the Confederation of Political Prisoners. He is known by the scouting nickname Hroznýš.

Text by Jan Horník