

My text deals with the writings of Ladislav Komorád (1895-1947), my great-great-grandfather and lieutenant colonel of the Czechoslovak army. He fought in the Czechoslovak legions in Russia during the First World War and took part in the domestic resistance during the Second World War. He has preserved a large number of notes in which he describes his experiences.

On March 15, 1939, German army started occupying Czechoslovakia. Komorád, who was at the time a major in the South Bohemian town of Písek, describes his experiences of that day in vivid detail:

"Munich was only the beginning of the seven lean years of the biblical parable. March 15, 1939, also came, and a rattling cloud of locusts flooded our beloved country and gradually spread over almost the entire continent. Like a plague, this flood spread all around it destruction and putrid fumes of dead decay. To the consummation of the plague, Satan himself seemed to have loosed all the gates of hell, so that serpents and scorpions spread over every corner of the earth, seizing the miserable souls of men."

In another, more factual text, he presents a concrete form of the occupation in the town of Písek:

"On the morning of March 15, 1939, I went to the barracks, like all the other officers and sergeants, under the impression of the Prague radio instructions, with a heavy feeling in my heart over my temporary helplessness against the impudent expansionism of the modern Siegfrieds and Niebelungs. (...) All units of the regiment were ordered to remain in their quarters until further orders. The interval of time until the arrival of the German troops was generally used to burn all secret and intelligence files if they might be harmful to individuals of our nation for whatever reasons, especially as a result of their present position. (...) The assumption of command of the garrison was very brief. The German commander (...) ordered an officers' assembly in the officers' mess. After a short arrogant speech (...) we again dispersed to our units. However, there were German soldiers standing everywhere in the corridors and in the offices with rifles and bayonets. None of us was allowed to touch anything. Gradually, the German adjutant went round all the offices, took the keys to the security locks and all the storerooms, and had the secret and mobilization files taken away."

Apart from the act of occupation itself, he also captured very accurately the atmosphere in the city and the propaganda dimension of the whole event:

"The population (...) saw nothing to be impressed by. German equipment and armaments were probably inferior to ours. Only the godlike haughtiness of *the superior race* and the bristling self-confidence of the soulless robots were reflected like a dark monster in the merciless eyes of the Hun raiders. (...) For promotional reasons, the Germans built field kitchens and offered *free* one-pot meals *to the hungry population*. (...) And the bill for the *free* one-pot meal given out had to be footed by the municipality. (...) Such an effect (...) was necessary to photograph, so that the world would know what abysmal misery had brought the noble Germans to our rescue."

He then summarizes the whole of 15 March with some pathos as follows:

"For our nation the twilight of the night, charged with the shadows of the snares of diabolical power and bloodthirsty deceit, but also with the ferment of decisive events, after which the morning of a new day will dawn, pure and free from all murk, a morning blessed with the love of God and of our whole race - past, present and future. For the Nazi nation, the dazzling emergence of the sun in the dazzling flood of the morning's golden glow, with its promise of joy, strength and unlimited power, but which will later be overwhelmed by gloom and clouds, out of which, at last, the ominous lightning will burst, and the devastating hurricane will ruffle all that alluring yarn of dreams which is so dear and sweet to the Nazi soul."

Practically immediately after the beginning of the occupation, Komorád joined the underground structures, especially the militarily organized Defence of the Nation, to which he felt obliged by his patriotic feeling and previous activities

He considered several forms of resistance as he had two children, both of whom were in high school at the time.:

"...the most tempting thing was to escape across the border so that I could join our second resistance with a gun in my hand, just as I had done in Russia in the first resistance. However, I had my then sick wife and children in my sights, and I realized with a heavy heart that they would be left here completely destitute and without help. That held me back."

It was absolutely necessary to observe the rules of conspiracy.

"In the organisation, three or four people at most should have known about themselves, and slogans were issued, e.g. in June the slogan was: *the sea of forests is beautiful - the Otava¹ is more beautiful*. The meetings of the insiders used to take place in a café or inn, where more people, especially civilians, gathered and where the most delicate things could be communicated discreetly. It was also always arranged to cover the meeting either with the loan of books and music, or with beekeeping, teaching, etc. Each meeting began: "We talk about this and that, that is, about something of daily life."

It was necessary to make a list of all the medical supplies as well as the weapons found in the area. Other essential tasks included distributing anti-regime printed material, listening to foreign radio and broadcasting intelligence by radio, planning small-scale sabotage and supporting the families of those arrested.

"Under constant nervous tension, the flow of time usually gives the impression of a murky pool in a backwater river that has run out of breath, where only treacherous eddies tell of its unbridled power. But I cannot say that with all the busy goings-on I have ever had the impression that time drags lazily on. (...) Like by far the greatest part of our people, I have clung with my whole being to my talking box, so that, as a rule, I have not slept through the night hours without a single report from our other, the better side. German predation may have celebrated its triumphs in the beginning, but then we were all still full of the holy heritage of the troubled times at the close of the First Republic, full of zeal and faith that the truth would prevail."

¹ River in the town of Písek

During the period of the Heydrichiad in 1942, there were massive arrests and executions. Although Komorád avoided them, many of his friends and associates were murdered. Often this was also due to Gestapo confederates working in the ranks of the resistance.

His relationship with one of the informers, Otakar Albrecht, was more personal and there was still a strong antipathy between them from before the war. Komorád himself states:

"I knew what was in him; his basilisk, shy nature had long since been no secret either to me or to my wife. (...) On more than one occasion, especially in a chance meeting with my wife, he directly reproached my behaviour and hers and threatened to denounce me. We could hardly escape his anger. Whether it was my wife or myself, we could feel his footsteps everywhere behind us, and even in the evening twilight he was not slow to sneak round our house and garden. And so, on one occasion, my wife told him directly that we were well aware that it was only in his power if I survived this war in freedom. Diplomatic as this step was, uttered with a woman's delicate tact, it was not, as you see, without effect."

On 23 April 1945, i.e. already at the end of the war, Komorád was sent a package by post from Prague containing a typescript with instructions for the formation of national committees, i.e. democratic cells ready to take power as soon as possible. Komorád was unanimously elected chairman at a secret meeting.

The situation in Písek was extremely complicated. There were a large number of SS units in the town and its surroundings. The Germans made it clear that they intended to fight for the town defensively and ordered the construction of roadblocks on the access roads. There was a serious fear that they might take revenge on the population. However, the demarcation line agreed upon by the Allied leaders as a result of the Yalta Conference negotiations ran several kilometres west of Písek, which was therefore to be liberated by the Soviet army. The latter was, however, still several days' march from the town. When the committee made its first public appearance and opened negotiations with the Germans, they admitted the possibility of surrender, but refused to place it in the hands of civilians. The nearest army was therefore the American one, which had already arrived in nearby Strakonice, where, according to the agreements, it was to stop.

Then, on 6 May, Komorád decided to go to Strakonice to get help. Together with an interpreter and a driver, they set out in a wagon through the woods, armed with only a few machine guns. They immediately sought out the American commander and Komorád explained to him the position of the citizens of Písek.

Fortunately the Americans immediately understood the seriousness of the situation and sent a small detachment to Písek the same day. It met with the Germans and, in the presence of Komorád, negotiated the terms of surrender. Ladislav Komorád fully assumed the office of chairman of the national committee.

It was thanks to Komorád's initiative that Písek was liberated without a single shot being fired. Soviet troops did not arrive in Písek until May 10. However, the great effort took a toll on Komorád's health. Already on May 18, during an official meeting, he suffered a stroke. His condition did not improve for a long time. He died in Písek on 8 February 1947 at the age of only 51.

Annex 1: Photo by Ladislav Komorád



Annex 2: U.S. Army pass

MILITARY GOVERNMENT

15-31 May 1945

Ladislav Komorád, *member of district national committee* IS AUTHORIZED

TO TRAVEL *to visit villages in the district of Písek. Radius 6 KM*

BETWEEN *0600* AND *2100* HOURS

FOR PURPOSE OF *official business*

Friedrich L. Schaefer
Capt 3rd
4th Armored Div.

MILITARY GOVERNMENT OFFICER

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