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**ACTIVITIES OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK MILITARY  
INTELLIGENCE SERVICE IN CARPATHIAN RUTHENIA INVESTIGATION CENTRE  
FOR CARPATHIAN RUTHENIA (PÁTRACÍ STŘEDISKO PRO PODKARPATSKOU RUS)  
IN THE CRISIS YEARS 1938/1939**

*Prepared primarily on the basis of documents from the Central Military Archive – Military History Archive in Prague (Vojenský ústřední archiv – Vojenský historický archiv) and the Security Service Archive in Prague (Archiv bezpečnostních složek), the study focuses on the restructuring of the Czechoslovak military intelligence service before the World War II as the curtailed Czechoslovakia was forced to respond to changes in geopolitical situation.*

*Intelligence activities aimed at Nazi Germany were officially prohibited and intelligence activity moved to the east of the Czechoslovakia to the region of Carpathian Ruthenia, in the direction of Poland and Hungary. Headquartered in Carpathian Ruthenia's Svaliava (Сваліава), the Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia (Pátrací středisko pro Podkarpatskou Rus) became a new element in the Czechoslovak intelligence service restructuring, tasked with both offensive and defensive intelligence activity targeting Poland and Hungary while monitoring the internal political situation in Carpathian Ruthenia. The Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia was taken from the usual structures and was fully subject to the Second (Intelligence) Department of the Military Headquarters (2. oddělení Hlavního štábu) in Prague. Staff Captain Jan Krček chaired the Investigation Centre throughout its existence (December 1938 – March 1939). In addition to him, Czechoslovak military intelligence officers Jindřich Krátký, Oldřich Vomáčka, Stanislav Vondřich and Štěpán Kareš were also stationed in Svaljava.*

*The Investigation Centre worked in difficult conditions and ended its activities in March 1939. Czech lands were occupied by German troops. Slovakia became independent, became an ally of Nazi Germany and the Hungarian army occupied Carpathian Ruthenia.*

**Keywords:** Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovak Armed Forces, military intelligence, Jan Krček, Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia.

**Introduction.** The Czechoslovak Military Intelligence Service started operating shortly after the founding of independent Czechoslovakia on October 28, 1918. It operated under the auspices of the Military Headquarters in Prague, the new state's capital. Its jurisdiction included all Czechoslovak military forces in the territory of the newly established republic; as with other military authorities emerging immediately after the revolution, as its activities were characterized by considerable improvisation (Břach, R. & Láník, J. 2013, p. 29; Straka, K. & Tomek, P. et al. 2018, p. 28).

Professionally organized intelligence activities started when the first Czechoslovak Army officer was appointed to the office of the intelligence service commander. This officer was Čeněk Haužvic, Major of the Military Headquarters and experienced intelligence

officer of the former Austro-Hungarian Army. Over time, the activities of the Czechoslovak intelligence services centred around the Second (Intelligence) Department of the Military Headquarters (2. oddělení Hlavního štábu), following the French model (Straka, K. & Tomek, P. et al. 2018, pp. 28, 32).

Like the emerging Czechoslovak Army, the Intelligence Service faced many challenges from the time of its origin. Most of the Czechoslovak state borders corresponded to the historical border of Bohemia and northern border of Hungary, except for the relatively large Czechoslovak-Hungarian section that was new and man-made. The relationship between Czechoslovakia and Hungary was tense from the start, leading to a relatively short but bloody conflict in 1919. Another serious crisis in relation to Hungary occurred in late 1921, when the last Austro-Hungarian emperor

Charles I attempted to restore rule of the Habsburg monarchy in Hungary. The operative sections of Intelligence Service Departments of Land Headquarters in Bratislava and Košice (2. oddělení štábu velitelství Zemského vojenského velitelství v Bratislavě a Košicích) focused their intelligence work on Hungary, controlling high-profile intelligence officers in individual divisions as well as independent troops. A special unit established in 1928 under the office of the Czechoslovak Military Attaché in Vienna carried out dedicated espionage work against Hungary. It's important to mention that intelligence work against Hungary was the main focus of the services' activities until 1934 (Straka, K. & Tomek, P. et al. 2018, p. 42).

The Czechoslovak Military Intelligence faced completely new challenges after Adolf Hitler seized power in neighbouring Germany in 1933. It became evident that his intention was to dismantle the Treaty of Versailles established after WWI using any means available. In response to the new circumstances, many changes were introduced by Czechoslovak intelligence services in the late 1930s which strove to effectively adjust the foreign intelligence offensive while improving the quality of work. The service was radically reorganized five times between 1934 and 1938. Four of the reorganizations occurred before Germany, Italy, France and Great Britain concluded the Munich Agreement in 1938, forcing Czechoslovakia to surrender territory around its border to Nazi Germany. The fifth one was required by the catastrophic consequences for Czechoslovakia of that Agreement (See, e. g.: Kokoška, S. & Malíř, J. 1989, pp. 51–65 and Kokoška, S. & Malíř, J. 1990, pp. 34–48).

In the late 1930s, when the productivity of the intelligence services was at its peak, the Second (Intelligence) Department of the Military Headquarters was divided into four groups: A – Study and Planning (studijní a plánovací), B – Investigation (pátrací), C – Foreign (zahraniční) and D – General (všeobecná). Intelligence work in the sense of collection and critical analysis of information was assigned to groups A and B. Group A (Study and Planning) was responsible for sorting, recording and analyzing reports provided by the special means of groups B (Investigation) and C (Foreign) (Straka, K. 2017, p. 33).

Immediately before the war, Czechoslovak offensive intelligence services launched their new “Advanced Agency Centres” (Předsunutá agenturní ústředna, PAÚ). They were intelligence subsidiaries located in border areas, tasked with keeping direct contact with both the local and foreign agency networks. Some of them were accountable directly to

the Intelligence Headquarters in Prague, that is, the Second (Intelligence) Department of the Military Headquarters, and others to the Second (Intelligence) Departments of provincial military headquarters. This solution proved less than ideal and all supervisory authority was later transferred to the Second Department of the Military Headquarters, leading to the establishment of four intelligence centres (Výzvědná střediska, VS): VS I in Prague, VS II in Brno, VS III in Bratislava and VS IV in Košice. All Advanced Agency Centres came under the authority of these Intelligence Centres. The new system took effect on October 1, 1936. In spring 1938 when Czechoslovakia faced a crisis, individual Intelligence Centres were renamed “Agency Investigation Centres” (Agenturní pátrací střediska, APS) with their respective Roman numerals (Straka, K. 2017, pp. 36–37).

The highest element in the hierarchy of intelligence authorities was Section P-1, constituting one of the integral parts of Investigation Group B under the Second Department of the Military Headquarters. The above-mentioned Investigation Centres (VS), later called Agency Investigation Centres (APS), were directly subordinate to it, as were foreign supporting points of the Czechoslovak Intelligence Service and the Advanced Agency Headquarters in Prague with the code name VONAPO, working since 1936 as a joint Czechoslovak-Soviet intelligence unit against Nazi Germany (Straka, K. & Tomek, P. et al. 2018, p. 54).

Like the Czechoslovak Army, the Czechoslovak Intelligence Service system was gravely affected by the Munich Agreement. Its last re-organization was ordered by German authorities. Nazi Germany was not allowed to be the focus of intelligence work and borders with this large neighbour of Czechoslovakia became a passive zone as far as military defence was concerned. Under the aggressive influence of Hungary and Poland, intelligence activities gravitated towards the very eastern part of Czechoslovakia, eastern Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. After a subsequent reorganization of armed forces, almost half of the country's military were gathered there (Straka, K. 2007, p. 132).

The intelligence apparatus also had to adapt to the new international situation. Its restructuring took place from October to December 1938. The primary sign of the disruption in the intelligence services after the Munich Agreement was the dissolution of the Advanced Centres in Bohemia. Agency Investigation Centres (APS) working against Germany were dissolved or transferred to Moravia and Silesia to focus their intelligence work against Poland or the originally Czechoslovak territories annexed by Hun-

gary after the First Vienna Award in 1938 (Straka, K. 2017, p. 38).

Aside from interests in Poland and Hungary, the need arose to monitor the situation in the very eastern part of Czechoslovakia, Carpathian Ruthenia\*. A new Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia (Pátrací středisko pro Podkarpatskou Rus, PSPR)\*\* headquartered in the town of Svaljava (Свалява) was founded in December 1938. It concentrated on the situation within the area and offensive activity against Poland, as well as the former Czechoslovak territory occupied by the Hungarian army to the south. In all other ways, it was subordinate to the Intelligence Headquarters in Prague (2. oddělení Hlavního štábu) (Straka, K. 2017, p. 38).

Another, previously unknown, element of Czechoslovak military intelligence services emerged: a secret agency. An agency investigation service focused on Germany had been established in late 1938 p. without the knowledge of superior officers at the Military Headquarters and Ministry of National Defence. The Munich Agreement prohibited all intelligence work, so the secret agency operated solely on a conspiratorial basis, with only a very small circle of persons aware of its existence (Straka, K. 2017, p. 38).

The following paragraphs aim to introduce the secret Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia (PSPR) as part of the system of Czechoslovak military intelligence services. The study draws on the very fragmentary archives of the Second Department of the Military Headquarters of the Ministry of National Defence, relevant archival sources of the First and Third (Planning and Operation) Departments (1. a 2. oddělení Hlavního štábu) and materials of Czechoslovak military counterintelligence (Hlavní správa vojenské kontrarozvědky), which are all maintained by the Central Military Archive – Military History Archive in Prague (Vojenský ústřední archiv – VÚA – VHA) and by the Security Service Archive in Prague (Archiv bezpečnostních složek, ABS). Other available litera-

ture on intelligence services was also used. Most of it was published by the Military History Institute in Prague (Vojenský historický ústav v Praze). As an example, let us name the book “Ve službách republiky. 100 let od založení československého vojenského zpravodajství” written by the Czech historians Karel Straka, Prokop Tomek and Tomáš Bandžuch and the work of Karel Straka named “Rekonstrukce československé agenturní sítě a jejich výsledků z let 1933–1939: Zpravodajské ústředí”.

**Research Results.** *Origin and Operation of the Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia (PSPR).* The exact founding date of this intelligence service centre is unknown. In late 1938, Emil Strankmüller, commander of the offensive intelligence service officers operating under the Second Department of the Military Headquarters drew up basic guidelines for this specialized intelligence service centre. It can be presumed that it was the Commander of the Czechoslovak Intelligence Service and future General František Moravec who played the role of the metaphorical father of the centre<sup>1</sup>.

Based on this document, the Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia was established in the town of Svaljava in the very eastern part of the Czechoslovak Republic (now it is a city located in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine) under the auspices of the Intelligence Headquarters. The first, and due to its short operation, only commander of the centre was the previous head of the Second Department of the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps Staff in Prague (2. oddělení štábu velitelství I. sboru v Praze), Staff Captain Jan Krček\*\*\*;<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1).

<sup>1</sup> VÚA – VHA, fund (f.) Velitelství vojenské zpravodajské služby, box (b.) 153, file (f.) 23, Předmět: Zpravodajská služba – informace, ref. no. 13415/1938 (undated), fol. 1. This is a key document produced by the Second Department of the Military Headquarters that has been preserved until the present day, thanks to the fact that the intelligence service group managed by Colonel František Moravec took it to Great Britain right before the Nazi occupation in March 1939.

<sup>2</sup> VÚA – VHA, fund (f.) Velitelství vojenské zpravodajské služby, box (b.) 153, file (f.) 23, Předmět:

\* After the Constitutional Act No. 328/1938 and Decree of Independence of Carpathian Ruthenia were passed in late 1938, the region was newly called “Carpathian Ukraine” or “Carpatho-Ukraine”. For clarity, the more common name “Carpathian Ruthenia” will be used throughout this text.

\*\* Some historical sources use the title “Investigation Centre in Carpathian Ruthenia”. This text will use the title “Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia”.

\*\*\* Jan Krček, born on June 8, 1901 in Přemyšl. Between 1915 and 1918, he studied at the Upper Military Realschule – secondary schools (Výšší vojenské reálné gymnasium) in Hranice (now Czech Republic) and Krakow (now Poland). He entered the Czechoslovak Army after the founding of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918. He served as an infantry officer from 1920 to 1927 in the eastern regions of Czechoslovakia in various garrisons in Carpathian Ruthenia. Between 1934 and 1936, he studied at the Military University in Prague (Vysoká škola válečná v Praze) and worked at the Second Department of the 1st Corps Staff in Prague (2. oddělení štábu velitelství I. sboru v Praze). His activities in the anti-Nazi resistance and after the war and his persecution after the communist coup in 1948 are described in the final part of this study (For details, see Kreisinger, P. (2017). Plukovník generálního štábu Jan Krček (1901–1961). Dlouhá cesta účastníka zahraničního odboje (velitele Gabčíka a Kubiše) k rehabilitaci. *Historie a vojenství*. № 4, pp. 70–83).

The secluded territory of Carpathian Ruthenia was not wholly unknown to Krček. Between the years 1920 and 1927, he occupied various functions (chief of the squad, connection officer, company deputy chief and armament officer) in the Infantry Regiments 19 and 36 (Pěší pluk 19 a 36) in Mukachevo (Мукачево) and Uzhorod (Ужгород)<sup>3</sup>.

On the other hand, Krček lacked the necessary practical experience with secret intelligence agency management due to the fact that when he joined the Second Department of the 1st Corps Staff in Prague, the intelligence offensive was run solely by the Second Department of the Military Headquarters. Lower levels of the intelligence hierarchy fulfilled only defensive functions (monitoring selected persons, drawing up opinions and sending experts to court hearings in cases of military treason) and intelligence training. Krček was temporarily assigned to the Second Department (2. oddělení Hlavního štábu) in November 1938<sup>4</sup>.

Apart from Jan Krček, other intelligence officers were also transferred to Svaljava: Staff Captain Jindřich Krátký, Staff Captain Oldřich Vomáčka, Captain Jozef Markančuk and Captain Stanislav Vondřich<sup>5</sup> (Figures 2, 3, 4). The group composition soon changed. The only Ruthenian among Czech and Czechoslovak officers, Captain Markančuk, was replaced by First Lieutenant Štěpán Kareš for unspecified reasons (Figure 5). It is also remarkable that of the appointed staff, only Jindřich Krátký, Oldřich Vomáčka and Štěpán Kareš had experience with intelligence work. Due to personnel restrictions brought about by the Munich Agreement (all anti-German intelligence work was officially prohibited), the commander of the Czechoslovak Intelligence Service František Moravec was interestingly hesitant to send more experienced officers to Carpathian Ruthenia. We can only speculate that a wish to keep the best intelligence officers close at hand in Prague played a role.

On the other hand, Krček and his subordinates were very well equipped materially and technically. They had three Czechoslovak modern Tatra 75 automobiles, photographic, chemical and writing materi-

Zpravodajská služba – informace, ref. no. 13415/1938 (undated), fol. 1

<sup>3</sup> VÚA – VHA, f. Kvalifikační listiny, Kvalifikační listina Jana Krčka

<sup>4</sup> Archiv bezpečnostních složek (ABS), f. Hlavní správa vojenské kontrarozvědky, b. 72, f. 1, Zpráva sepsaná s Janem Krčkem, fol. 473 and 476.

<sup>5</sup> VÚA – VHA, f. Velitelství vojenské zpravodajské služby, b. 153, f. 23, Pátrací středisko na Podkarpatské Rusi, organizace a úkoly (undated), fol. 3.



Figure 1. The head of the Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia in Svaljava (Свалява) Staff Captain Jan Krček in 1938 (Národní archiv)



Figure 2. Staff Captain Jindřich Krátký (Archiv bezpečnostních složek)



als and necessary intelligence equipment along with reports on the Ukrainian irredentist movement. They also had a broadcasting and reception device with set broadcasting and reception times to communicate with the Military Headquarters in Prague<sup>6</sup>.

The Intelligence Headquarters in Prague were aware that Poland and Hungary were interested in the territory of Carpathian Ruthenia. Reports of activities of the local paramilitary organization Carpathian Sich also raised concern\*. It is remarkable that a great deal of political, economic, social as well as military information was also collected from the very eastern part of Czechoslovakia by the German military intelligence service Abwehr, which found many locals willing to cooperate<sup>7</sup>. The serious situation required precise reports on the development in the region. Many challenges lay before the Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia.

The Military Headquarters in Prague summarized the Centre's activities in three basic points: 1) carry out intelligence agency work against Poland, taking full advantage of Polish-Ukrainian irredentism; 2) collect reports on the current political situation in Carpathian Ruthenia and 3) initiate offensive intelligence work against Hungary<sup>8</sup>.

Offensive action against Poland took the form of the collection of military and military-political reports. Krček's subordinates quickly built a network of agents (some suitable individuals were adopted from the no longer utilized network of agents working against Germany) and pedestrian agents, focusing on Polish territory north of Carpathian Ruthenia, roughly delimited by the towns of Turka (Турка) – Sambir (Самбір) – Lviv (Львів) – Berežany

<sup>6</sup> VÚA – VHA, f. Velitelství vojenské zpravodajské služby, b. 153, f. 23, Pátrací středisko na Podkarpatské Rusi, organizace a úkoly (undated), fol. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg, f. Nachgeordnete Dienststellen und Einheiten des Amtes Ausland/Abwehr, b. 49, f. 32, Politische Nachrichten aus der Tschechoslowakei (Politische und soziale Verhältnisse in Karpethen-Rußland. Militärische Angaben allgemeinen Charakters – Zu Abw. St. Mchn. Nr. 1219/37 I geh.) (undated).

<sup>8</sup> VÚA – VHA, f. Velitelství vojenské zpravodajské služby, b. 153, f. 23, Pátrací středisko na Podkarpatské Rusi, organizace a úkoly (undated), fol. 3.

\* Carpathian Sich (Karpatská Sič) was a volunteer paramilitary organization of Ukrainian nationalists aiming to found an independent state. They were anti-Czechoslovak and anti-Hungarian (Straka, K. (2007). Československá armáda, pilíř obrany státu z let 1932–1939. Praha: "Ministerstvo obrany České republiky", p. 134).



Figure 3. Oldřich Vomáčka in a post-war photo with the military rank of Lieutenant Colonel (Vojenský ústřední archiv – Vojenský historický archiv)



Figure 4. Captain Stanislav Vondřich (Archiv bezpečnostních složek)



Figure 5. First Lieutenant Štěpán Kareš  
(Archiv bezpečnostních složek)

(Бережани) – Stanislav (Івано-Франківськ) – Kolomyia (Коломия) – Yasinia (Ясіня). The Czechoslovak Second Department (2. oddělení Hlavního štábu) devoted special attention to the area between Stanislav (Івано-Франківськ) – Stryi (Стрий) – Lviv (Львів) – Sambir (Самбір) – Kolomyia (Коломия) regarding the necessity of cooperation with residents offering knowledge of local circumstances who would occupy the post of pedestrian agents. The Military Headquarters in Prague urged the Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia to recruit as many reliable Ukrainian emigrants as possible<sup>9</sup>.

To assess internal circumstances in Carpathian Ruthenia and activities of the local irredentist movements, Krček's agents were instructed to inconspicuously enter into contact with local authorities, while also cooperating with local confidants and defence agents. Commander of the Investigation Centre, Staff Captain Jan Krček, had to be informed in a timely manner of the official stances of local authorities but also backstage politics including objectives and means adopted by the locals<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> VÚA – VHA, f. Velitelství vojenské zpravodajské služby, b. 153, f. 23, Pátrací středisko na Podkarpatské Rusi, organizace a úkoly (undated), fol. 3.

<sup>10</sup> VÚA – VHA, f. Velitelství vojenské zpravodajské služby, b. 153, f. 23, Pátrací středisko na Podkarpatské

Offensive intelligence work against Hungary focused on the area delimited by the towns of Mukachevo – Sevljuš (Виноградів) – Nyírbátor – Nyíregyháza – Uzhorod. It also included the territory that had previously belonged to Czechoslovakia and was now occupied by Hungary based on the Vienna Award. The intelligence headquarters urged the Investigation Centre to promptly report all relevant changes of Hungarian border patrol crews as well as higher ranking posts in the area, aiming to detect any preparation for terrorist activity<sup>11</sup>.

Jan Krček informed only his superiors about the results of his efforts and his subordinates worked more or less independently. Colonel František Moravec urged Krček to carry out offensive work without any intervention or support of the local authorities, if possible<sup>12</sup>. In light of the unstable situation, Moravec said to Krček before he left for Svaljava (according to his own words spoken after the war): “*Don't forget that our power in C[arpathian] R[uthenia] is only temporary*”<sup>13</sup>.

The founding and position of the Investigation Centre was, however, disclosed to the Second Departments of the two higher military headquarters in the area for the purposes of future cooperation: the Second Department of the 6<sup>th</sup> Corps Headquarters in Spišská Nová Ves (2. oddělení štábu velitelství VI. sboru) and the Second Department of the 12<sup>th</sup> Division Headquarters in Svaljava (2. oddělení štábu velitelství 12. pěší divize). The local intelligence workers were urged to oblige Krček and his subordinates whenever they needed anything. Their work entailed mostly checking selected persons and intervening with local authorities, etc. Krček in turn kept them updated on important foreign and state reports, provided they were directly related to their interests<sup>14</sup>.

The exact date when the Investigation Centre started working is unclear from the available sources. Based on personal documents of many of the officers

Rusi, organizace a úkoly (undated), fol. 3.

<sup>11</sup> VÚA – VHA, f. Velitelství vojenské zpravodajské služby, b. 153, f. 23, Pátrací středisko na Podkarpatské Rusi, organizace a úkoly (undated), fol. 3.

<sup>12</sup> VÚA – VHA, f. Velitelství vojenské zpravodajské služby, b. 153, f. 23, Pátrací středisko na Podkarpatské Rusi, organizace a úkoly (undated), fol. 4.

<sup>13</sup> ABS, f. Hlavní správa vojenské kontrarozvědky, b. 72, f. 1, Zpráva sepsaná s plukovníkem Janem Krčkem, fol. 485–486.

<sup>14</sup> VÚA – VHA, f. Velitelství vojenské zpravodajské služby, b. 153, f. 23, Předmět: Vojenské zpravodajství – informace, ref. no. 13415/1938 (undated), fol. 1 and Pátrací středisko na Podkarpatské Rusi, organizace a úkoly (undated), fol. 4.

issued after the war, we can presume that a majority of the crew arrived at the location on December 16 and 17, 1938. Jan Krček mentioned this in his interrogation by the Communist Military Counter-Intelligence Service after the war. The report states that he travelled from Prague to Svaljava alone by car, equipped with fake documents in the name of Ing. Kalina. Two civil vehicles joined him in Moravia with Staff Captain Krátký, Staff Captain Vomáčka, First Lieutenant Kareš and one non-commissioned officer. The last to join the crew was Krček's former subordinate at the Second Department of Military Headquarters in Prague, Captain Stanislav Vondřich<sup>15</sup>.

Apart from the technical equipment listed above, Krček also received documents with factual and personal data on the Ukrainian irredentist movement to help him select locals willing to work against Poland in the Galicia Region. It is remarkable that he allegedly received no instructions as far as offensive intelligence work against Hungary was concerned. On the other hand, he was advised to initiate close cooperation with intelligence subsidiaries in eastern Slovakia that had some experience with intelligence work against Hungary. Unlike the newly founded centre in Svaljava, they had an established agency network at their disposal<sup>16</sup>.

One of the Centre's tasks was defensive intelligence work. The internal situation in Carpathian Ruthenia was disrupted by the activities of the Carpathian Sich. Staff Captain Jan Krček often negotiated with the Minister of the Interior for the Autonomous Government of Carpathian Ruthenia (ministr vnitra autonomní vlády Podkarpatské Rusi) Lev Prchala, who was gravely concerned about the group's activities. Prchala primarily collected information about its members but did not radically intervene against them. Krček did not agree with Prchala's benevolent approach and expressed his displeasure to his subordinates<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> ABS, f. Hlavní správa vojenské kontrarozvědky, b. 72, f. 1, Zpráva sepsaná s plukovníkem Janem Krčkem, fol. 486–487 and ABS, f. Zpravodajská správa Generálního štábu Československé lidové armády (Intelligence Service of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak People's Army), Osobní složka Stanislava Vondřicha, No. 2661.

<sup>16</sup> ABS, f. Hlavní správa vojenské kontrarozvědky, b. 72, f. 1, Zpráva sepsaná s plukovníkem Janem Krčkem, fol. 486–487.

<sup>17</sup> ABS, f. Hlavní správa vojenské kontrarozvědky, b. 72, f. 1, Předmět: Krček Jan – štábní kapitán, zpráva, fol. 112 and Zpráva sepsaná s plukovníkem Janem Krčkem, fol. 484.

Krček reported his arrival to the Commander of the 12<sup>th</sup> Division General Oleg Svátek. As mentioned above, the headquarters of Svátek's division was also located in Svaljava, because it had to be moved from Uzhorod, currently occupied by the Hungarians. After they arrived, Krček's group started looking into the possibility of cooperation with reliable Czechoslovak police and state officers. They also contacted the Advanced Agency Headquarters (Předsunutá agenturní ústředna, PAÚ) in Prešov (now Slovakia) under the code name "Rudolf", subordinate to the Agency Investigation Centre I (Agenturní pátrací středisko, APS) in Banská Bystrica (now Slovakia)<sup>18</sup>.

Based on the above, we can assume that the group was in close cooperation with the Centre in Banská Bystrica. As of January 15, 1939, the Investigation Centre (APS) managed two Advanced Agency Centres (PAÚ) – one with the code name "Radomil" in Nitra (now Slovakia) and another one with the code name "Rudolf" in Prešov, providing intelligence work between: Miskolc – Košice – Prešov; Sátoraljaújhely – Trebišov – Vranov nad Topľou; Nyíregyháza – Chop (Чоп) – Uzhorod (Ужгород). Another task was to build a network of residents in 1<sup>st</sup> degree locations: Miskolc, 2<sup>nd</sup> degree locations: Košice, Sátoraljaújhely, Uzhorod, Nyíregyháza, Szerencs, Debrecen and the remaining areas where the Hungarian 6<sup>th</sup> and mixed 5<sup>th</sup> brigades were deployed (Debrecen and Szeged). They also monitored traffic on the line Miskolc – Košice – Miskolc – Sátoraljaújhely – Debrecen – Nyíregyháza – Čop – Uzhorod. "Rudolf" carried out recruiting activities also on Czechoslovak territory, in the Districts Moldava nad Bodvou, Gelnica, Spišská Nová Ves, Levoča, Kežmarok, Poprad, Spišská Stará Ves and Stará Ľubovňa<sup>19</sup>.

The Advanced Agency Centre (PAÚ) "Rudolf", focusing on the area east of the Headquarters in Banská Bystrica to the line Uzhorod – Nyíregyháza, became the "neighbour" of Krček's Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia<sup>20</sup>.

The Centre in Svaljava sadly did not have much time to develop its activities against Poland and Hungary. Between March 14 and 15, 1939, the crisis in

<sup>18</sup> ABS, f. Hlavní správa vojenské kontrarozvědky, b. 72, f. 1, Zpráva sepsaná s plukovníkem Janem Krčkem, fol. 486–487.

<sup>19</sup> VÚA – VHA, f. Vojenské zpravodajství I, b. 4, Předmět: Organizace zpravodajské služby proti Maďarsku).

<sup>20</sup> VÚA – VHA, f. Vojenské zpravodajství I, b. 4, Předmět: Organizace zpravodajské služby proti Maďarsku).

central Europe peaked. The Autonomous Government of Carpathian Ruthenia had long sought the support of Nazi Germany. Ukrainian nationalists began a coup d'état during the night of March 14, 1939. The Czechoslovak Army quickly silenced it but Carpathian Ukraine, which was the other official name of the very eastern part of Czechoslovakia, also declared itself independent. It however did not obtain any of the expected guarantees from Berlin. The Hungarian Army began an offensive against it from three directions on March 14, 1939. When the Czechoslovak Army received the Hungarian ultimatum requiring the immediate clearing of Carpathian Ruthenia, many troops of the Czechoslovak Army started fighting back (Straka, K. 2007, p. 134).

Occupation of the Czech lands by German troops began soon afterwards. Officers at the Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia attempted unsuccessfully to make radio contact with Prague after listening to appeals for calm on Radio Prague throughout the night of March 15. Radio traffic in the Czechoslovak military network had been cut off, telephone lines were overloaded and the connection with Slovakia kept dropping<sup>21</sup>.

Krček finally managed to make a short call to his superiors to find out what was going on in Prague. His initial suggestion to immediately leave for Poland was declined. He had no other choice than to abandon his position along with his remaining troops and return across Slovakia. When they crossed the Slovak town of Prešov in their military convoys, the situation was already very tense. Krček later remembered that the Slovaks, who had meanwhile declared an independent state, were quite hostile especially towards Czechs. Krček also ordered all intelligence materials, equipment and codes as well as radio transmitters to be destroyed<sup>22</sup>.

This proved to be excellent foresight, as the collection of materials from military intelligence headquarters and subsidiary divisions of the former Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia was among the first measures taken after the proclamation of an independent Slovak State. The order applied also to documents from the Agency Investigation Centre I (APS) in Banská Bystrica and its Advanced Agency Headquarters (PAÚ) (Šimunič, P. 2012, p. 44).

<sup>21</sup> ABS, f. Hlavní správa vojenské kontrarozvědky, b. 72, f. 1, Zpráva sepsaná s plukovníkem Janem Krčkem, fol. 486–487.

<sup>22</sup> ABS, f. Hlavní správa vojenské kontrarozvědky, b. 72, f. 1, Zpráva sepsaná s plukovníkem Janem Krčkem, fol. 478.

The only thing that could be confiscated from Krček's subordinates was a radio receiver station and sadly also their vehicle fleet. Krček's people were dispatched on a special train to the occupied city of Prague together with the commanders of General Oleg Svátek's 12<sup>th</sup> Division (12. pěší divize)<sup>23</sup>.

Battles related to the retreat of the former Czechoslovak Army from Carpathian Ruthenia continued until March 17, 1939. Troops of the state that no longer existed retreated in three directions. The first was across Slovakia, while other soldiers ended up in Romania and Poland (Straka, K. 2007, p. 134).

Captain Jan Krček reported to the Deputy Commander Intelligence Colonel František Havel who took over after Colonel Moravec immediately on March 22, 1939. Krček described the course of retreat from Carpathian Ruthenia to Havel. That was more or less all that was required of him. Anything else was irrelevant under the new circumstances. The Czech lands and Carpathian Ruthenia were occupied and Slovakia had declared independence. The Czechoslovak Republic as an autonomous state no longer existed. The former Czechoslovak Army slowly but surely entered a phase of controlled liquidation that ended in summer 1939. Jan Krček himself was called up again to serve in the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps (I. sbor) in Prague but took an open-ended leave of absence due to the situation in the country<sup>24</sup>.

**Conclusion.** There are not enough archive sources to assess the activities of the Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia more thoroughly. Agency materials, reports and other documents were likely lost during the rushed destruction of the intelligence service archive on March 15, 1939 at the Military Headquarters in Prague (2. oddělení Hlavního štábu). Testimonies from after the war also confirm the destruction of all paperwork transferred from Carpathian Ruthenia by employees of the Investigation Centre. The material fragments that have survived to the present day, however, do allow us to arrive at some conclusions.

<sup>23</sup> ABS, f. Hlavní správa vojenské kontrarozvědky, b. 72, f. 1, Zpráva sepsaná s plukovníkem Janem Krčkem, fol. 478.

<sup>24</sup> ABS, f. Hlavní správa vojenské kontrarozvědky, b. 72, f. 1, Zpráva sepsaná s plukovníkem Janem Krčkem, fol. 478. The return to Prague on March 22, 1939, when Krček reported to Colonel František Havel, is confirmed in the personal documents of Infantry Staff Captain Jindřich Krátký from the former Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia. VÚA – VHA, f. Vojenské osobní spisy, Vojenský osobní spis Jindřicha Krátkého.



We need to remember that the last reorganization of intelligence services in the area was very rushed. The original system of agency investigation centres changed drastically (intelligence work against Germany was prohibited) and an offensive intelligence agency focused on Poland and Hungary was quickly established as intelligence interests shifted eastward. A specialized centre for intelligence work against Poland and Hungary emerged under these circumstances.

The Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia sprung up relatively fast, without any personnel or local continuity. The Intelligence Headquarters in Prague chose an inexperienced commander without detailed knowledge of the local conditions. It is surprising that only three officers working at the Investigation Centre were even somewhat familiar with the area, which was very unpopular among officers of the Czechoslovak Army, unlike the less remote and more attractive Bohemia and Moravia. It remains a mystery why the Commander of the Second Department did not choose an officer with more experience in intelligence service work.

Another factor giving a disadvantage to the Czechoslovak intelligence officers in Svaljava was the season of the year, along with lack of time to build the Investigation Centre. The cold and hard terrain proved a significant obstacle for messengers trying to cross the border. The new offensive centre was built in a great rush, at a time when it took years to establish a quality offensive agency. It is also more than likely that the Investigation Centre for Carpathian Ruthenia did not achieve any significant success during the three months of its operation. The results of the defensive intelligence work are also arguable. Jan Krček himself admitted after the war that the Investigation Centre never really moved beyond the preparation phase and did not achieve any considerable success<sup>25</sup>.

Despite that, it would be inappropriate to disregard the participation of the intelligence officers in defence of the republic. The difficult internal and foreign political situation of Czechoslovakia brought many individual challenges. It goes to the credit of the officers of Investigation Centre in Carpathian Ruthenia that many joined the resistance after the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia.

Their former Commander, Staff Captain Jan Krček, fled to Poland in August 1939. He served in a

Czechoslovak legion and was imprisoned by the Red Army in the USSR together with the future commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Czechoslovak Army Corps in the USSR (1. československý armádní sbor v SSSR) General Ludvík Svoboda after the German and Soviet attack on Poland. In 1940, he became the commander on one of the Czechoslovak military transports to France and took part in retreat fights under the 1<sup>st</sup> Czechoslovak Infantry Division in France (1. československá pěší divize ve Francii). After France was defeated, he went to Great Britain and served as commander of the Second (Intelligence) Department of Staff of the Czechoslovak Composite Brigade (2. oddělení štábu velitelství Československé smíšené brigády). In this function, he participated in selecting the right persons for parachute/diversion and intelligence operations in the occupied Czech lands. During this time, his active involvement was crucial in the operation code named Anthropoid, which aimed to physically remove the Deputy Reich-Protector, Chief of the Reich Security Main Office, SD and SS – Obergruppenführer and Chief of Police Reinhard Heydrich, which occurred on May 27, 1942. After that, Krček worked at the Department of Political Intelligence of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czechoslovak Exile Government in London (Kreisinger, P. 2017, pp. 78–80).

Events following the communist coup d'état in February 1948 were particularly tragic for Krček. At that time, he held the position of a Colonel and Commander in the 74<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (Pěší pluk 74) in Most, northern Bohemia. He was considered a great professional by his superiors, but also potentially politically unreliable, as they expressed in September 1948. In September 1949, Krček was drafted as a student of the Military University in Prague (Vysoké vojenské učiliště) but was expelled in May of the next year. The Communist Counter-Intelligence kept a close eye on him during his studies. In June 1950, he was arrested for alleged subversive activity. Those allegations could not be proven but in October 1950 a lower court found him guilty of negligence in keeping of a state secret and sentenced him to nine months in prison without the possibility of parole. He also lost his military rank of a Colonel. His persecution was fully in line with the general purge in the Czechoslovak Army. Instead on being released after serving his time, he was transferred to a forced labour camp in March 1951 and forced to stay until April of the next year. The same court cleared him of all charges in July 1950 but he could not return to his post in the army. He had to earn his living as a manual worker. Jan Krček died

<sup>25</sup> ABS, f. Hlavní správa vojenské kontrarozvědky, b. 72, f. 1, Zpráva sepsaná s plukovníkem Janem Krčkem, fol. 486–487.

as a reserve private after a serious illness on March 24, 1961 in Prague, completely forgotten. During the political thaw in the late 1960s, his wife attempted to have him rehabilitated. Her efforts were, however, interrupted by the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops in August 1968. Krček was not

definitively and fully rehabilitated morally and as an officer of the army until long after the fall of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, in March 2015<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> VÚA – VHA, f. Kvalifikační listiny, Kvalifikační listina Jana Krčka.

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**ДІЯЛЬНІСТЬ ЧЕХОСЛОВАЦЬКОЇ ВІЙСЬКОВОЇ РОЗВІДКИ НА ПІДКАРПАТСЬКІЙ РУСІ  
В РОЗСЛІДУВАЛЬНОМУ ЦЕНТРІ ПІДКАРПАТСЬКОЇ РУСІ  
(PÁTRACÍ STŘEDISKO PRO PODKARPATSKOU RUS) У КРИЗОВІ РОКИ 1938/1939**

*Дослідження, підготовлене переважно на основі документів Центрального військового архіву – Військово-історичного архіву в Празі (Vojenský ústřední archiv – Vojenský historický archiv) та Архіву Служби безпеки у Празі (Archiv bezpečnostních složek), зосереджується на реструктуризації чехословацької служби військової розвідки перед Другою світовою війною, оскільки Чехословаччина була змушена реагувати на зміни геополітичної ситуації.*

*Розвідувальна діяльність проти нацистської Німеччини була офіційно заборонена, і зосередилася на сході Чехословаччини, у регіоні Підкарпатської Русі, у напрямку Польщі та Угорщини. Розташований у Сваляві Розслідувальний центр Підкарпатської Русі (Pátrací středisko pro Podkarpatskou Rus) став новим елементом у реструктуризації чехословацької розвідувальної служби, маючи завдання проводити як наступальну, так і оборонну розвідувальну діяльність, спрямовану проти Польщі та Угорщини, а також контролювати внутрішньополітичну ситуацію в Підкарпатській Русі. Розслідувальний центр Підкарпатської Русі був виведений зі звичайних структур і повністю підпорядковувався Другому (розвідувальному) відділу Військового штабу (2. oddělení Hlavního štábu) у Празі. Протягом усього періоду його існування (грудень 1938 – березень 1939) Розслідувальний центр очолював штаб-капітан Ян Крчек. Окрім нього, у Сваляві також були розміщені офіцери чехословацької військової розвідки Їндржих Кратки, Олдржих Вомачка, Станіслав Вондржих та Штепан Кареш.*

*Розслідувальний центр працював у складних умовах і припинив свою діяльність у березні 1939 року. Чеські землі були окуповані німецькими військами, Словаччина здобула незалежність, стала союзником нацистської Німеччини, а угорська армія окупувала Підкарпатську Русь.*

**Ключові слова:** Чехословаччина, чехословацькі збройні сили, військова розвідка, Ян Крчек, Розслідувальний центр Підкарпатської Русі.