

KAMEN: A Cold War Dangle Operation with an American Dimension, 1948–52

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Soon after the coup d'état in February 1948 that brought the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) into power, the government granted the security services—civilian and military—unlimited freedom of action against any target, with no regard for the rule of law. The StB (Statni bezpecnost, the civilian state security apparatus) was especially cunning in adapting and combining the techniques of Nazi Germany's Gestapo and the Soviet Union's special services in the struggle against the StB's primary targets: Americans and their Czech associates.

The StB embraced the view of its Soviet teachers that its mission was not merely to identify and neutralize existing opponents to the new order through routine investigative methods. Instead, the StB adopted a more proactive method: It created fictitious resistance organizations, dangled them as bait, and waited for potential new resisters—in addition to those already active—to be drawn to them.

Soviet special services introduced this approach to counter-intelligence in postwar Eastern

Europe with frightening success. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Wolnosc i Niezawislosc (WiN)—a Soviet and Polish Communist security (Urzad bezpieczenstwa [UB]) joint operation—identified an underground organization, took it over, built it up, and used it to gain significant US, British, and Polish émigré support. They ran this fictitious scheme to discourage domestic resistance and to gain Western cash and intelligence technology. The ruse ended in December 1952, when the communists publicly declared themselves to be the creators and managers of WiN.¹

Smaller and less ambitious, but still lethal, dangle organizations were created in postwar Czechoslovakia. One such organization, SVETLANA, grew out of a plan to study public opinion in the country while it was still adapting to the Communist takeover. The StB soon realized that this could evolve into something bigger and more profitable. With the use of agent provocateurs, it merged its own fictitious underground organization with elements of the true anti-Communist resistance. The hybrid grew and spread with astonishing speed

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Many victims never realized they had fallen for an StB trick. Between 1949 and 1950, the service arrested close to 500 men and women who had joined SVETLANA. Some unfortunates had done so after a ceremony that included the signing of sworn anti-Communist declarations and distribution of SVETLANA membership cards, all under the watchful eyes of the undercover StB agents. A series of show-trials provided many opportunities to attack the West in general and the United States in particular as the alleged masters of SVETLANA. Although some of the defendants fervently believed they had “worked for the Americans,” the United States was never involved.²

In the end, there were 16 death sentences, more than 10 executions, several suicides, 20 life sentences, and close to 300 other prison sentences.³ To maintain operational cover, the StB had at least one of its own agent provocateurs executed, not an uncommon practice during that time.⁴ Antonin Slabik, SVETLANA’s putative “chief of staff,” was luckier and avoided that fate. He managed to emigrate under murky circumstances and died peacefully in Australian exile in 1981.⁵

WiN, SVETLANA, and other Eastern European variations on the same theme helped the Communist security services crush a significant segment of the opposition at the onset of the Cold War. The swift and deadly response by those services likely drove many potential resisters into resigned, passive acceptance of the new regime.

KAMEN: The United States as Bait

There were other operations of this kind, and some have remained largely unknown to this day. At least one directly involved the United States. Operation KAMEN (meaning “stone” or “border marker”) was one of the most cunning StB schemes. Launched only a few weeks after the February 1948 coup d’état in Czechoslovakia, KAMEN, like WiN and SVETLANA, was a copy of a stratagem that Stalin’s special services (in this case, the NKVD) had invented before WW II.

In the Soviet version, a provocateur would offer a person who feared arrest safe passage to freedom abroad. Guides posing as agents of a Western intelligence service would lead the victim to a location where the NKVD had created a false border post. Mistakenly thinking they were already safely outside Soviet territory, the would-be defectors spoke freely dur-

ing “interviews” with undercover NKVD personnel, indicting themselves as well as family, friends, and whomever else had helped them along the way.

Soviet military counterintelligence also practiced this technique in postwar Germany, focusing mainly on Red Army soldiers. Some were eager to escape the Stalinist system, and Berlin, where one could cross from east to west with relative ease, was a magnet for such dreamers. Soviet agents posing as Westerners would deliver these would-be deserters to an apartment in East Berlin, where fake US Army personnel interviewed them. After a deserter had fully implicated himself and identified comrades with similar attitudes toward Soviet power, the illusion was burst, and the victim was brought to face an executioner.⁶

Organization. KAMEN followed this Soviet pattern with some local variations. Ultimate responsibility resided with the bosses of the StB (see table on right). Practical details of the *kombinace*, to use the contemporary terminology for a deceptive scheme, were in the hands of the personnel of Group BAa (internal state security), Sector I (Counter Intelligence), Referat 28 (directed against the US Army Counter Intelligence Corps [CIC], a generic term used for all US intelligence in the 1950s) and Referat 29 (its target was the US Embassy and Americans in Prague), and Sec-

tor IV, Operations, Department 3 (Arrests).⁷

Method of Operation. Typically, Joseph Janousek or Milena Markova of Department 3 (as an agent-provocateur) contacted a suspect government official, military officer, Czechoslovak employee of the US Embassy, or businessman, and claimed to have been sent by the CIC. The agent told the victim that, according to US sources, his downfall was imminent and offered safe passage across the Iron Curtain into the open arms of the United States. Waves of arrests had been directed against democrats, Catholic activists, intellectuals, military officers, and the propertied class, making the threat of arrest entirely credible.

Following painful decisions, individuals, couples, and families with small children, carrying only cash and jewelry, were escorted to the border area by StB agents posing as members of a resistance organization. They introduced the refugees to another StB agent, posing as a

local smuggler or a bribed border guard official who then offered, for a fee, to take the refugees into the woods and across the German border. The victims were led, usually under cover of darkness, to a fictitious US Army post visible from afar at night. In reality, the building was well inside Czechoslovakia. (see map on next page) The post was guarded by StB agents posing as German border police and manned by StB agents wearing US Army uniforms. The difficult role of the US intelligence officer was frequently played by StB agent Amon Tomasoff (“Tony”).⁸

The final stages of KAMEN followed various scripts. Some victims were directed to take a copy of the protocol of their interview to a second American post, which they were to find unescorted. On the way, they were stopped by Czechoslovak border guards and placed under arrest. It was impossible for victims to deny their guilt, as they carried signed statements in which they boasted of their

StB Personnel and Components in KAMEN

- Jindrich Vesely
- Stepan Placek
- Oswald Zavodsky
- Ivo Milen
- Sector I, Counterintelligence
- Referat 28 (US intelligence organizations)
- Referat 29 (US embassy, US citizens)
- Sector IV, Operations
- Department 3 (Arrests)
- Evzen Abrahamovic, “Evzen” or “Dr. Breza.”
- Emil Orovan, “Oliva.”
- Amon Tomasoff, “Tony,” F-7.
- Rudolf Freund
- Josef Janousek, “Johnny.”
- Milena Markova, “Vanda Roubalova,” “Kolda,” K-40, AK-950

anti-Communist convictions and activities.

Given that the victims were moving at night through unfamiliar and dense woods, they tended to blame themselves for having lost their way and seldom realized that they had fallen for an StB provocation. Some firmly believed they had already been on German soil but were kidnapped by the border guards and taken back into Czechoslovakia.



The fake US Army officer occasionally chose a different ending. He told the applicants that their petitions for political asylum were denied and handed the victims over to the Czechs. The news that the US had turned down some applicants and forced them back into the arms of the StB trickled out of prisons and labor camps and had a desirable effect on the rest of the population. The message intended, and received, was that there was no escape, no hope, and that it was best to

give up and submit to the Communist regime.

Cases

The first documented KAMEN case involved Jan and Jirina Prosvic.⁹ Jan was a brilliant engineer, designer of household products, and a founder of the ETA Company, which produced irons, vacuum cleaners, and toasters. Prosvic was so committed to improving his products that he initially stayed on as a lowly employee after ETA had been nationalized by the

Communist government. In addition, as parents of two daughters, Vera and Jana, the Prosvics had been unwilling to risk exile, although the authorities had started to harass them in early spring 1948: Prosvic was arrested, mistreated, and then suddenly released.

On 13 April 1948, only six weeks after the Communist takeover, Janousek approached the couple, introduced himself as “Johnny,” a CIC operative, and offered to arrange an escape. Mrs. Prosvic energeti-

Operation KAMEN, Czechoslovakia, 1948–52



DI Cartography Center/MPG 793647AI (G03253) 3-11

cally turned down the offer and refused to discuss it. Even her husband was far from eager to risk crossing the border, living in a camp for refugees, and then starting anew abroad.

Janousek later testified that Prosvic had little desire to leave: "But since I knew I would earn a lot of money, I tried to talk them both into it."¹⁰ That first approach was followed by anonymous phone calls from supposedly well-meaning sympathizers who warned that another arrest was imminent. Then came a second visit by Janousek and more pressure. Mrs. Prosvic remained adamant: The family would stay at home. It took more anonymous calls and a third visit by Janousek to change the minds of these increasingly desperate people.¹¹

On 23 April 1948, the couple and their children met



In the only known photo of KAMEN in action, an agent in US Army uniform is shown interviewing a victim, a man named Jaroslav Hakr. A notation on the photo reads "Compromising photograph of Hakr with a CIC officer"—a pretender serving as "proof" of Hakr's disloyalty and as evidence for others considering flight that Hakr had been successfully led to safety. Photo courtesy of Archiv bezpečnostních služeb, ABS H-253.

Prosvic was shattered to hear that his application for political asylum was denied.

Janousek in the center of Prague. They drove together to Kdyne, a small town nearly 100 miles to the southwest. For a while they rested in the Hotel Modra Hvezda, located on a scenic square lined with old trees. At 10 p.m. Janousek introduced them to Stanislav Liska, the chief of the police station in Vseruby—a sad hamlet on the border. After Prosvic had paid a hefty fee of Kc 70,000 [other protocols mention the sum Kc 60,000], Liska left to make sure that the escape plan was in order.

At midnight, Liska returned to report that all was well. He drove the couple to Vseruby. They were stopped several times at roadblocks manned by security personnel, but Liska, wearing his uniform, "always knew what to say." The Prosvics were

impressed. From the edge of Vseruby, Liska and the family continued on foot through Mysliva, a place so small that it no longer exists, and around a lake. Standing by a border marker, Liska pointed out a well-lit building in the distance: the supposed US Army post.

The family reached the post

without difficulty, and the fake German border guards invited them inside. There, a visibly nervous Tomasoff, wearing a US Army officer's uniform, offered the Prosvics a choice of Lucky Strikes or Camel cigarettes; he gave their daughters Swiss chocolate and allowed them to sleep in the waiting area. The office was decorated with a large US flag and portraits of Presidents Roosevelt and Truman. A bottle of whiskey stood on the table.

Tomasoff began by asking Prosvic about his connections with the anti-Communist underground, of which the engineer and businessman knew absolutely nothing. All other questions, such as "What do you think of Communism?" sounded politically illiterate to Prosvic. The interrogation continued: who knew about his escape, who helped him, what reliable friends could he recommend for the Americans to contact in Prague?

Prosvic did not like the questions and resented the interrogator's arrogant tone, and their conversation became tense. Nevertheless, he signed the protocol, as Tomasoff requested. But Prosvic was shattered to hear that his application for political asylum was denied. "We have no interest in Czech Communists," said Tomasoff. He drew his revolver and forced Prosvic into a car in which his frightened wife and daughters were already waiting.¹² The family was

Marie trusted the fictitious American officer so completely that she agreed to answer in her own hand his semi-literate and grotesquely misspelled "Guestionnaire."

speechless and could hardly believe it when the "Germans" drove them back to Vseruby, where they were handed over to Czechoslovak security officers. The Prosvics were interrogated and arrested, with the exception of the youngest daughter, who was too young to be processed by the judicial system.

The protocol, dated 24 April 1948, noted with satisfaction that "Prosvic carried with him lots of valuables, especially jewels." Much of it disappeared into the pockets of Evzen Abrahamovic, Emil Orovan, and Tomasoff. But that was trivial compared with the property the Prosvic family had left behind. There was the "beautiful apartment," to use the words of the StB, in Prague and a spectacular villa just outside the capital. Exquisitely furnished, both homes were filled with works of art. Even though the villa had belonged to Mrs. Prosvic, whom the court found innocent, the entirety of the Prosvic property was confiscated.¹³

The crass nature of the CPC bosses—and possibly the prime motivation for the operation against Prosvic—was revealed when the villa was "purchased" the following year by Antonin Zapotocky, one of the top three party leaders at the time and the eventual president of Czechoslovakia (1953–57). A review of the Prosvic case in January 1957 concluded that the "seizure of the Prosvic villa

took place outside the legal framework, the confiscation of the apartment by the state was illegal, and the sale of the villa in Vonoklasy to comrade Zapotocky was inappropriate. It could be used by our enemies to defame us."¹⁴ The report made no mention of Mr. and Mrs. Prosvic.

Malac. Only five days after the Prosvic family had been sent back to Prague in handcuffs, the next victims of KAMEN, Oldrich and Ludmila Malac, were on their way.¹⁵ As an official of the Ministry of Interior, a democrat with contacts in the United States, and a security specialist, Malac was a prime target of the Communist regime.

During the war, Malac worked for Czechoslovak intelligence on behalf of the London-based government-in-exile.¹⁶ He was fired from the Ministry of Interior on 4 March 1948, an obvious prelude to more serious trouble. While Malac was contemplating his bleak future, Janousek came unannounced to see him in his apartment on Kamenická Street in Prague.

Janousek introduced himself as "Johnny," a courier of the CIC. He insisted that Malac's arrest was imminent, which was true, and proposed to arrange for his and his wife's escape to the US-occupied zone of Germany. Given the purge raging all around, Malac knew

his life was in danger, and he and his wife agreed to leave. On 30 April 1948, Janousek took them along the same sorrowful path the Prosvics had treaded before. From Prague they traveled to the Modra Hvezda in Kdyne, where Mrs. Malac emotionally begged her husband not to proceed; it was a trap, she insisted. He replied that it was too late, whereupon his wife—according to Janousek—suffered a nervous breakdown.¹⁷

On 1 May 1948, the couple went with Liska to Vseruby and further to the fake US Army post. There the StB's scheme began to unravel. Malac immediately noticed that the two StB agents pretending to be Germans spoke non-native German. Although Tomasoff interrogated Malac wearing a US uniform, he spoke the sort of English he had learned among sailors, which was not enough to fool Malac, a lawyer who had spent time in the United States during the war (1943–44). Moreover, Malac noticed that Tomasoff used a Czechoslovak-made typewriter with a keyboard that an English-speaking user would have found confusing. It became clear to Malac that he was surrounded by actors. He refused to cooperate and was arrested, together with his wife. She was treated gently by the still tentative Communist system of justice, but her husband was sentenced to 15 years of hard labor.¹⁸ Although the KAMEN personnel had failed to fool Malac, the StB had nonetheless reached its objective and destroyed an opponent.

Sterbova. Malac proved to be far too sophisticated and knowledgeable to find Tomasoff's performance credible, but others believed the KAMEN scheme until the end. Such was the case with two women, Mrs. Marie Sterbova and her daughter, Vlasta, who experienced the KAMEN ordeal in June 1950. Mrs. Sterbova later confessed to the StB: "Having crossed the state border we were guided by a German customs officer to a CIC office where I made a complete statement regarding my underground organization. Subsequently, I received a letter recommending me to the CIC in Selb."

Mrs. Sterbova trusted the fictitious American officer so completely that she agreed to answer in her own hand his semi-literate and grotesquely misspelled "Questionnaire." Having declared herself a sworn enemy of Communism and a member of an underground resistance cell that she had created on behalf of the CIC, she helpfully identified a soldier when asked to list "Persons not agreeing with the present regime and wishing to ascape [sic] across the frontier." Mrs. Sterbova also wrote a note to a relative, stating that she was "safe and under American protection in Germany" and urging him to join the anti-Communist resistance. "I hope you won't let me down," she added.

Vlasta filled in her own form, providing more names of current and potential members of the resistance.¹⁹ The two

Several days later, the whole group was found in the woods close to the border, mowed down by an automatic weapon.

women were then escorted out by a fake German policeman, who indicated the direction they were to follow and turned back. "I don't know how it happened," Mrs. Sterbova recounted, "but the moment the German official left us, we were arrested by the Czech border guards, taken to Cheb and the same day we were back in Prague." Both women were convinced they had been kidnapped from German territory. After intense interrogations, Mrs. Sterbova suffered a breakdown and died in prison in December 1951.²⁰

Bozena. Some not only never reached safety but died en route, possibly in ill-fated attempts to escape after they realized they were being tricked. Such most likely was the case of Bozena, a "beguiling, vivacious, lovely blond girl of 20," who caught the attention of the StB as a girlfriend of Walter Birge, an assistant to Ambassador Laurence A. Steinhardt at the US Embassy in Prague. In the summer of 1948, at the end of their last date, Bozena told Birge with an air of mystery: "Maybe next time we meet, it will be in the West." When she dropped out of existence, Birge anxiously investigated her disappearance among her friends. What he discovered was appalling. Bozena had received an offer from an unknown man to take her across the border. She trusted him so much that she invited seven friends to join her. Sev-

eral days later, the whole group was found in the woods close to the border, mowed down by an automatic weapon.²¹

Military targets. KAMEN was frequently used against military officers. Major Josef Hnatek, a Czechoslovak Air Force officer who had served as a pilot with the Royal Air Force (RAF) and was a decorated veteran of the Battle of Britain, was dismissed from service shortly after the Communist coup. An StB agent approached him in May 1948 and offered to help him escape across the Iron Curtain. The police protocol puts it simply: "From the very beginning the escape was arranged and directed by the security organs (KAMEN)."

Hnatek also invited his brother and a friend. They traveled with a group of 11 others to Marienbad and then on to the Czechoslovak-German border. They were interrogated through the night. After they had completed the necessary forms, the phony American told them they were "unreliable for the West," and they were handed over to Czechoslovak authorities. "The financial means obtained from the arrested men were applied to benefit Operation KAMEN," states the protocol, without offering any further details. The military court sentenced Hnatek to death; this was changed on appeal to 16 years, and subsequently to 15 years, in prison.²²

Even more shocking to StB inspectors was the discovery that the victims were sometimes chosen because they owned something desirable and not because they posed a threat to the regime.

KAMEN claimed many other victims in the officer corps, especially among those who had distinguished themselves in the war against Germany. Air Marshal Karel Janousek, RAF, the highest-ranking Czechoslovak Air Force officer in Great Britain during the war, was lured into KAMEN shortly after the Communist takeover. He was sentenced first to 19 years and then to life in prison. Inevitably, KAMEN sowed seeds of mistrust among the officers and made it impossible for them or anybody else to distinguish between professional provocateurs and genuine operatives dispatched across the Iron Curtain by Western agencies.

In accordance with the harsh logic of Stalinism, KAMEN was eventually aimed at high-ranking Communists targeted in the purge, including, for instance, Vladimir Clementis, a life-long Communist who in 1948 replaced Jan Masaryk as foreign minister. On 28 January 1951, Clementis was snatched off the street in Prague and forced into a car.²³ The StB crew introduced themselves as CIC agents who had come to rescue him from an imminent arrest and execution. He was put through the KAMEN routine, was brought back to Prague, formally arrested, tried and executed in the show trial centered around former CPC Secretary General Rudolf Slansky.²⁴

Discovery

The StB was understandably pleased by the productivity of KAMEN. Jindrich Vesely, chief of the StB in the late 1940s, testified before an internal commission in 1963: "I considered it then and still consider it now a clever, well thought out trick."²⁵ The stratagem played out not only in Vseruby but also near Cheb, Marienbad, Domazlice, and other locations. But there were problems. Only a small fraction of the money and valuables confiscated from the would-be refugees was reported and placed in state coffers; the bulk disappeared into the pockets of those running KAMEN.

Even more shocking to StB inspectors was the discovery that the victims were sometimes chosen because they owned something desirable and not because they posed a threat to the regime, as had been the case with the Prosvics, for example. It was also a source of embarrassment that some victims virtually had been forced to accept the phony offer of escape.²⁶ Those were minor problems from the point of view of the StB, however.

In its early weeks, the scheme seemed to be working fine. Then came a big surprise: The Americans found out about KAMEN and formally protested with a note on 15 June 1948. It described the whole

setup in surprising detail.²⁷ (See text box on facing page.)

About two weeks later, on 2 July 1948, there was another US protest. It stated that Czechoslovak security personnel had been seen moving about the border area in "American cars and wearing United States Army uniforms." The embassy made it clear it had no intention of interfering with whatever methods Prague used to guard the borders, but it disapproved of the misuse of American uniforms and insignia.²⁸

Czechoslovak authorities rejected the protests with a sarcastic note of their own. They denied the existence of anything untoward in the Vseruby area and hinted that the Americans were being somewhat paranoid. Even the "most minute investigation in Vseruby has failed to find the smallest trace or suspicion of a misuse of American insignia or portraits of US statesmen. We maintain that the protest is based on a report of an unreliable informer."²⁹

The American description of KAMEN was accurate, and Prague's rejection of the US protest can be ignored as diplomatic persiflage. But how did the United States find out about KAMEN so quickly? This question can now be answered with complete certainty. The source was Stanislav Liska, the supposed escort to safety of the Provic family and more who would follow.

Liska was part of a network that gathered information for

**US Protest Note,
15 June 1948**

For approximately four weeks, representatives of the Czechoslovak State Security Police (S.N.B.), dressed in full uniform with insignia of officers of the United States Army, have been conducting an office in a house on Czechoslovak territory in the western outskirts of the village of Vseruby. In the conduct of their business, these representatives are seated behind a desk on which there is conspicuously displayed a bottle of American whiskey, packages of American cigarettes and a small American flag. On the wall behind their desk is a large American flag and pictures of Presidents Truman and Roosevelt.

These S.N.B. representatives, dressed in uniforms of the United States Army, are assisted by other S.N.B. representatives who are dressed in uniforms of the German border police. According to factual evidence in the possession of the Government of the United States, the purpose of this office, as well as of the fraudulent misuse of the uniform of the Army of the United States and of the German border police, as well as the display of the American flag and pictures of the former and present presidents of the United States, is to supplement other measures taken by the Czechoslovak Government to prevent illegal departures from Czechoslovakia.

US Army intelligence from the winter of 1945 to the summer of 1948.³⁰ The network was created by LtCol. Zoltan Josef Havas, US Army intelligence (MIS), stationed in Regensburg and Straubing in southern Germany.³¹

Liska had joined the police force in 1935 and became a dec-

orated officer of its elite branch—the SOS (Straz obrany statu). Having served in the dangerous and often volatile prewar Sudetenland, Liska also acquired an admirable military record.³² He returned home and to his police work as soon as the Third Reich was defeated. In the winter of 1945, his chief, LtCol. Frantisek Havlicek, invited Liska to join a US-run intelligence gathering network. Liska accepted the offer.³³

The network was initially productive, and Liska, one of the principal players, was the reason why the United States found out about KAMEN so quickly. He later testified that at the end of February or in early March 1948, Evzen Abrahamovic of the StB came to Vseruby, introduced himself as Dr. Evzen Breza, and told Liska, “You have been chosen ...to run a certain operation in this area. You will take people across fake borders, we will arrange for a certain measure to take place, and interrogate them.” Abrahamovic then asked to be taken to Mysliva, where he made a detailed plan of the area, and then left for Prague.³⁴ He did not know that Liska, whom he had just recruited to be one of the main actors in KAMEN, was a part of the US network.

Like other networks of its kind, this one eventually was wrapped up by the StB. Two men—Havlicek and Liska’s deputy at Vseruby, police officer Vaclav Snajdr—were sentenced to death, and others

were sent to dig uranium for many years.³⁵

Details contained in the US protest of KAMEN turned out to be Liska’s downfall. It was obvious that the description of the fake US Army post could have come only from someone who had been there. There had to be a rotten apple in the group that ran the operation in Vseruby, and that group was small. An internal investigation concluded that Liska was the traitor, and he was arrested on 10 December 1948.³⁶

The experienced policeman knew how to conduct himself in such circumstances. Despite harsh treatment and long interrogations by Abrahamovic, he was cleared of all suspicion and, after five months in prison, was released because of lack of evidence. When other people around him continued to be arrested, Liska decided not to test his luck any further, and he crossed the border to the US-occupied zone in Germany on 12 August 1949.³⁷

Liska found no respite west of the Iron Curtain, however. His life in the refugee camp in Ludwigsburg took a dramatic turn shortly after he arrived; he ran into Jan Prosvic, his first victim in KAMEN. It turned out that after his arrest in Vseruby, Prosvic was sentenced to a forced labor camp, but the enterprising engineer escaped, fled the country, and made his way to Ludwigsburg, where he ultimately had the pleasure of confronting the man who had deceived and ruined him and

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his family. Prosvic reported Liska to the US authorities as a Communist spy.

Liska was arrested by US Military Police and interrogated. In his defense he typed out a long statement, wherein he revealed his three years of work for US intelligence, his contribution to the unmasking of KAMEN, and his other activities on behalf of the democratic cause.³⁸ The US authorities at the camp did not charge Liska with espionage on behalf of a Communist power, as they did in countless cases involving double agents, nor did they exclude him from consideration for a visa to another Western country. Instead, they accelerated his departure, most likely to Canada. This suggests that Liska’s description of his morally ambiguous role in the Cold War was accurate.

Closure and Aftermath

After Liska’s departure in August 1949, two other actors in KAMEN, the fake German border guards, crossed into the US-occupied zone in Germany. It would have been natural for the StB to discontinue the operation at this point, yet KAMEN continued until August 1951, when Radio Free Europe (RFE) warned against the deception.³⁹ Focusing on Svaty Kriz on the Czechoslovak-German border,

some 2 or 3 km from Cheb, RFE described the ersatz US Army post and the tragedy that played out there when three US Embassy employees—two young Czech women and a man—arrived for their interrogation by the supposed US Army officer. This was followed by a dramatic portrayal of the Prosvic case, narrated by several voices. The script concluded with a stern warning to “Dr. Evzen,” i.e., Abrahamovic, and to other top officers involved in KAMEN.

Like most such threats floating over the heavily fortified Iron Curtain on jammed radio waves, this one was without teeth. Tomasoff, the fake US Army officer, died in January 1953 of a brain tumor. But the other mastermind, Abrahamovic, was more fortunate. He was injured in the fall of 1949 in a mistaken shoot-out between two StB undercover teams in Prague. Each was independently seeking to arrest a foreign agent, and at least one StB officer was killed by friendly fire. Abrahamovic’s injury made it possible for him to weather the Stalinist purge while recovering at a spa.

Abrahamovic ultimately continued on to a long and happy life as a director of a large department store. He was still

alive as of October 2010, at the age of 89, living in the Czech Republic. Until some two or three years ago, undisturbed by any of the geopolitical upheavals that beset his country after the Velvet Revolution of 1989, he could be seen lunching regularly at the same place as the notorious traitor Karel Köcher.

Tomasoff’s boss, Evzen Orovan, became the head receptionist and StB resident (code name OTA) in the Alcron Hotel, now the Radisson Blu, in Prague. He assisted in all the operations the StB ran against westerners in the Alcron. His StB employers viewed him as completely reliable until 2 July 1969, when he suddenly left for Israel with his third wife. They traveled with valid passports and exit permits but never returned.⁴⁰

Operation KAMEN was a fiendishly clever scheme with real counterintelligence potential. However, the StB bosses failed to exploit it because they were focused on destroying the “class enemy” and not on gathering intelligence and learning the truth about US activities in Czechoslovakia. Indeed, their victims could reveal little, and while KAMEN did serve the interests of the StB and its CPC bosses by heightening distrust and insecurity among democrats, its real impact was the destruction of the lives of innocent victims and the corrupt enrichment of Communist thugs.



Endnotes

1. *Zrzeszenie 'Wolnosc i Niezawislosc' w dokumentach*, 6 volumes (Wroclaw: Zarzad Główny WiN, 1997-2001); Jerzy Slaski, *Zolnierze wykleci* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 1996).
2. National Archives and Records Administration, NARA, College Park, MD. Laurence Steinhardt, US Embassy, Prague, to the Secretary of State, Washington, 30 April 1948, 860F.00/4-3048. The embassy strictly followed Ambassador Steinhardt's view that once the police state had been formed in February 1948, all armed resistance became futile and counterproductive.
3. Josef Spidla, "Krvava Svetlana," *Reflex* 5, 16 (1994): 16–17.
4. Archives of the Ministry of Interior (AMI), fond A 8, inventory unit 156, sign. IM-085/55, 120 pp.
5. Spidla, "Krvava Svetlana," *Reflex* 5, 16 (1994): 16–17.
6. Tennent H. Bagley, *Spy Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 110, 130–31.
7. AMI, H 796. The most comprehensive description of Operation KAMEN comes from the pen of one of its main protagonists, SNB (Police) Sergeant Stanislav Liska, Ludwigsburg Camp, no date. See also "Akce KAMENY," UDV, Prague, 10 May 1996. Milena Markova was blackmailed into employment with the StB in 1947 on the basis of her less than honorable behavior during the Nazi occupation. Having successfully used her several times, the StB decided she had become a liability and arrested her in 1949. Having been held incommunicado in a solitary cell without any explanation, Markova hanged herself.
8. Amon Tomasoff (1922–1953) left Czechoslovakia in 1937 and entered the United States. In October 1944 he walked into the Soviet Consulate General in New York City and was received by Anatolii Yakovlev; he offered his services as a spy. After a severe lecture never again to come near the consulate, Tomasoff was introduced to an NKVD officer who called himself Alex. The Russian became particularly attentive when Tomasoff told him he was in the United States Merchant Marine and knew of fellow sailors who had smuggled Trotskyite literature to Soviet personnel during trips to Murmansk. Tomasoff and Alex worked together in the United States, observing strict tradecraft rules until the end of August 1945, when Tomasoff returned to Czechoslovakia. In Prague, Tomasoff contacted security specialists in the Central Committee of the Communist Party (CPC) who directed him to join the CPC intelligence apparatus, ZOB. Having lived in Great Britain, Canada, United States, and South America, Tomasoff claimed to speak Russian, Polish, Hungarian, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Hebrew, Yiddish, Danish, Norwegian, Hindu, and Latin. I am grateful to Colonel Adolf Razek of UDV, Prague, for documents on Tomasoff. The most comprehensive treatment of this figure is in Prokop Tomek, "Amon Tomasoff," *Securitas Imperii* 12 (2005): 5–28.
9. AMI, 319-38-6, AMI 13065, and AMI 4219.
10. AMI, 13065, "Statement by Josef Janousek," 7 July 1948.
11. AMI, 13065. "Statement by Jan Prosvic," 3 July 1948, StB, Prague.
12. AMI, 4219.
13. AMI, 319-38-6. "Jan and Jirina Prosvic. For comrade Minister," 7 January 1957.
14. Ibid.
15. AMI, 319-22-6.
16. AMI, A8-1355. "Statement by Oldrich Malac," 7 January 1966.
17. Ibid and "Statement by Josef Janousek," 9 January 1966.
18. AMI, file 13065, "Statement by Oldrich Malac," 12 July 1948, StB, Prague.
19. Jan Frolik, "Plukovník Antonín Prchal a jeho doba," *Minulosti zapadoceskeho kraje XXXI*, (1996): 179–84.
20. Frolik, 141–42.
21. Walter Birge, *Mémoires*, 253–54. This is an unpublished manuscript. I am grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Birge for giving me a copy.
22. AMI A-8-354-379. "The former Air Force Major Josef Hnatek," 25 October 1956.
23. National Archives, Prague, Fond Commission II, vol. 3, archival unit 37.
24. Open Society Archives, Budapest (OSA), OSA-300-30-31/box 18.
25. Zdenek Valis, "Akce KAMENY," 4. This is an unpublished internal study, 10 May 1996.

Endnotes (cont.)

26. Karel Bayer, Lubomir Stepan et al., *Dokumentace vzniku a pricin nezakonnosti v cinnosti prokuratury v letech 1948–1952*, 25–28. I am grateful to Colonel Razek for a copy of this document.
27. Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AMFA), General Secretariat, 1945–1954, box 192, US Embassy note no. 4680, 15 June 1948.
28. AMFA, General Secretariat, 1945–1954, box 192, US Embassy note no. 4749, 2 July 1948.
29. AMI, sector II Ab to sector III Aa, 24 June 1948, Jiri Wehle, chief of III/Ab; and AMI, sector III Aa to sector III Ab, “Reply to the American Protest Note.”
30. AMI, 44516, Record of Interrogation of Emil Sztwiertnia, 14 April 1950, and Reports from Germany, 3 May 1950.
31. AMI, 596973, “Causa Zoltan Joseph Havas.” Born in 1920 in Czechoslovakia, Havas moved to the United States in 1937 on Columbus Day and became a US Army intelligence officer. He was discharged as a Lieutenant Colonel. Using police chief Frantisek Havlicek (code-named Sumava) as his point man, Havas (he signed his notes as “Zofka”) created an intelligence network that involved mainly policemen serving along the border. Havas later worked for the New York Times in Paris. He returned to Prague as a journalist on various occasions in the 1960s and was always closely followed by the StB.
32. AMI, H 796, Stanislav Liska, “False Border,” Ludwigsburg, and interview with Jan Frolík, 13 February 1998, Prague.
33. AMI, 319-38-6. In light of the fact that both Havlicek and Liska were part of a US Intelligence network, it is ironic to read the former’s evaluation of his subordinate. Havlicek found Liska’s station in Vseruby to be in “excellent” condition. He admired Liska’s “considerable achievements, especially in the field of special measures in the border area...” The evaluation also stressed Liska’s active membership in the CPC.
34. AMI, H 796, Stanislav Liska, “False Border,” Ludwigsburg.
35. Ibid. According to Liska’s testimony, Vaclav Snajdr played one of the German guards.
36. Ibid.
37. AMI, A8-1355.
38. AMI, H 796, Stanislav Liska, “False Border,” Ludwigsburg.
39. OSA, Budapest, 300-30-31/box 18. The program was broadcast on 31 August 1951.
40. AMI, 638585.

