

The Shorthand of Experience

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This true story of an exceptional spy has been reconstructed from records of the postwar debriefings of participants and witnesses to his adventures.

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This is the story of two men who broke nearly every rule in the spy's handbook, and were right. One was a German. The other was one of the top drawer Czechoslovak military intelligence officers. As a young man, long before World War II, he had studied intensively the unchanging axioms of espionage, and was thoroughly versed in these fundamentals:

Identify the agent. Don't do clandestine work with parties unknown.

Study the agent. Know as much about him as possible before asking him to work for you.

Recruit the agent. If it is he that selects you, beware of provocation. You choose him -- for access, reliability, motivation, stability, etc.

Train the agent. Untutored, he is a menace to himself, to you, and to your service.

Test the agent. Be skeptical not only of his capability but also of his loyalty. Establish all possible independent checks on all his contacts.

Control the agent. You ask all the questions; he provides the answers. You order; he obeys.

The man who breaks these rules in ignorance is likely to die young, at least professionally. But General Z, the Czech, and Major L, the German, broke them wittingly and for good reasons. The result was a brilliantly successful operation that began before World War II, provided Czechoslovakia and the Western Allies with invaluable intelligence, and survived to the end of the war. It was like the other great espionage coups of history, which are almost all full of deviations and exceptions to the rules. But in all of them the controlling service planned the rule-breaking before the operation began. It did not begin by the book and then stumble into anarchy.

The story begins on 4 March 1937, four years after *der Korporeal* became *der Fuehrer*. The wind from the north, Dr. Goebbels, howled around the ears of the Czechs. But their houses were snug, their stores full; they were prosperous and free. The Nazi occupation of Austria was still six months away. A year and a half would pass before Chamberlain would go to Munich with his symbolic umbrella and return in a figurative barrel.

In Prague the Agrarian Party was in power. It saw keenly the full national granary but only dimly the shaking of Sudeten German fists. And this myopia spread throughout the country. Only a handful of people, among them the Czech intelligence officers, saw the growing danger clearly. Intelligence was busier than it had ever been before. On the positive side, it was straining to learn everything possible about German political and military intentions, while counterintelligence struggled to prevent or manipulate the activities of the *Abwehr*. This small group of men knew that war was coming.

The Agent Recruits a Case Officer

General Z reached his office in the General Staff building punctually at eight. He hung up coat and cap, sat at his desk, read his correspondence. In other offices administrators and analysts, code clerks and comptrollers, were also starting the day. The machinery began to move. The general sorted his correspondence swiftly. Policy, promotions, pyroelectric techniques. And then he stopped. He had

opened an envelope typewritten in Czech and addressed to him by full name, rank, and function. It had been mailed in Chomutov, a town in northwestern Bohemia. It held a three-page letter, also typewritten, but in German, with only the initial L for signature. This is what it said:

Dear Sir:

I offer you my collaboration. After we have had a personal meeting and you have been given the first samples, and after mutual agreement on the terms of further cooperation, I shall be paid one hundred thousand Reichsmark.¹ I need this money urgently.

Here is what I can do in return. I can provide you with information, partially documentary, on German preparations for mobilization; detailed order of battle; documentary material on Wehrmacht developments and current disposition; documentary material on German defences along the Saxony border; information concerning German armament, tanks, planes, and airfields; Sudeten-German underground activities and the support provided for these by the government of the Third Reich. I can also provide information about German espionage in Czechoslovakia.

Our interview will take place in the restaurant at the Chemnitz railway station. The time and date are for you to select. Please send your reply, general delivery, to [a code name], Chomutov, main post office.

L.

General Z read the letter several times. Never in his wide experience had a peddler made quite so crassly commercial an offer. You couldn't take it at face value: even worse than the possibility of fabrication was the probability of provocation. Chemnitz was well inside Germany, and the specification of the meeting place would make it simple for the German police to arrest a Czech officer there. And what an array of information the writer claimed -- not only military, but political and clandestine as well. Surely no one German could have access to so much. The language, too, had a faintly technical flavor, as though formulated by a military intelligence service. General Z had recently conducted a successful provocation against the Abwehr; sweet is revenge. No doubt the technical examination of letter and envelope would prove only that both were sterile. Chomutov was in Sudeten territory; a check at the post office there would probably draw a blank.

But while the general's mind pondered everything that was wrong with

the letter, his nose was telling him something different. Somehow the distinctive odor of the phony was missing. His mind, intrigued, began to consider what was right about the letter. Well, it was too suspicious; the Abwehr had demonstrated that its provocations were professional. Again, it dangled too many kinds of bait. A provocation is built like a tunnel; he who enters may go deeper and deeper, seeing more and more; but he cannot turn to left or right. He is confined to that area which the provoking service can control and exploit. Then too, that sentence about needing the money urgently -- a personal consideration, of no concern to the Czechs, somehow not the sort of thing that an enticer would hit upon.

The general summoned the chiefs of his espionage and counterintelligence sections. Both read the letter attentively. Both looked a bit blankly at the general, as though to inquire why he asked advice in so elementary a matter. Both had the same opinion: swindle or provocation.

The letter was subjected to technical examination. Nothing. The Chomutov postmark was genuine. The general decided not to risk a check at the post office, because it would not reveal a hoax and might ruin a possibility. What next? If he dropped the matter, he could not be wrong.

Instead a letter went to Chomutov. It expressed interest in L's offer but flatly rejected a meeting on German soil. L could select any Czech site he found convenient. He was to send his reply to the Chomutov post office, box 83. The general particularly liked this last touch. It did not matter if every postal employee in Chomutov were a Nazi: his own men would watch. They would find out who picked up the letter to L; or, if anything went wrong, they would at least see who slipped L's reply into box 83.

But they didn't. They could not determine who picked up the Czech reply, in its distinctive off-blue envelope. And the postal clerk who put L's response in box 83 was sorting his mail in normal fashion. The letter was stamped.

L proposed that General Z meet him in Linz, Austria. Technical examination revealed only that his second letter was like the first, written on the same German machine. Perhaps it was just a diversion operation. If so, it had already succeeded in tying up a surveillance team

and some technical experts, not to mention one of the key men in Czech intelligence.

Linz, of course, was as unacceptable as Chemnitz. By this time the Nazis were already on the march in Austria. The *Anschluss* was coming, and everyone knew it. So L received another rejection and another proposal to meet on Czech soil. Finally he agreed. As the place he chose Kraslitz, a little town situated directly on the Saxony-Bohemia border and lying partly in Germany, partly in the CSR. He set the time at midnight on 6 April 1937. His letter said that he could be recognized -- in the unlikely event that anyone else should be standing in the square of the sleepy town at such an hour -- because he would set his watch by the clock in the tower.

General Z was decidedly unecstatic about this proposal. The border town could not be controlled as tightly as a wholly Czech village. The dark forest which came marching to the outskirts on one side was on German territory. Ninety-nine percent of the 8,000 villagers were Sudeten Germans, the most fanatical of Nazis. Available for protection in this situation was a six-man patrol of local gendarmes with doubtful loyalties. Recently there had been several kidnappings along the German border. Not long ago, in fact, an intelligence officer of the East Bohemian 4th Division had been taken by force.

The general nevertheless decided that he too would be in the town square at midnight. He knew perfectly well, of course, that by simple logic he should be anywhere in Czechoslovakia except Kraslitz that night. But his initial decision to pursue this matter had been intuitive, and it was not to be expected that later decisions could be based entirely on reason. General Z knew his subordinates agreed unanimously that L's offer was a piece of cheese poised neatly on an especially vicious trap. Therefore he did not feel justified in forcing them to run a risk which he evaded. But at least preparations could be made. His own trusted men, heavily armed, would form a hidden ring around the square. The most loyal of the gendarmes (or least disloyal, thought the general) would serve as outer circle. Signals for the inner ring were established: one to indicate the approach of L, or anyone else; the other to warn of danger. Finally, the general would remain in Kraslitz only long enough to identify L. Within minutes he and L, with selected subordinates, would be in a car and on their way to Chomutov, some thirty miles away, where a villa had been fully equipped for just such a purpose.

The night was black. There was no moon, and an oppressive blanket of black clouds shut away the stars. There was no wind, either. Standing at one side of the seemingly empty square, the general heard all the unreal noises created by the ears of a waiting man. Now and then he glanced at his luminescent watch. The unlighted clock was as invisible as the tower in which it was ensconced. Darkness blotted out everything. The hands on the general's watch moved to midnight and beyond. No one came. The general began to berate himself silently. It was obvious now. The cat had spotted the mouse in the town square, but it had also spotted the waiting dogs. No one would come.

Then, 25 minutes past 12, the general saw a figure standing motionless in the center of the empty space, near the fountain. Neither the approach signal nor the danger signal had been sounded. The stranger had apparently not walked into the square. He just stood there. Then he turned toward the town clock that he could not see, raised an arm, and made an indistinct motion with the other hand. Immediately a young Czech officer emerged from a doorway, walked over to the man, and spoke a few words. The two approached the general, who now could see that the stranger was carrying a suitcase in either hand and a long roll of white paper under one arm. No greetings were exchanged. The three men walked swiftly to the car, parked in a near-by street. There a staff officer, drawn aside to report, said that neither the outer nor the inner ring had spotted anyone entering the square. The general ordered that the outer ring stay in place for three more hours.

The villa in Chomutov was comfortably furnished and warm. Among its facilities was an excellently equipped photographic laboratory. The experts and technicians were waiting.

In the living room L put down his suitcases and turned to the general. "This one," he said in fluent, accented Czech, "holds what you may keep. You'll have to photograph the contents of the other, which I must take back with me. I have to be over the border before dawn."

"We'll help you return," offered the general.

"Thank you, but I prefer that the car drop me near Kraslitz; I'll make my own way back. I know the border well."

The general heard the faint click of the shutter as a concealed camera photographed L while he spoke. He hoped that L had not heard it. Two Czech officers, both blown to the Abwehr, came into the room. One left with the suitcases and the roll of paper. The other, a colonel, remained. The three men sat down.

Identification, Study, and Control

The general leaned forward slightly. The time had come, clearly, to get this operation on the tracks. "Would you mind telling me your name?" he asked pleasantly.

"Yes," L said.

"Oh. Well, in that case, would you please state your occupation?"

"No."

"But this information is necessary, so that I can determine what possibilities exist, what you can do for us."

"You have my suitcases. They speak for themselves."

"Why do you need 100,000 Reichsmark?"

"For personal reasons."

"Is the money your only reason for offering to work for us?"

"No," said L, and now for the first time he looked less guarded and withdrawn. "My fiance, who comes from Lausitz, is of Slavic origin. I do not like the things that our beloved Fuehrer and his buddies have been saying about Slavs. In fact, there are several things that I do not like about our heroic leader and his little group of trained animals."

"Money and ideology do not usually go hand in hand this way," the general observed bluntly.

L smiled. "If it were not for the devil," he said, "who would believe in God?"

They fell silent, waiting for the analysts to report whether the stuff was jewels or junk. No one said anything until, on signal from a sergeant, the general excused himself and left the room. In the hallway the first analyst reported, and then the second. They were enthusiastic. The report on the defenses along the Saxony border tallied with information from other sources.

It was hard to believe that Czech intelligence now had in its possession a true copy of the German *Grenzschutz* plan in all its meticulous detail. The plan for border protection was in all the countries of Europe one of the most closely guarded secrets. The Germans had ordered a state of border alert in order to proceed with their mobilization on schedule and without detection; knowledge of the preparations for war would reveal to the Czechs the areas of main concentration of force, and therefore their intentions, not to mention other logical deductions. Yet the information on border defenses checked out.

The general re-entered the living-room, the border plan still in his hand. "This document is a hand-made copy, I presume?"

"Yes," said L. "I did it myself. Took me two months."

"It will require further study," said the general.

L grinned. "It's all there. And now that you have it, you may be interested to know that we have yours too." From his pocket he drew several sheets of paper and passed them to the general. The briefest of inspections was sufficient to reveal that it was the Czech border plan for Northeastern Bohemia and that it was wholly accurate.

"Where did you get this?" the general asked.

"I am sorry, but I shall not be safe unless you figure it out for yourself. I do assure you that this plan, like everything else I've brought, is genuine."

(Subsequent investigation led finally to the arrest of a captain of the Czech General Staff. He was hanged for treason.)

The general turned to other documents. Two contained original orders from Abwehrstelle Chemnitz concerning certain subversive activities of Sudeten Germans. The nature of the orders made it clear that the underground work was directed entirely from inside Germany, by the Abwehr. Moreover, it had been instigated by German intelligence and was financed by Abwehr funds. (These documentary proofs were shown to the Czech government, which in turn passed their contents to its Western allies, but the evidence was largely ignored in the prevailing atmosphere of appeasement.)

After four hours of talking with L and examining his materials, General Z had formed several conclusions about the German. First, he had a military background; it was apparent in his speech, in his bearing, and in the documents he had submitted. Next, he was an Abwehr officer or at least was closely associated with the German service. He knew Saxony well and specialized operationally in this border area. He was particularly knowledgeable in security matters. Apparently he had direct access to secret documents. He was intelligent.

Mentally General Z reviewed the standard data form for new agents: true name (s) in full, with all variants; aliases; exact place of birth; etc., etc., etc. Not one of the required blanks could be filled. There were only these deductions and conjectures.

So the general hired L. He paid him his 100,000 Reichsmarks. And feeling rather like a man who props up one splintered door at the entrance of a building wracked by war or revolution, he asked a little weakly, "I wonder if you would mind signing a receipt? The administrative people ..." His voice trailed off.

L grinned companionably. "I know," he said. "Sure, I'll sign it."

He picked up the receipt, made a motion, and returned it to the general. It now bore a block L in the lower right-hand corner.

Well, there was one consolation. In General Z's shop the auditors had no jurisdiction over operational expenses. Otherwise this first meeting with L would have been the last. And maybe it should be, the general

thought.

"Naturally," he said in firm tones, "our work is beginning in unorthodox fashion. I quite understand that it had to begin this way, or not at all. But I'm sure you'll agree with me that it would be best to--ah--regularize the circumstances in the future. We shall need one or two rules."

"Naturally," L agreed. "Three, in fact. The first is that you will not pass any requirement to me but will be content to review what I provide. If I were to try to carry out assigned tasks, I'd be practically certain to make mistakes. If I bring apples and peaches, and you want apples and pears, throw the peaches away. You needn't pay a groschen for them. But if I try to steal pears for you, I'm likely to lose my neck."

"Agreed," said the general. He did not even wince.

"The second rule," L continued, "is that you will not attempt to ascertain my identity or my vocation. If you do so, you are likely to direct the attention of German counterintelligence toward me."

Again General Z agreed.

"The last rule is that there will be no other rules."

"Unless mutually agreeable."

"All right."

It was near dawn now. There was time for only two more questions. "Tell me," said the general, "how did you manage to mail your letters from Chomutov?"

"I have my ways," said L.

"Well, what about coming across the border, then? Rather risky for someone who stresses security as much as you do." "I know the area," said L. He smiled at the general, not in the least insolently or tauntingly, but understandingly, as a friendly fencer might smile at a highly-trained opponent who looks clumsy against an unorthodox attack.

Arrangements were made, of course, for continued contact, personal

and postal. The next meeting was set. Two Czech officers took L by car to the outskirts of Kraslitz. He walked away from the road, into the last of the darkness.

But he reappeared on schedule, not once or a few times but through the years. His value remained extremely high. In fact, General Z and his staff, both in Prague and later in London, had no source of greater worth or reliability. The Allies, too, discovered that L was a pearl beyond price. One British general said, "When L reports, armies move."

Episodes in a Partnership

The value and validity of L's information clearly reduced, or even eliminated, the normal need to establish a source's identity and obtain as much personal data as possible. Unless, that is, the entire operation were aimed at one master stroke of deception. What if all this accurate reporting which clearly hurt the Nazi cause were intended solely to insure that when the big lie came, at the critical moment, it would be accepted unquestioningly? But in that event any prying at L's secrets would be certain to establish only that he was exactly what he seemed to be, an Abwehr officer.

Of course, as the contacts continued, the Czechs learned more about L. For one thing, the general and the agent began to discuss their respective needs and capabilities with growing frankness. And L became less guarded about himself as time went on. Gradually it was learned that he was indeed an Abwehr officer, stationed in Chemnitz and assigned to Abwehrstelle IV, in Dresden. He mentioned his age, 35, quite casually one day. But not until 1940, three years after the operation started, was his identity established by name, and then only because he chose to reveal it.

The major unsolved mystery remained his motivation. At the outset he had claimed an antifascist idealism while demanding at the same time large sums. He was in fact paid handsomely: he had received more than 800,000 RM up to the German occupation of Czechoslovakia. General Z was well aware that the swindler (especially the wartime swindler) customarily professes the highest motives while lifting your wallet; but L was no swindler. A mercenary, then, a salesman of secrets without

loyalties. Strictly cash-and-carry. Or was he truly antifascist? Perhaps he belonged to a small clique that was deliberately leaking information as one means of hastening der Fuehrer's defeat?

Whatever else he might be, he was engaging. Once in 1938, in the safehouse at Chomutov, L was smiling a little, as usual.

"How about doing me a favor?" he asked.

General Z was painfully conscious that a significant raise or bonus for L, already better paid than any other source, might place the G-2 budget squarely in the red. "What is it?" he asked cautiously.

"I have orders to establish four new W/T sets inside the CSR. Two go to Slovakia. The other two are supposed to be placed in Moravska Ostrava, in Moravia. I don't have any operators in the towns chosen by the brass for these four sets. I could recruit them, of course, and let you know who they are. I'd like to do it that way, the natural way. But the brass have put one of those blasted 'urgent' stamps on this one. The sets aren't supposed to go on the air now, you understand. They come up when you begin emergency mobilization. So how about giving me a hand?"

"Your realize the problems?"

"Well, I'll read them from our side, and you read them from yours."

The problems were indeed horrendous. The four radio sets could not be faked or quietly forgotten; the Abwehr might check at any time. The four operators --

"Let's say three," said the general. "Better to fail on one; nothing more suspicious than infallibility."

"No," said L. "I want all four. After all, my professional reputation is involved."

"All right; maybe they do think you're infallible. But these four men must be completely loyal to us and yet acceptable to you. And they must be

skilled already or else they will have to be trained. They can't be trained because I don't want to tell them the story, and your people would have to do the training. And you're going to want test runs, I suppose, which my people are likely to pick up."

But L remained cheerful and helpful. One by one the knotty problems were solved. Finally the four sets were all in place, and Czech intelligence gained a thorough knowledge of German methods and tactics in radio operations, German equipment, German codes and signals. Exploitation of the information led to the discovery of seven really German-controlled sets in the CSR. L's four sets could be used by the Czechs at will, to remain silent or to furnish deception. Finally, the severe pressure exerted upon L for speedy placement of the sets had been an unmistakable warning that the war was near.

This success seemed to make L even happier. By 1938, in fact, there was a genuine and mutual cordiality in the relationship. In the summer of that year occurred another episode which is worth describing because it reveals how constantly danger threatened the operation and also provides an added insight into L's character. At that time serious public disturbances, nearing the proportions of armed revolt, occurred in the Sudeten German area of the CSR. Units of the Czech Army had to be dispatched to the border regions to put down the rebellion. L continued to appear for scheduled meetings, punctual and serene. One night two Czech intelligence officers were returning him, as usual, to the outskirts of Krasnitz. The car was stopped by a barricade; armed men appeared; their leader, in guttural Czech, ordered the occupants to get out of the car and hand over their identity papers. There was no doubt that this was an insurgent group, and the lives of the two Czech officers would be in serious danger if they were searched and exposed as intelligence personnel.

In sharp German L ordered the leader of the group to step aside with him. At a distance he showed the leader a paper of some kind. The Sudeten German listened respectfully to L, saluted, and then shook hands, as though he could not decide whether civilian or military courtesy was required of him. L and his two associates got back into the car, armed now with the password for the return trip.

At the next meeting L laughed over the incident. "Nothing could be simpler," he said. "I showed him an official Abwehr document - without a name on it-and told him that your chaps were two of my best agents

who had just supplied me with excellent material and now were guiding me back to the border."

"You thought quickly. I want to thank you on behalf of my subordinates as well as myself. You saved their necks." "Mine was on the same block," said L.

Being human, L was not an ideal agent. It was obvious, for example, that he knew a great deal about Czechs who were spying for the Abwehr. In fact, he had promised at the outset to deliver precisely such information. But when General Z pressed him for it, he became evasive. "Do you remember hanging that General Staff captain because he was an Abwehr agent?" L asked sharply. "Every one of your arrests is thoroughly investigated by the III-boys [Abwehr counterintelligence]." L grimaced at the memory. "And not only the Abwehr, but the Gestapo and the Sicherheitsdienst as well." "But you did not identify that man," the general protested. "Exactly. That's why I'm still wearing a head."

Yet once, inexplicably, he volunteered the information that someone in Artillery Regiment No. 305 in Ctyry Dvory (Southern Bohemia) was a German agent. A lieutenant colonel of German parentage was arrested and confessed. "This time it was safe," said L.

He was proud and sensitive. At the time of one scheduled meeting other business had called General Z away for three days, and his deputy filled in. The deputy was a scholarly man, precise of habit.

L was coldly angry at his next meeting with the general. "Keep your good little boy away from me from now on," he snapped.

"I do not risk my hide this way to talk with fools and pedants."

"I am sure that he meant no offense."

"Of course not," said L, unmollified. "But he is forever saying, 'In such a case, one does thus and so. The rule to follow is this or that.' He doesn't appreciate our nice little operation, he isn't interested; he only wants to know what type of operation it is, so he can decide which of the three sets of rules he has memorized ought to apply here."

"Perhaps he is right," General Z argued. "Rules are the shorthand of experience."

"Rules of this kind are the crutches of feeble minds," retorted L. "The simple truth is that the world we live in is a chaos. And most minds are uncomfortable when confronted by chaos. Scatter blocks in front of a baby, and it makes patterns. Any child can do it, and does. So we impose on this whirling formlessness all kinds of imaginary structures, each different from the next. Confusion is too much for us; we create an arbitrary order. That's all right; but then we confuse our subjective patterns with reality and say that these structures are inherent, that they belong to the nature of reality."

The general drew the correct conclusion from this discourse. He decided that his deputy had somehow offended L's sensibilities.

Munich and After

The work of Major (later Colonel) L for the Czechoslovak G-2 falls into two periods: from March 1937 to the German invasion of the CSR in March 1939, and from then to the end of the war. Through both periods he was an invaluable source. The Czech army and government were kept steadily apprised, up to the time of the Munich conference, of German intentions and capabilities affecting Czechoslovakia. Moreover, this flood of reliable information served to reveal new gaps in Czech knowledge and thus to stimulate new efforts, both in positive collection and in counterintelligence. During the Munich crisis L appeared only once. Obviously he was very busy in connection with the German mobilization and final preparations for the forthcoming campaign; it was surprising that he could get away at all. Moreover, the increased tension had tightened the border controls on both sides. L looked completely relaxed, however, as he sat in his favorite armchair at the safehouse and calmly reported that unless the Czech government surrendered the Sudeten territory, the Germans would open fire.

"Der Fuehrer and his foot-kissers are convinced that there is not a country in Europe, including your ally France, that will come to your aid if Germany attacks. The main thrust will come from Lower Austria, where your fortifications are weakest."

L continued, explaining the German plan in detail. On the basis of his information the Czechs were able to inform the French High Command

that all but two of the first-class German divisions would be employed against the Czechoslovak army. The rest of the divisions along the border of France would be second and even third class, incompletely equipped. The entire length of the Polish border would be guarded by only two divisions. This concentration of force upon the CSR left the German flanks obviously exposed, although the Czechs were under no illusion that the Allies would counter a thrust against the CSR by an attack elsewhere. The solution, instead, was "peace in our time," and some months later the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia.

L did not appear during this interim. General Z assumed that Munich's elimination of Czechoslovakia as a military power had caused him to lose interest in any further collaboration. Moreover, the changing times had wrought collaborative changes in the Czech G-2; L now had increased reason to fear betrayal to German counterintelligence if he persisted. Perhaps, too, he suspected that there was little cash left in the Czech coffers. General Z reasoned that L either would cease to work against the Hitler government or would now seek support from a stronger, wealthier power.

General Z was wrong. L came, hurried but unagitated, to the safehouse on 2 March 1939 and told the houseman to arrange an immediate meeting with the general. The latter left all important conference and sped to Chomutov. Without preliminaries L reported that the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia would take place on 15 March 1939. He identified the German armies scheduled for participation, the commanding generals, the directions of advance, and the objectives. Armored and mechanized units were to reach Prague and Brno as fast as possible. Only token resistance, or none at all, was anticipated from the demobilized and demoralized Czech army. Slovakia would become an independent German protectorate. L provided a copy of a document which ordered police units advancing with the German armies to arrest all Czechoslovak intelligence officers and subject them to immediate interrogation. Of key interest were the identities of all Czech sources in Germany or reporting about Germany.

Thirteen days! And so much to do.

L was not smiling now. His face showed plainly his sympathy and deep concern. "Look here," he said, "what are your plans?"

"Oh, we have something cooked up, of course."

"Well, it's plain that you've got to clear out, unless you want to invite the Gestapo for tea. I don't advise France. Wherever you go, you'll be able to set up a safe meeting place or two, nicht?"

"Yes, I can give you an address in Holland, and another in Switzerland."

"Good." L wrote them down. "I promise to get word to you as soon as I can. And I want you to promise me something.."

"Whatever I can."

"See to it personally that any file material which identifies me, or even points toward me, is destroyed."

"It has already been taken care of," said the general.

The two men stood, then, and shook hands. "God protect you," said L in German. "This is not goodbye. I'll be in touch with you soon. Just get out in time to save your skin."

"Yes. Thank you."

"Not necessary. If you're stabbed, I bleed." But L's eyes, usually full of inquisitiveness or amusement, now showed his anxiety for his associate.

The general sat down again after L had gone. There was much to do. But L was, as always, a teasing enigma. Why did he risk his life to appear at such a time? And why did he volunteer to continue serving the Czechs even after his own people had driven them from their homeland? He could withdraw now. Even if the Czechs were so unscrupulous as to betray him, they would not profit thereby. He had been paid so well that he could now live comfortably throughout the war and for years thereafter. Or if he were greedy, he could seek out a major power and reap far handsomer rewards than could be offered by an impoverished government in exile. Perhaps the promise was empty, a gesture intended to console an associate in distress, offered without any intention of carrying it out. Yet his manner had not been one of pious sympathy; it was too sincere and friendly.

Still baffled, the general was driven back to Prague, where he reported his latest information to the Chief of Staff. But the report was met with

governmental skepticism. Collaborators had already infiltrated the government, and many of those free of this taint seemed half paralyzed by the headlong rush of events and the ominous clouds gathering. L's information was labeled incredible, and the general was forbidden to disseminate it. Under these circumstances he concentrated on plans for the security of his own staff. At 6 p.m. on 14 March 1939, six hours before the German armies crossed the border and twelve hours before they entered Prague, the general and twelve of his staff members left the capital in a plane made available by the British.

Intelligence-in-Exile, Impoverished

Czech operations were resumed from London through offices in Switzerland, Holland, Sweden, Denmark, and Poland. The ranks of Czech intelligence officers were augmented by a number of military attachés abroad who refused to serve a Hitler-dominated government.

The spring passed, and the summer, without word from L. Despite the refutation of his earlier doubts, General Z was by now convinced that he would never again see the Abwehr major, or hear from him. Undoubtedly, he thought one day as he attacked his morning mail, L had worried in the spring about the possibility that Czech documents or arrested Czech intelligence officers would reveal his identity and the story of his silent battle against the Nazis. Now that nothing had happened for nearly half a year, he probably felt safe. And freedom from this anxiety would be such a welcome relief that he would not be likely to put his neck into the same noose a second time.

Thus theorizing, General Z opened a letter from Switzerland. It came from L. He would soon arrive in the Hague, where he would like to meet General Z or even the once-hated deputy. He would reach the Hotel des Ludes at 2 p.m. on the afternoon of 4 September and would register there under the name of Braun.

On the appointed day L received the deputy cordially. "Please tell General Z," he said quietly, "that if he is interested, I am prepared to resume our association."

"I am sure he will be delighted."

"I've been transferred to Berlin, to the OKW Abwehr Abteilung [General Staff G-2]. I shall have plenty of opportunities to travel and can easily meet you. And I'll have some first-rate information for you."

The deputy looked a shade uncomfortable. "This is wonderful news, of course," he said, "but--"

"But what?"

"It's the money. You'll understand that things are not the same for us now. I do not mean that we cannot pay anything, but in comparison with the old days we--"

"I don't want pay," said L. "General Z has done very well by me; my only money problem now is to keep your generosity from endangering my security. So don't give it another thought."

The general's deputy was tempted to ask what caused this remarkable about-face on the part of an agent who had required about one million Reichsmark for two years' work. But his earlier encounter with L had made him cautious.

L turned over valuable and detailed information about German armored and mechanized divisions. The deputy agreed to his proposed arrangements for the next meeting, and returned to London to report.

General Z listened to the story with surprised delight. Was nothing that L did ever to conform to expected patterns of behavior? Now he did not want money, and was willing to serve an emigré organization that had lost much of its power along with its funds. Why? His fondness for a Slavic fiancé seemed a far from sufficient answer. If he were a burning anti-Nazi, was he operating all alone? Or did he perhaps tie in to some German underground group dedicated to Hitler's overthrow? Was he part of the dissident Canaris group? Was this group seeking a liaison channel to the Allies? But probably, in that event, it would have sought contact with the English, or another power, rather than the exiled

Czechs.

Now that contact had been reestablished, reporting flowed smoothly. Correspondence embroidered with secret writing went to cover addresses in neutral countries, usually Switzerland or Portugal. Personal meetings were also held in these countries and in Holland. One meeting was held in Constantinople. It is no exaggeration to say that L's reports, submitted on both military and intelligence subjects from 1937 to 1945, were of momentous significance. Here are a few examples:

- Accurate advance information about the German attack on Poland and plans for the subsequent campaign. This information included the now familiar fact that German SS units garbed in Polish uniforms would simulate an attack on German positions to furnish a pretext for war.
- The concentration of German armies for the invasion of Denmark and Norway.
- Prior warning of the German attacks upon Belgium and France, together with clear indications of the main lines of thrust.
- The opening of hostilities against the U.S.S.R.
- Plans for the German offensive in the Kharkov area in the spring of 1942.
- A series of reports on German order of battle.
- Reports on the movements of major German headquarters from one battlefield to another.
- Some information on preparations for the V-1 and V-2.
- Hitler's plans for Spain, which did not materialize.

L's written reports were almost always brief. Sometimes the secret text consisted of a single sentence. His oral reports were somewhat lengthier, but they too were pithy. During these personal meetings the friendship which had grown between General Z and the agent never led L into confidences or irrelevancies. In time the Czechs managed to organize from London a respectable agent network, but L's value continued to outweigh the combined work of the others.

At one meeting in Lisbon he eyed the general reproachfully. "It looks as though your British friends pried my name out of you," he said.

The observation was accurate. For quite a long time General Z had withstood the pressure of British questions about L's identity, but finally

things had reached the point where withholding it was no longer possible. "Some very smooth customer dropped in on me right after our last meeting and with an air of engaging frankness explained all the practical reasons why I should work for his firm directly instead of through an intermediary."

"Oh?" said the general. "And what did you tell him?"

"I told him that I didn't know him and that he had obviously made a mistake. You know, you might tell them to check with you before they come calling, and get your blessing."

"Perhaps you should agree to cooperate with our friends," said General Z. "They can pay you better than L"

"I've told you I don't want money. Look here: I've worked with you for about three years now, and I'm still alive." General Z said nothing more. It was typical of L to profess the purest self-interest as his sole motive. He would have blushed at the mention of loyalty. In fact, the general reflected, the idea of fealty has been out of fashion for a long time.

In January 1944 L wrote to ask for a meeting in Constantinople. He reported that he had been promoted to the rank of colonel and transferred to the Prague military command. His new assignment precluded frequent travel.

General Z discussed this change with his deputy. It had serious disadvantages. The transfer from Berlin took L away from the brain of the German Army. It also posed delicate problems of communication, for secret writing mailed from Prague would obviously be too risky. There were some advantages. The Protectorate had grown increasingly important to German military operations as the result of developments on both fronts. The war industry there was virtually unmolested by Allied bombing, so that the railroad network served the German High Command efficiently. Moreover, it had become clear by 1944 that the Allies were going to win the war. The exiled Czech government therefore needed information from Prague. Communications were the hardest problem. There was good radio contact between the Prague underground and London, but General Z felt that placing L in touch with the underground so that he could use its facilities was too risky. He anticipated, in fact, that L would reject such a proposal.

The deputy met L in Constantinople. The new Abwehr colonel proposed

that communications be maintained by radio; he was willing to use the Czech underground if his contacts with it were restricted to a single reliable man. General Z had previously selected such a man, a Colonel Studeny: It was decided that a separate code would be employed for L's reports. The time and place for future meetings with Studeny were chosen by L, and arrangements for dead drops were worked out in detail.

And so L began a new life. His assignment as chief of the counterintelligence section of the Prague military command, under General Toussaint, provided him a measure of protection. He usually knew in advance which persons were suspect to the Germans and which were slated for arrest. This knowledge was not infallible; the Gestapo and Sicherheitsdienst were often-and increasingly-on unfriendly terms with the Abwehr. And sometimes Gestapo arrests were not only unannounced but seemingly capricious, made for precautionary reasons, on suspicion rather than evidence.

But at least the operation was now conducted in accordance with the rules. Colonel Studeny had dropped all other underground activity and functioned solely as L's cut-out. There were no more chancy meetings in neutral countries. L had received no money for years, so the danger which an added and inexplicable income always brings had now evaporated. L and Studeny never met; they used a number of cleverly concealed drops. Perhaps it was a miracle that the operation had survived its cowboy years, but now L had for protection an intelligent application of the rules.

His reports continued to be very valuable, fulfilling also the new function of providing warning about forthcoming Gestapo arrests. The months rolled by, months in which the German armies met a series of major defeats. The end was in sight.

Mission Fulfilled

In October 1944 Colonel Studeny was arrested. It seems that he had been under surveillance for some time. And yet, surprisingly, the Gestapo had not found his dead drops; for if they had they would have arrested L as well. What they did find, when they searched Studeny, was

a piece of paper bearing questions obviously addressed to someone in the German headquarters at Prague. Colonel Studeny was interrogated under relentless torture. He died a hero, without revealing anything about the radio station or the identity of the German collaborator. L even participated, on behalf of the Abwehr, in the investigation of the case.

L's own arrest came in December. Its causes remained as obscure as those that had led to Studeny's apprehension. Perhaps an analysis of the requirements on Studeny's person had led, in turn, to investigation of the past activities of all logical suspects. Such a review would presumably have revealed L's presence near the Czech border before the war started, his specialization as intelligence officer in Czech matters, his extensive travels, and a number of other significant indicators. Or perhaps, after the attempt on Hitler's life in June 1944, L was one of the large number of Abwehr officers who fell under suspicion of complicity. Whatever the reasons for the arrest, the Gestapo used much the same barbarous methods on him as it had previously employed on Colonel Studeny.

There was one difference. L must have sometime read *The Arabian Nights*. At any rate he emulated Queen Scheherezade by prolonging his story, relating only one episode at a time, and ensuring that much additional investigation would be required before the next chapter could be drawn. from him.

In this way Colonel L sought to remain alive until the dying war reached its end and he, along with the other prisoners at Terezin, was set free. He nearly succeeded. In fact, this rational plan would almost certainly have worked except that fate is notoriously irrational. The SS guards at Terezin, growing more frightened daily as the Russians stormed closer and closer, got thoroughly drunk on their last afternoon as masters of the concentration camps. They decided to shoot forty prisoners in a final Teutonic orgy of death. By chance a sodden sergeant chose L as one of the forty.

As he was led from his barracks, he managed to exchange a few words with a Czech inmate not marked for execution. He told him to seek out General Z and tell him what had happened.

"Tell him it was a wonderful time. I'm sorry it stops here. And tell him--he always wanted to know why, so tell him that my reasons in life were just as logical as the reasons for my death."

And there you have it, thought General Z, pondering the story. Maybe no one can proceed by logic or rules alone; maybe nobody knows enough. I don't know why he was the best spy I ever knew. I don't know why he was a spy at all. I don't even know why I broke all the rules at the outset. One of my English friends once said that the prerequisite for intelligence is intelligence. He's wrong. The indispensable organ in this business is not the brain. It's the nose.

1 \$40,000 at that time.

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