

# The Assassination of Reinhard Heydrich

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*A tyrant's death at patriots' hands revealed as Operation Salmon of Czech Intelligence in exile.*

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On the twenty-ninth of May, 1942, Radio Prague announced that Reinhard Heydrich, Reichsprotektor of Bohemia and Moravia, was dying; assassins had wounded him fatally. On the sixth of June he died.

Though not yet forty at his death, the blond Heydrich had had a notable career. As a Free Corpsman in his teens he was schooled in street fighting and terrorism. Adulthood brought him a commission in the German navy, but he was cashiered for getting his fiancée pregnant and then refusing to marry her because a woman who gave herself lightly was beneath him. He then worked so devotedly for the Nazi Party that when Hitler came to power he put Heydrich in charge of the Dachau concentration camp. In 1934 he headed the Berlin Gestapo. On June 30 of that year, at the execution of Gregor Strasser, the bullet missed the vital nerve and Strasser lay bleeding from the neck. Heydrich's voice was heard from the corridor: "Not dead yet? Let the swine bleed to death."

In 1936 Heydrich became chief of the SIPO, which included the criminal police, the security service, and the Gestapo. In 1938 he concocted the idea of the Einsatzgruppen, whose business it was to murder Jews. The results were brilliant. In two years these 3,000 men slaughtered at least a million persons. In November of that year he was involved in an event that in some inverted fashion presaged his own death. The son of a Jew

whom he had deported from Germany assassinated Ernst von Rath in Paris. In reprisal Heydrich ordered a pogrom, and on the night of November ninth 20,000 Jews were arrested in Germany.

In 1939 the merger of the SIPO with the SS Main Security Office made Heydrich the leader of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt. In this capacity he ordered and supervised the "Polish attack" on Gleiwitz, an important detail in the stage setting for the invasion of Poland on September first. It was he who saw to it that twelve or thirteen "criminals" dressed in Polish uniforms would be given fatal injections and found dead on the "battlefield." It was probably he who chose the code name for these men--Canned Goods.

At this time Bohemia and Moravia had already been raised from independent status to that of Reichsprotectorat, with Baron von Neurath, Germany's now senile former foreign minister, designated the Protector--of the Czechs from themselves, presumably. But a greater honor was in store for them. On 3 September 1941 von Neurath was replaced by SS Obergruppenfuehrer Heydrich. The hero moved into the Hradcany Palace in Prague and the executions started, 300 in the first five weeks. His lament for Gregor Strasser became his elegy for all patriotic Czechs: "Aren't they dead yet? Let them bleed to death."

He had come a long way in thirty-eight years. The son of a music teacher whose wife was named Sarah, Reinhard had gone on trial three times because of Party doubts about the purity of his Aryan origin. Now, as chief of the RSHA, which he continued to run from Czechoslovakia, he was Hangman to all occupied Europe. His power was such that he could force Admiral Canaris to come to Prague and at the end of May, 1942, sign away the independence of the Abwehr and accept subordination to the Sicherheitsdienst. It was his moment of sweetest triumph. A few weeks later he was dead, and Himmler pronounced the funeral oration calling him "that good and radiant man."

So much for the story we all know, and on to questions left unanswered by it. Who were Heydrich's assassins? Who could successfully plan his death? Was the motive simply revenge for suffering? How was it accomplished? And the hardest question of all, was it a good thing? Here, for the first time, are the answers to all these but the last, and on that question stuff for pondering.

# Need Mothers an Invention

When Heydrich took charge of Bohemia and Moravia, the Czechs learned what it means to live under a master of suppression. The war fronts were far away: it was the period of smashing German successes in the Balkans, Scandinavia, France, and the USSR. The Czechs heard little that Heydrich did not want them to hear. Their underground movement was systematically penetrated and all but destroyed. On October third of 1941, for example, the capture of a single Czech radio operator by Heydrich's men led to the arrest of 73 agents working for Moscow. Underground radio contact with London was monitored. The Czechs were losing heart.

In London the strength of the resistance in all occupied countries was periodically reviewed, and the countries were listed in the order of the assistance each gave the Allied cause. In 1941 Czechoslovakia was always ranked at the very end. Eduard Benes, its president-in-exile, was deeply embarrassed. He was also gravely concerned that the Allies, if his people failed to fight, might give short shrift to any Czech claims after the war. He told his intelligence chief, General Frantisek Moravec, to order an intensification of resistance activity. But it was difficult enough to get even a parachuted courier or coded radio message past the wary Heydrich. Nothing happened in response.

Then President Benes hit upon the idea of contriving to assassinate a prominent Nazi or Quisling inside the tight dungeon of the Protectorate; such a bold stroke would refurbish the Czech people's prestige and advance the status of their government in London. The German retaliation would be brutal, of course, but its brutality might serve to inflame Czech patriotism.

Who should be the target? General Moravec first nominated the most prominent of the Czech collaborators, an ex-colonel whose fawning subservience to his Teutonic masters left the London Czechs nauseated and ashamed. The general also had a personal reason for his choice: the name of the Czech Quisling was Emanuel Moravec, a coincidence that had plagued the general for years. But Emanuel, called the Greasy, was not the right man for the purpose. He was not well known abroad, and Czech prestige would not be raised significantly by crushing a worm. The Germans, too, were likely to regard his death as no great loss; he was

only a minister of education, easy to replace, and even the Nazis despised traitors.

Heydrich was totally different. His unique combination of: brilliance and brutality had no peer even in the Third Reich. He had been personally responsible for the execution of hundreds of Czechs and the imprisonment of thousands. The shot that killed him would be heard in every capital of the world. There could be no other choice. General Moravec so recommended, President Benes agreed, and the planning of Operation Salmon began in tense secrecy.

## **Wanted: Men for Martyrdom**

The first problem was finding one or two men who could and would do the job. It must have seemed to General Moravec, at least at the outset, an almost impossible task. The many Czech politicians in London were preoccupied in the unending scramble for posts in the provisional government. There were quite a few Czech businessmen in England, but most of them were too busy making a fast koruna to be interested. There were brave and patriotic Czechs serving in fighter and bomber wings attached to the Royal Air Force, but the Air Ministry would never let them go. And so the choice narrowed to the single infantry brigade of about 2,500 men encamped near Cholmondly.

This pool of prospects had its own disadvantages. An encampment of 2,500 is like a town of that size: everyone knows everyone else and is full of curiosity about everything that anyone does. Here this inquisitiveness was also undissipated by outside contacts, the Czech soldiers speaking little or no English and having few interests beyond the limits of the camp. Each transfer, trip, or trifle thus became news, something to discuss and analyze.

For screening purposes the personnel files of the brigade contained only what each man had told about himself or, in rare instances, about others whom he had known earlier, at home. There was no way to check police files, run background or neighborhood checks, or otherwise obtain independent verification of loyalties. Under such circumstances it is a tribute to General Ingr, Minister of Defense in the exiled government, to General Moravec, and to their subordinates that of 153 parachutists

flown from England and dropped into Czechoslovakia, only three proved turncoats.

How many people would have to know? President Benes, General Ingr, General Moravec and his deputy, Lt. Col. Stragmueller, and Major Fryc, chief of operations. Of these, President Benes and General Ingr needed to know only the purpose of the operation and the names of the men chosen to carry it out. Others, required for instruction, would necessarily know that certain men were entering Czechoslovakia to carry out a clandestine action, but not their precise intent. Four instructors would be needed, experts respectively in parachute work, in the terrain of the area, in cover, documentation, clothing, and equipment, and in commando techniques.

Several British officers, representatives of MI-6, would participate in this training. The crew of the plane carrying the men into Czechoslovakia would know where and when they were going, though not their identities or mission. And finally, a large number of men in the brigade personally acquainted with the candidates could be expected to make guesses of varying degrees of accuracy as the preparations for assassination progressed.

Because the number of persons who would be partly or fully informed was so unavoidably much too large, it was essential that the men finally chosen should be as discreet as they were brave. Of the 2,500 Czech soldiers in the brigade some 700, most of them volunteers, were already engaged in parachute training under British instruction. Two officers were assigned to the brigade, one to the parachutists and the other to the ground troops, ostensibly as aides but actually as spotters. These two officers knew only that they were to choose the best candidates for a dangerous assignment.

Men recommended by the spotters were interviewed singly by Lt. Col. Stragmueller. Some were asked whether they would volunteer for special training. Almost all those asked agreed, and they were sent in groups of ten for vigorous physical conditioning and thorough schooling in commando tactics--the use of a wide assortment of small arms, the manufacture of home-made bombs, ju-jitsu, cover and concealment, and the rest. During this intensive drilling the ten-man teams were kept under close observation. It was essential to discover not only the bravest and most capable but also--it having been decided that the assassination was a two-man job--those who worked best in pairs.

Other considerations also came into play; men from Prague, for example, were automatically eliminated because of the danger of recognition after arrival.

By now the choice had narrowed to eight men in half as many groups. General Moravec visited these four groups, along with all the others, on a regular schedule. On his orders the instructors drew the eight candidates aside one at a time and passed each a piece of juicy, concocted information with the warning not to mention it to anyone. Each tidbit was different. Soon two new rumors were circulating, and two men were eliminated. One of the remaining six was disqualified by marriage; another was suddenly incapacitated by illness.

General Moravec interviewed the remaining four. Two of them, non-coms, met all tests and were also good friends. Their names were Jan Kubis and Josef Gabcik. Kubis was born in Southern Moravia in 1916. After some ten years of schooling he had gone to work as an electrician. He had been in the Czech Army since 1936 and had fought in France in 1940. His excellent physical condition made his 160 pounds, at 5'9", look lean. Slow of movement, taciturn, and persevering, he was also intelligent and inventive.

Gabcik was a year younger than Kubis. An orphan from the age of ten, he too had left school at sixteen. After working as a mechanic for four years, he had entered the Czech Army in 1937. He had been given the Croix de Guerre in France in 1940. He was strong and stocky, an excellent soccer player, and like Kubis lean for all his 150 pounds on a 5'8" frame. His blue eyes were expressive, and his whole face unusually mobile. Talented and clever, good-natured, cheerful even under strenuous or exasperating circumstances, frank and cordial, he was an excellent counterpoise for the quieter, more introverted Kubis.

Both men had gone through the arduous training without illness or complaint. Both spoke fluent German. Both were excellent shots. General Moravec spoke separately to each of them. He explained that the mission had the one purpose of assassinating Heydrich. He stressed to each of the young men the great likelihood that he would be caught and executed.

Escape from encircled Czechoslovakia after Heydrich had been killed would be practically impossible. And the survival of either, hiding inside the country until the war ended, was extremely unlikely. The probability

was that both would be killed at the scene of action.

Although neither man had relatives or friends in Prague, both had relatives in the countryside; and the general reminded them of what had happened to the family of a Czech sent from London on a successful clandestine mission to Italy. Somehow the Gestapo had learned his identity and executed all of his relatives in Czechoslovakia, even first and second cousins. "Please understand," General Moravec told each of them, "that I am not testing you now. You have proved that you are brave and patriotic. I am telling you that acceptance of this mission is almost certainly acceptance of death--perhaps a very painful and degrading death--because I do not believe that the man who tries to kill Heydrich can succeed if the awful realization that he too will die comes too late, and unnerves him. I have another reason, too: if you make your choice with open eyes, I shall sleep a little better."

First Gabcik and then Kubis agreed, thoughtfully but without hesitation or bravado. Both were quietly proud to have been chosen. The general then brought them together and explained that from that moment on they would be separated from all the rest, the final preparations would be made in strictest seclusion. If at any moment either man felt that he could not go through with the assassination, he was bound in duty and honor to say so immediately, without false shame.

They glanced at each other. "No," said Gabcik. "We want to do it." Kubis just nodded.

## **Dress Rehearsal and Curtain Up**

Some training was still needed. Kubis had to learn to ride a bicycle. Both had to know Prague as though they had spent years walking its streets and alleys. Both needed instruction in withstanding hostile interrogation. Both had to memorize all the details of separate cover stories which could be "confessed," after initial resistance, to the Gestapo. On the last day of training they were each given a lethal dose of cyanide and told how to conceal it on their persons. It was the last defense against torture.

"One more point," General Moravec told them. "Under no circumstances-

-and I mean none at all--is either of you to get in touch with the underground, directly or indirectly. You are absolutely on your own. The underground is infested with informants; Heydrich has done his usual masterful job. For this reason we have not sent out one word about you, even to the most trusted leaders there. If anyone approaches you and says that he comes from the underground, he is a provocateur. Treat him as such."

The men nodded.

"Don't forget," the general insisted. "And now, a review. Kubis, where does Heydrich have his office?"

"Prague Palace."

"Show me on the map."

Kubis did so without hesitation.

"Gabcik, where do you land?"

"Here, sir," said Gabcik, pointing to another spot some 50 kilometers southeast of Prague, an area chosen because it was wooded, rolling, and offered good approaches to the city.

"Kubis, what do you do first, after touching ground and removing parachutes?"

"We destroy all traces of the descent, sir."

"Do you proceed to the palace Gabcik?"

"No. It is too heavily guarded. All visitors are thoroughly checked."

"His private residence?"

"The same, sir."

"Kubis, where do you go?"

"Here, sir." Kubis' finger pointed to a spot half way between Prague and the village of Brezary.

"Gabcik, when does Heydrich pass this spot?"

"Daily, sir, going into the city, and at night on his return. We shall observe the time."

"Why have we chosen this particular spot on the road?"

"Sir, there is a sharp curve. His car and the motorcycles must slow down to twenty kilometers."

"How many motorcycles, Kubis?"

"Probably two, sir. We'll find out."

"Good. Now remember--don't rush it. Don't use pistols in any case. If there is any chance that you can't bring it off with the bomb or the machine gun on first try, wait and pick a better spot for the next day. But don't delay too long. Now, a last dry run."

The two men left. General Moravec waited for ten minutes, summoned his car, and asked to be driven down a certain country road at normal speed. He sat in the back, with binoculars, closely scanning all the foliage and other cover wherever the car slowed for a curve. Then he drove back and waited. Soon Gabcik and Kubis reappeared.

"Well?" the general demanded. "Did you kill me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good."

The escape was planned with equal care. The men would make their way, mostly on foot, to Slovakia, where the German pressure was far less severe. Gabcik, who knew the mountains of Slovakia well, had chosen a safe area where none of his friends or relatives lived. For food they were on their own.

Early April was all fog, wind, and rain. Normally Czech, Polish, and Canadian crews took turns flying paratroopers over Czechoslovakia, but General Ingr had made sure that a Czech team, Captain Anderle and his crew, would be rested and ready for a good day. The fifteenth, at last, dawned clear and still. General Moravec walked to the plane with his

two chosen men. They stood at the bottom of the ramp. He looked at them, and they at him, in silence. No speeches, no cheek-kissing, no wet eyes. Gabcik and Kubis seemed as impassive as two farmers starting the day's work. They shook hands briefly.

The general went into the plane and briefed its captain and crew. When he came out, he found Gabcik suddenly flustered. "Sir, may I speak to you for a moment in private?"

So, the general thought sadly. Well, better for it to happen now. We shall have to send him to the Isle of Man until the war ends. "Of course, Gabcik," he said, and moved some yards away.

Gabcik followed, uncomfortable. He said, "Look, sir, I don't know how to tell you this, I'm ashamed. But I have to tell you. I've run up a bill at a restaurant, the Black Boar. I'm afraid it's ten pounds, sir. Could you have it taken care of? I hate to ask, but I haven't got the money, and I don't want to leave this way."

"All right," Moravec managed. "Anything else?"

Gabcik was relieved. "No, sir," he said, "except don't worry. We'll pull it off, Kubis and I."

They climbed in, then, and the plane started down the runway. The general thought of all the courageous men he'd known. "No," he said out loud. "None of them were braver." He felt full of pride and pain.

## **Death Rides in Spring**

Captain Anderle came back on schedule. He reported that the two men had teased his crew about having to go back to the strangeness of England instead of coming home. At the command they had jumped unhesitatingly.

So the waiting started. Gabcik and Kubis had not taken a transmitter or any means to report back: if they were successful everybody would know it. None of the anxious witting talked about the operation. On the tenth day Captain Anderle was shot down and killed in an air battle at

Malta. "I am not a superstitious man," General Moravec told himself.

Two weeks, three weeks, four. It must have gone wrong. "If they failed," said General Ingr, "let us hope they failed completely, without getting anywhere near Heydrich."

Six weeks, and May 29, Friday afternoon. Prague radio, indignant, reported that Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich had been severely wounded by murderers in a criminal, dastardly attempt upon his life that very morning. They had thrown a bomb into the Protector's car. Two men had been seen leaving the spot on bicycles. The search for them was under way. They would be found.

The news exploded in the international press. At home and abroad, Czechs stood a little straighter. Several "authentic inside stories" were printed. The favorite was that the Czech underground had struck. Scarcely less popular was the tale that the Abwehr had killed Heydrich because of the humiliating agreement he had just forced Canaris to sign.

At Cholmondy the brigade buzzed. The absent Gabcik and Kubis were talked about, of course; but they had been gone for a long time. And so had many more paratroopers dispatched on one mission or another. There was no reason to pick out these two over others who had never returned. Lieutenant Opalka, for example. He had been gone for five months now. And three men had left the camp just a week before Heydrich was killed.

The battalion talked of little else. One sergeant, a little older than the others, was convinced that the man who took care of Heydrich was a non-com named Anton Kral.

"Kral?" repeated one of the others. "Why Kral? He's been gone as long as Opalka."

"I don't know," the sergeant answered. "It's just a feeling. Remember how tall and dark he was, and silent?"

"And brave," said another. "He fought well in France."

"Well," shrugged a third, "it could be anybody."

Perhaps the sergeant knew more than the others about Anton Kral. Kral

had been picked by General Moravec to be parachuted with Lieutenant Opalka into an area northeast of Prague. Their mission was to get in touch with the underground there to deliver instructions. Nothing had been heard from either of them since their departure, and they were presumed lost.

In Prague, Heydrich was dying. The three physicians summoned from Berlin--Gebhardt, Morell, and Brandt--tried hard, but could not save him. Himmler was there too, full of public sorrow, privately perhaps rejoicing. He had his funeral oration down pat before the sixth of June, when Heydrich died. And he seized the chance to direct personally the search for the assassins and the massive reprisals.

First, martial law was proclaimed over all Bohemia and Moravia. A rigid daily curfew at sundown was imposed. Throughout the land public announcements proclaimed that anyone who harbored the assassins or otherwise aided them in any way would be executed summarily and without trial. The illegal possession of arms and even approval of assassination in principle were declared capital crimes. Himmler's chief executive in the subsequent action was the notorious Sudeten German, Deputy Reichsprotektor Karl Hermann Frank.

The mass arrests and mass executions began. Czechs were killed without investigation, without trial, even without interrogation, usually on the basis of some vague or distorted denunciation. For twenty days the slaughter continued. But neither terror nor the special Gestapo details dispatched to Prague could bring the assassins to light.

Then Himmler and Frank had a new idea. Quite arbitrarily, they chose a small settlement near Kladno, fifteen miles from Prague. On 9 June Colonel Rostock marched a military detail into this village of the now memorable name, Lidice. Every male not unquestionably a child was slaughtered. Even the few who chanced to be absent were run down and killed--two hundred men and boys in all. The women were driven into concentration camps. The children were shipped off to Germany. Everything above ground, all structures, were razed, and the ground was ploughed. Lidice became a blank, a field of regular brown furrows.

And still there was no trace of the killers of Heydrich. So they did the same thing to another hamlet, Lezaky, in southwestern Bohemia.

The killers were not found.

On 24 June Frank officially announced that if the assassins were not turned over in 48 hours, the population of Prague would be decimated. He also used a carrot--1,000,000 marks for anyone giving information leading to the death or capture of the wanted men. This worked, apparently. On 25 June, Radio Prague reported that the culprits had been discovered in the basement of the St. Bartholomeus Orthodox Church on Reslova Street. Encirclement was under way and capture only a matter of hours. In London the listeners knew that Gabcik and Kubis were fighting back.

The following day the radio said the fight was over; the assassins were dead. There were four of them, the announcer said flatly, one Gabcik, one Kubis, a certain Opalka, and a man known as Josef Valcik.<sup>1</sup>

In England Opalka was known, of course. So was Valcik, a reliable member of the Prague underground. But what were they doing in the same cellar with Gabcik and Kubis, sharing their hopeless last stand? General Moravec, at least, felt certain that his men would not have violated his orders and made contact with the underground. And no word had gone to the underground about Gabcik and Kubis.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the two teams had met by chance at the church, driven to the same sanctuary because the priests were known to be patriotic and because all four were desperate.

Even now the Nazis went on murdering. The paralytic SS General Kurt Daluege succeeded Heydrich. During the trial that preceded his execution in Prague in 1946, he admitted that 1,331 Czechs were executed, 201 of them women, in reprisal. From another source it has been established that during this period 3,000 Jews were taken from the Terezin ghetto and exterminated. No one knows how many died in concentration camps. A sober estimate is that at least 5,000 Czechs were killed to avenge the death of one murderous Nazi. Among them were all the priests of St. Bartholomeus, not one of whom would say a word about their guests.

## **Was It Worth This Price?**

In London the jubilation of the Czech leaders gave way to doubt as the

murderings continued, and then to recrimination. At first President Benes would have none of it. He listened to Radio Prague as day after day, and several times a day, the numbers and names of the executed were methodically announced. "Why don't they fight?" he asked his staff. "Why don't they die as partisans and men, in the forests and the mountains, taking as many Germans with them as they can? Look at the Poles, the Yugoslavs, the French. They don't line up at the scaffold, waiting patiently like sheep." He was unmoved by arguments about the terrain, the proximity of France to England, the density of the population in Bohemia and Moravia. "Why don't they fight?" he asked again. "It's their duty." Whatever the answer, it was plain by now that one of the hoped-for results, the stiffening of the Czech will to resist, had not been achieved.

In Czech political circles the intensity of criticism mounted, in direct ratio to the mounting toll of German reprisals at home. Although President Benes remained privately convinced that the execution of Heydrich had been both justified and necessary, he began to feel a need for modifying his views, publicly. He reacted to the pressure, finally, by announcing that General Moravec had planned and supervised the assassination; and the accusations of irresponsibility from the political group were turned on the intelligence chief. Those who had lost relatives and friends at home were especially bitter.

As the war went on, General Moravec found that his mind would not stop mulling over the profound questions of right and wrong that attend all action but become sharpest, most nagging, when the action has terrible consequences for others. There was no doubt that the killing of Heydrich had served its intended prestige purpose. In this sense it had been a major success. For a time, at least, Czechoslovakia had jumped from last place to first in the esteem of all the anti-fascist world. Even the suffering of the people, even Lidice and Lezaky, served this cause. But the aim of awakening resistance had been a mirage. The people were not fighting, were not earning the acclaim. They would be remembered as martyrs, not heroes, even though there were heroes--Gabciks and Kubises and Opalkas--among them.

Who had killed these 5,000 civilians? The Germans? General Moravec himself? The civilians at home, inviting slaughter with their meekness? As the toll of war dead mounted into the millions, the 5,000 shrank to perspective and seemed almost insignificant; the war killed thousands every day, women and children as well as soldiers. Yet right and wrong

are not a matter of quantity. The same questions would have come whispering in his ear at night, like old ghosts, if only the brave assassins had died because of Reinhard Heydrich's death.

Modern war, total war, kills everyone indiscriminately; women and children drop as fast as soldiers. Millions were dying to destroy the German instruments of war. And clearly Heydrich had been one of the most effective of those instruments. When Hitler escaped the twentieth-of-July bomb in 1944, the general wondered whether the German anti-fascists would have been able to strike even this unsuccessful blow if Heydrich had been alive to trap them before they could act. Was it wrong to have assassinated Heydrich and right to try to kill Hitler? No one who believed that fascism had to be destroyed felt anything but admiration for the Yugoslav partisans, the French Maquis, the brave Norwegians and Poles--for all the people who fought and killed Germans. The Czechs at home were not fighting, so the Czechs abroad had to do the job for them.

It might have been wrong if the target had been the one he first considered, Emanuel Moravec. This would have had the taint of personal motives. But there was no such taint in the assassination of Heydrich, and it had the official and unqualified approval of President Benes. Of course, the general thought wryly, I cannot proclaim this fact today. It is the duty of subordinates to step back when their plans succeed and come forward into the limelight if their plans fail.

Finally, before the war ended, the self-questioning, the drilling inside, apparently hit bed rock. General Moravec found a firm position, he later explained, in the truth that no one ever gets something for nothing. If Czechoslovakia had rejected the Chamberlain capitulation at Munich, a real underground would have been born of its thus-affirmed integrity. Men must die that countries live. If enough of them die at once, the country may be lucky enough to coast for a few generations. But coasting builds no muscles. The cost of the free ride is strength, and the cost of sapped strength is freedom. So in the last analysis you have to kill a Heydrich not because he needs killing but because coasting along with his kind will kill you and everybody else.

By the time the war was over, General Moravec felt sure that the assassination of Heydrich was not a sombre page of history. It was a page that he could turn back to with satisfaction, he and his countrymen and all the rest of us. Turn back to, read again, and know

that it was right.

## Dregs of the Bitter Cup

At last the war ended, and General Moravec went home to Prague. Everywhere in the city was a kind of gladness; it was over now, and all were thinking of the future. Everywhere, it seemed, except at General Moravec's home, where the callers apparently could not forget the past. They asked, why their fathers and mothers had been executed. They wanted to know if the former general still thought he'd done the right thing. His doubts returned. These people saw him not as the executioner of Heydrich but as the killer of their kin. This post-war period in Prague, he said later, was the most miserable of his life. The men who, now that the war was over, called themselves the leaders of the underground also came to ask questions and pronounce judgment. They said that the Heydrich operation was conceptually faulty. They said they should have been consulted in advance, they never would have permitted so blatant an error. The general, asked them to give a detailed account of their underground activities and a signed estimate of their contribution to the war against fascism, and they went away.

One day a different caller came. He said that the traitor who delivered Gabcik and Kubis to the Gestapo had been discovered and interrogated. He had confessed to a revolutionary tribunal, but he stubbornly refused to give details. His name was Alois Kral.

Kral! So the general's careful choice of men had produced two heroes, and one villain to seal their fate. He put on his coat; he would visit the man in prison and talk to him. He recognized Kral as soon as he saw him; the four full years had not changed him. Tall, swarthy, taciturn, he squinted up at Moravec and said, "Greetings, brother."

"Brother?"

"I killed two Czechs. You killed five thousand. Which of us hangs?"

So it went throughout the questioning. Kral kept most of his secret to himself, not to save his neck but because he knew he couldn't. Besides, the revolutionary tribunal was not predisposed to patient inquiry. It

consisted of one professional lawyer and four lay judges on the bench, a prosecutor, and a defense attorney appointed ex officio. All of them had been chosen by the Citizens' Committee, which in turn was dominated by the Communists. Each actor in the play had memorized his part, knowing that the function of the court was not to serve justice but to kill Kral. The hand-picked audience was fanatical, a lynch mob. Neither actors nor spectators cared about the fate of Gabcik and Kubis; they were all preoccupied with the million marks Alois Kral had collected for his act of betrayal. While their closest relatives and friends were dying and they themselves were suffering, Kral had been living like a king. There was the unforgivable crime--not murder or treachery, but his comfort in the midst of their pain.

In France Kral had fought well. In England he could not have been serving as a German stool-pigeon, because two operations he knew enough about to wreck had been successful. There was even evidence that he had not betrayed Lt. Opalka to the Gestapo, or any of his underground contacts. Why had he turned traitor at the end? General Moravec went to see him several times. The best he could get was a fuller record of events.

Kral said that Gabcik threw the bomb, Kubis covering with the machine gun. Then the two rode their bicycles straight to the church, where they were given sanctuary. The presence of Lt. Opalka and Valcik was accidental. The four hoped that the storm would subside, and when the intense searching was called off they could escape to Slovakia. Kral hinted that he found out about the fugitives from a prostitute; he was vague at this juncture.

"But why did you tell the Nazis?" asked the general.

"Maybe for the million marks," said Kral. "Or maybe I thought it was better that two men die than two thousand. What does it matter?"

At the church, the Gestapo had shouted to come out, to surrender. The men answered with the machine gun, and later with their pistols. The cellar of the two-hundred-year-old church was a fortress not to be breached or taken by storm. Finally the Germans flooded it. It was then that all four men, out of ammunition and near drowning, swallowed their cyanide. The Gestapo officers reported the great victory; Alois Kral was paid his million marks and lived in luxury for three years.

The next morning General Moravec got up early. He wanted to have a

last talk with Kral and get the rest of the story, how Kral found out and why he informed. But before he could leave the house a member of the Citizens' Committee, a leading Communist, came to see him.

"Let's have a little chat," the visitor said, removing his coat.

"I was just leaving."

"It's no use," said the Communist, sitting down and lighting a cigarette. "We've given orders that you're not to be admitted at the jail any more."

"Why?"

"Why do you want to talk to Kral? You have no status in this matter."

"I want to find out the truth."

"We know what you want. You want to keep your glamorous story of the Heydrich case alive. Don't try to pretend that you care about Gabcik and Kabis, or whatever their names were, or Kral either. You just want people to believe that your so-called government in London was a band of heroes and patriots. You're not getting away with it. Keep away from the jail, or we will let you in. There's still room."

The general did not say anything.

"And stop sniffing around trying to get records and names of other people to talk to." The visitor got up. "In fact, former General Moravec, it would be a very fine idea for you to get out of here. I think we understand each other?"

"I understand you," the general said. "Good day."

He knew it was no use to go to the jail, but he did anyway. He was turned away so rudely that he was surprised to be admitted to the trial. It lasted about five minutes. Gabcik and Kubis were scarcely mentioned; Kral was tried and condemned for collaboration with the Gestapo. It was a Marionette show. But just at the end an impromptu line brought it momentarily to incongruous life.

"Why did you do it?" the chief justice recited. "For their rotten German marks?"

"One million of them," Kral retorted. "How much are the Russians paying

you?"

They killed him, of course; General Moravec watched the execution. He could not help thinking that Kral was dying for the wrong reason--not for his crime, but for Communist ends. Maybe that's really what keeps bothering me about Heydrich's death, he reflected. Did we kill him and trigger 5,000 other deaths in a just cause, or out of political ambition? Is any human motive ever untainted?

At least the two who did the killing, Gabcik and Kubis, came close to purity of motive. They had been healthy young men, not born martyrs in search of death. They had not killed for pride, greed, envy, anger, or ambition. They had killed like dedicated surgeons removing a cancerous mass. They must have felt deeply that the play had to unfold and that their business was not to choose the actors or criticize the choice of theater but only to play their ordained parts as best they could. Of all forms of courage, theirs was the highest because it is the most humble.

As he walked away, General Moravec met the Communist functionary who had forbidden him to visit Kral.

"Will you please tell me where Gabcik and Kubis are buried?" he asked politely.

"Nowhere," came the sardonic answer. "There are no graves. You foot-kissers of the British are not going to have that excuse to build a statue and hang wreaths. Czech heroes are Communists."

General Moravec felt tired. There were more Heydrichs than a man could destroy. Fascist Heydrichs died and Communist Heydrichs took their places and there was no end to it, as long as people coast.

Some day, perhaps, the wheel would turn and Czechs would grow strong again, and be free to remember the strength of Josef Gabcik and Jan Kubis.

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1 There are conflicting records of this name; the *New York Times* gives Walicikoff.

2 In an unpublished manuscript, *War Secrets in the Ether*, Wilhelm F. Flicke asserts, "The attempt upon the life of Heydrich had been planned and directed over [the Czech underground to London] network. That was

a big mistake on the part of the English and Czechs because it afforded the German radio defense a complete disclosure not only of the plot itself and those directly participating but also of all the connections within the Czech resistance movement." This statement is almost wholly wrong. It is true that Heydrich and his spies had penetrated the Czech underground thoroughly. But radio was not used for Operation Salmon, and the network inside Czechoslovakia had no hand in planning or directing Heydrich's assassination. The Germans had no advance warning. And it was not merely an "attempt"; Gabcik and Kubis did kill Heydrich.

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