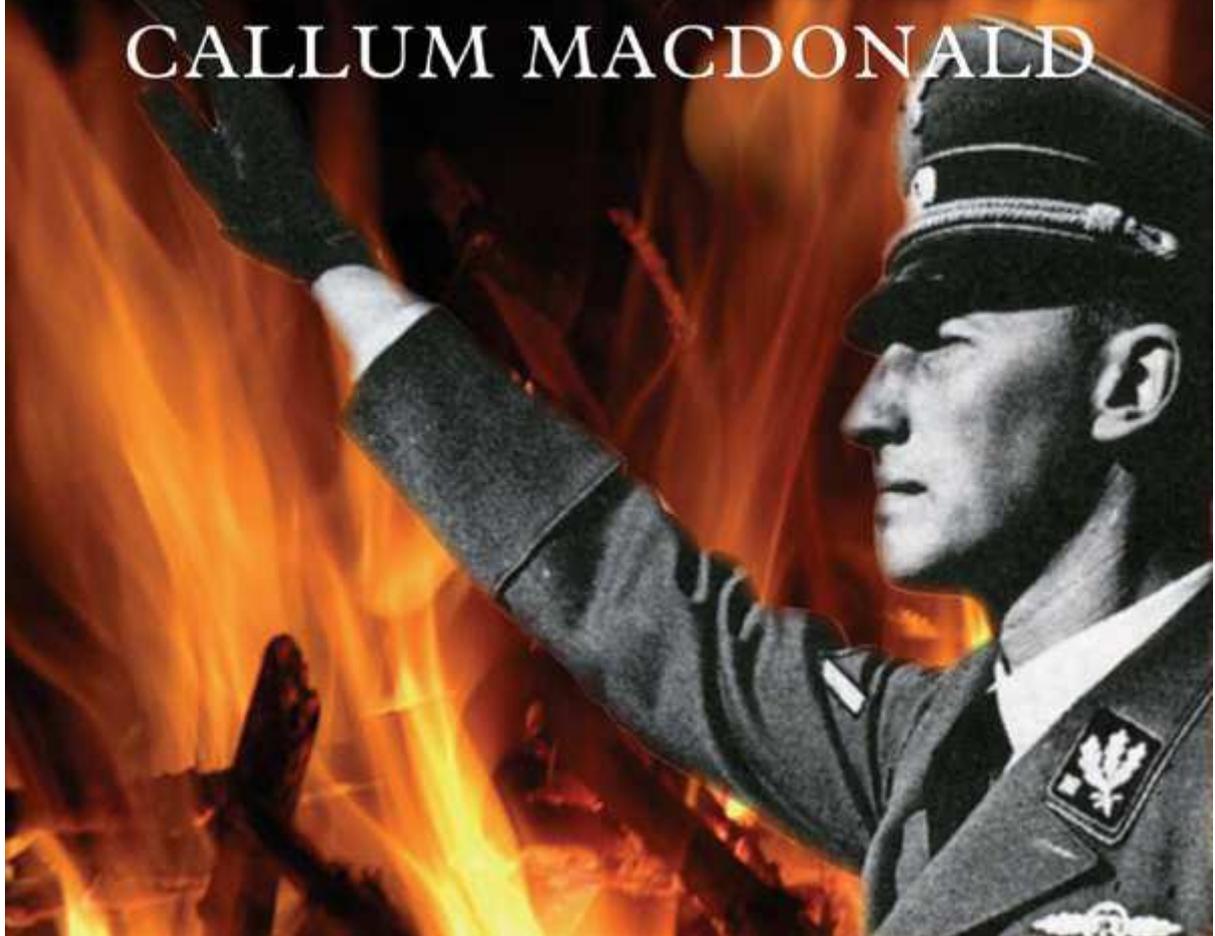


NEW EDITION

**THE ASSASSINATION OF
REINHARD
HEYDRICH**

CALLUM MACDONALD



The Assassination of Reinhard Heydrich Callum MacDonald

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3

The Czech Connection

As Hitler began to implement his plans for European domination, the power struggle between Abwehr and SD, army and SS, spilled over the German border. Nowhere was this clearer than in Czechoslovakia, which became an early victim of Nazi expansion. The Czech state, founded on the ruins of the Habsburg Empire, contained a substantial German-speaking minority which lived just beyond the frontier of Hitler's Reich. In 1938 the grievances of these Sudeten Germans provided the Führer with a convenient excuse for the assertion of Nazi power in central Europe. Czechoslovakia, with its well-equipped army and modern industrial base, was a strategic threat which had to be eradicated in advance of the great war which Hitler already contemplated. Moreover he regarded the Czech lands as an historical part of German living-space foolishly lost by the Habsburgs. Bohemia had once been German and would be German again. The Czech state must be ruthlessly crushed. As Hitler announced to senior military commanders in May 1938: 'It is my unalterable decision to smash Czechoslovakia by military action in the near future.' Himmler and Heydrich were his willing tools in this task of destruction. They dreamed of transforming the conquered Czech lands into an SS state, a totalitarian model which would one day be applied to the Reich itself.

The leader of the Sudeten Germans was Konrad Henlein, a bespectacled gym teacher of no particular intelligence who was thrust into prominence when the economic depression of the early 1930s brought Sudeten grievances to a head. Henlein's aim was to secure a wide measure of autonomy from the government in Prague which would allow the Sudetens to run

their own affairs. Although his movement was secular and nationalist, Henlein was backed by the Kameradschaftbund, a shadowy secret society much influenced by the model of Austrian clerical fascism and the ideas of the Austrian Catholic philosopher, Othmar Spann. The Kameradschaftbund aimed at transforming the Sudetenland into a spiritual commonwealth run by an intellectual elite, at once German, Catholic and authoritarian. The presence of this group in the leadership of the Sudeten movement did not please the more radical of Henlein's followers and created tensions which were later exploited by the SS. While Henlein willingly accepted a subsidy from the Nazis, he also sought other means of bringing pressure to bear on Prague. Through contacts in the Sudeten German landed aristocracy, he established links with the British Foreign Office and was invited to London in 1935 and 1937. Henlein hoped to play off the rising power of Nazi Germany against Britain's fear of war to realise his own dreams for the Sudeten Germans. It was a dangerous game and one which earned him the lasting enmity of the SS. Heydrich regarded Henlein as a compromiser who might sell out to the Czechs. He was deeply suspicious of his contacts with Britain and even more of his backers in the Kameradschaftbund, whom he regarded as tools of Rome, purveying a fascist model at odds with the ideology and interests of the greater German Reich. Accordingly Heydrich set himself to undermine the Sudeten leader and reduce his movement to a reliable tool of Nazi expansion.

In pursuit of this goal, Heydrich established contacts with the radical wing of Henlein's movement, which stood for union with the Reich and the assertion of German racial supremacy in the Czech lands. This was led by a one-eyed bookseller from Karlovy Vary named Karl Hermann Frank, whose name was to be closely associated with Heydrich's throughout his career. Frank, like his master, was a profoundly damaged personality who combined ability and intelligence with a wholly negative addiction to destruction and revenge. For him it was not enough to assert a Sudeten-German identity. The Czechs were to be humiliated and ultimately destroyed as a people, an ambition which was to make him the natural agent of SS plans. As one critic later recalled: 'Frank united in his person a perverse hatred of everything Czech with a degree of duplicity which I have never seen either before or since.' While establishing links with Frank's group, Heydrich attempted to discredit Henlein and his friends in the Kameradschaftbund. He denounced Henlein as an agent of British intelligence and encouraged radical plots against his leadership. As the head of the SD foreign espionage section, Oberführer Heinz Jost, later recalled: 'Himmler and Heydrich discharged volleys of abuse on the leader of the Sudeten Fatherland Front [and] I received an order to maintain a constant watch on Henlein.' An SD office was established in Dresden for this

purpose, linked to Berlin by special telephone and teletype links. In November 1937, Heinz Rutha, one of Henlein's closest advisers, was arrested by Czech police and charged with homosexual offences. Two weeks later he hanged himself in his prison cell. Heydrich always found accusations of homosexuality a useful way of smearing his opponents and it is likely that the material on Rutha was leaked to the Czechs by the SD. When Austria was seized in March 1938, the spiritual father of the Kameradschaftbund, Othmar Spann, was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to a concentration camp. He was soon to be followed by his Sudeten disciples.

While Heydrich intrigued with Karl Hermann Frank, Henlein was backed by Canaris and the Abwehr. Canaris supported self-determination for the Sudetens and their incorporation into the Reich, but not at the price of war. The Admiral wished to curb the SS and feared that an alliance between Heydrich and the Sudeten radicals might plunge Germany into a disastrous conflict for which it was unprepared. He therefore tried to strengthen Henlein's position against his anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic rivals. This task was assigned to Abwehr Abteilung 2 (Minorities and Sabotage) under Major Helmut Groscurth, a conservative nationalist who shared his chief's opinions about the criminal nature of the SS and was active in a series of military conspiracies against Hitler before he was captured at Stalingrad in 1943. Groscurth's mission was an ambiguous one. His military task was to prepare a Sudeten fifth column to co-operate with an invading German army. In this capacity he established secret arms dumps, collected intelligence on Czech defences and trained sabotage groups. At the same time he tried to strengthen Henlein and encourage a negotiated solution to the Sudeten problem, something which caused endless friction with Heydrich's SD and police network. Groscurth enjoyed some limited success in bolstering the Sudeten moderates against SD intrigues but by the beginning of 1938 the balance was shifting towards Heydrich. Under pressure from the radicals and impressed by Hitler's triumph in Austria, Henlein capitulated and agreed to act as Hitler's tool. As Jost later recalled: 'What was he to do? Withdraw from the political scene and hand over to Karl Hermann Frank or remain and try to save what could still be saved? He gave in.' At a meeting with Hitler in March 1938 he agreed to magnify Sudeten grievances to isolate the Czechs from their allies and give the Führer a pretext for war. This surrender led to a temporary suspension of Heydrich's intrigues against Henlein but as events were to show he had forgotten and forgiven nothing.

Czechoslovakia faced the Nazi threat under its second president, Eduard Beneš. The son of a small farmer from Bohemia, Beneš had been active in the independence movement against the Habsburg Empire before the First World War. A natural radical, he was influenced

as a young student by the figure who became the spokesman of the Czech national revival, Tomáš Masaryk, a professor of philosophy at Prague University, and the two men became closely associated. In 1914 both agreed that the war spelt the end of the Habsburgs and offered a unique opportunity for the cause of national liberation. While Masaryk went into exile to work towards this goal, Beneš remained in Prague to maintain links between the home resistance, nicknamed the 'Maffia', and the émigrés. In 1915, Beneš too was forced to flee abroad on a false passport barely one step ahead of the police. He had to abandon his wife, who spent four years in an Austrian jail before she saw her husband again. Beneš escaped through Switzerland to France and spent the remainder of the war lobbying the allies in favour of independence. He maintained close contact with the home resistance, which provided a stream of valuable political and military intelligence for the émigré politicians. This material was passed on to the allied high command and helped Beneš obtain a hearing for the Czech cause in Paris and London. By the end of the war, Britain, France and the United States had endorsed the creation of an independent Czechoslovakia on the ruins of the Habsburg Empire, an outcome that owed much to his dedication and astute diplomacy. His experiences in the liberation struggle reinforced the aloof and secretive side of Beneš' personality and left him with a taste for intrigue. As he later remarked: 'There has never been a revolution without espionage and conspiracy.' It also left him with the conviction that Czechoslovakia must pursue an active foreign policy if it wished to maintain an independent existence.

In the post-war period Beneš served permanently as the Czech Foreign Minister and tried to cultivate a role which was above domestic politics. Governments might come and go, but Beneš remained. A lonely, austere figure, he had no intimate friends and lived only for his country. He hated social gatherings and neither smoked nor drank. As even his admirers admitted, Beneš lacked the human warmth of Tomáš Masaryk. According to Robert Bruce Lockhart, he was 'a difficult man to know well' for his mind was 'machine-like in its compact tidiness and his reserve . . . almost impenetrable'. His conversation was 'factual and entirely unemotional. Each point was marshalled in its proper place and, when dealt with, was marked off on his fingers'. His tendency to deliver tedious lectures was remarked upon by the British diplomat, Harold Nicolson, who dealt with him at Versailles. Nevertheless, Nicolson considered Beneš 'a plausible little man with broad views' and remarked upon his 'intelligent eyes, rather like Keynes's' and his fine forehead. Others were less impressed and in some circles, particularly in the British Foreign Office, Beneš gained a reputation for being too clever, which was to harm him during the Munich crisis. Despite his chilly personality and

dry precise manner, Beneš was a natural optimist with a strong nineteenth-century belief in the inevitability of progress. As he later argued: 'In the most difficult position I have never despaired. In politics I always behave as though I were playing tennis. When my opponent is "forty" and I am "love" and the next ball may be the last, I am still convinced that I can win the game.' His only personal conceit concerned his appearance. A short man, just over five feet tall, he was always well dressed and insisted that photographers take their pictures from angles which concealed his lack of inches. According to his biographer, Compton Mackenzie: 'It would be absurd to call him a dandy, but his ties and his shirts and his suit always appeared to have been chosen deliberately to get on with one another. He used to remind me of a well preened chaffinch.'

Beneš' record as the friend and collaborator of Masaryk made him the natural choice to succeed the father of the republic as president when the old man was forced by ill health to retire in 1935. His appointment coincided with the growing crisis in the Sudetenland and its exploitation by the Nazis. In addressing the problem, Beneš stood by the vision of a unified state of Czechs and Slovaks. He was unwilling to concede autonomy to the Sudetens or to the other minorities lest this begin a process that would end with the dissolution of the Czechoslovak republic. He was similarly distrustful of the demands of many Slovaks for home rule. Beneš, like Masaryk, was prepared to recognise a Slovak identity but only within a unitary state. It is clear that while he articulated Czechoslovak nationalism, he feared that the country created in 1919 was a fragile one, liable to fly apart under the conflicting demands of its constituent peoples and fall victim to its larger neighbours. In defending it, he was determined to remain true to the vision of Tomáš Masaryk. This was not always easy for the prosaic Beneš, who lacked his predecessor's charismatic personality and claims to greatness. While sometimes admired, he was never loved and often criticised. As a result, he experienced strong inner tensions, which were sometimes reflected in devious conduct and an intolerance of opposition. His dry academic manner concealed a sense of mission which, like de Gaulle's, bordered on the Messianic. Throughout his life, Beneš clung to the idea that as Masaryk's disciple he knew better than anyone else what was best for his country.

Faced with the Sudeten problem, Beneš attempted to strengthen the international position of Czechoslovakia, an effort in which intelligence played a key role. Intelligence material had gained the Czechs a hearing in allied capitals during the First World War and was now employed to guarantee the continued independence of the country. In 1935 Czech military intelligence was headed by Lieutenant-Colonel František Moravec, a balding professional officer who, like Beneš, was a former student of Tomáš Masaryk. Moravec had

deserted to the Russians from the Habsburg army in 1916 and during the revolution had fought the Bolsheviks as a member of the Czech legion, a group which was to have a powerful influence in post-war Czechoslovakia. Like Beneš, Moravec had known hardship and exile. He shared with his president a talent for intrigue and an absolute commitment to the national cause which overrode the personal claims of family and politics. The greatest day in his life was when the Czech legion entered Prague, the capital of the newly created republic, in 1919: 'It was an experience given to few men. It was to help mould the character of a generation. I have often thought that there was about the men who marched into Prague with Masaryk the same dedication as gripped the followers of Garibaldi, Bolivar and Washington. A country had been fought for and won. I believe that some of the fervour of that day stayed always with the founding generation.' It was to be Moravec's tragedy to fight for the Czech cause in two world wars and to die in exile far from the country that he loved.

When Moravec was appointed to the intelligence section of the general staff in March 1934 he found a moribund organisation obsessed with the former imperial power Austria rather than with the danger of a rearming Germany. Its principal network in Vienna regularly delivered 'detailed information . . . about the private life and love affairs of former archdukes . . . which read like the libretto of a Lehar operetta'. As one senior officer complained: 'I have no idea of the battle order of even the peacetime German divisions, but they tell me which Austrian archduke has slept with whom . . . I think our intelligence service must be the worst in the world.' Clearly this dismal situation could not be allowed to continue and Moravec set himself to reform the system. He secured an increased budget, employed a new group of young, enthusiastic officers and concentrated the Czech intelligence effort on Nazi Germany, whose contacts with Henlein were already causing concern. These changes were part of a wider reform of the general staff which was accompanied by a massive increase in military spending and the construction of modern defences along the German frontier. Within two years, Moravec was beginning to produce results. As he later recalled: 'Although our recruitment of agents inside the Reich began from scratch we soon discovered that even a brutal police state like Hitler's could be penetrated. We were to find, in fact, that the tight Gestapo-backed security of the Third Reich could be completely riddled.' While this was an exaggeration it was nevertheless soon widely recognised that Beneš possessed one of the best intelligence organisations in Europe, a fact which was to have a powerful influence on subsequent events.

Beneš hoped to convince the major powers that supporting Czechoslovakia was in their own best interests. The Czechs already had a security pact with France but in May 1935

Beneš sought additional insurance in a new treaty with the Soviet Union. This committed the Russians to defend Czechoslovakia against aggression, although only if the French first fulfilled their military obligations. The pact reflected his conviction that Czechoslovakia could survive only within a European security system which included both east and west. He saw no advantage in excluding the Russians and believed that Czechoslovakia could balance between communism and capitalism, incorporating the best of both sides. Intelligence played an important role in military co-operation with Paris and Moscow. Moravec maintained a close association with the representative of the Deuxième Bureau in Prague, Major Henri Gayou, an amiable but limited individual nicknamed 'Smidra' because of his resemblance to the bumbling village policeman in Czech folk tales. He also had regular meetings with the head of the Deuxième Bureau, Colonel Fauché and other French intelligence chiefs. Through these channels the Czechs were able to pass on information about the progress of German rearmament and Hitler's military plans. Despite this flow of high-grade material, Moravec found the French distinctly cool. They refused to co-ordinate a joint intelligence effort against the Nazis and absorbed everything which the Czechs had to give without conceding anything in return. This attitude was paralleled in the military sphere where the French refused to draw up a joint operations plan for use in the event of war. By the beginning of 1938, Moravec was losing faith in France. He detected a curious mixture of complacency and defeatism in Paris and privately concluded that, in the event of a crisis, the French would not fight. Despite his growing sense of alarm, he had little choice but to maintain contact with the Deuxième Bureau and hope for the best.

Intelligence co-operation with the Soviet Union was never as close but followed a similar pattern. Moravec, who had fought the Bolsheviks in 1917, was more sceptical than Beneš about the desirability of links with Moscow but obeyed orders like a good soldier. As he later remarked, the rise of Hitler made him view the Soviet Union from a different angle. In the summer of 1936 Moravec and the leading experts on his staff were despatched to Moscow for talks with the Russians. His team received a cordial welcome and spent two weeks in discussions with General Uritsky of Soviet military intelligence and other high-ranking officers. It was soon evident to Moravec that the relationship would be one-sided: 'We were well prepared for the conference and gave our Soviet colleagues a series of reports which provided a picture of all the basic units of the German armed forces . . . The Russians listened carefully and, without any display of reaction, made copious notes . . . only the data brought by our side were discussed and analysed. The Russians produced very little of their own.' Moravec concluded that this stemmed less from the Soviet mania for secrecy than from

the fact that they possessed practically no information about events in Germany. The destruction of the German communist party by the Gestapo had blinded them. Uritsky himself admitted difficulties in running agents into the Reich. He asked the Czechs to help him establish new networks which would be directed by a large Soviet intelligence mission based in Prague. Moravec balked at the idea of giving the Russians free range in Czechoslovakia and in the end Uritsky accepted a more modest proposal. Soviet intelligence was allowed to establish a resident in Prague but he was to work under the control of Moravec. All operations were to be cleared with the Czechs and any information produced by the Russian networks was to be shared. On this basis intelligence co-operation began.

A Soviet representative appeared shortly after Moravec's return from Moscow. He was a charming regular soldier named Captain Kuznetsov, who was given the cover name of Rudolf One and reported to Moscow through a controller in the Russian Consulate. Kuznetsov did not last long and was recalled to Moscow within months where he disappeared in the great purges. His successor, Rudolf Two, proved to be anything but an asset. He was a drunken boor obviously selected more for political reliability than brains. According to Moravec his operations were dismal failures and he spent most of his time in bars 'where his primitive dissipation at times approached bestiality. My office several times had to hush up unsavoury scandals resulting from his amorous activities.' This behaviour was perhaps understandable given what was happening in the Soviet Union. During the purges any form of contact with foreigners was considered suspicious and a posting abroad was often the preliminary to a death sentence. Despite these problems Moravec continued to work with the Russians to the limited extent possible. Czech intelligence facilitated the transit of Russian soldiers to fight in Spain during the civil war and passed on information about German rearmament and military plans. Co-operation, however, remained largely a one-way street. The Russians, like the French, were prepared to take but not to give. Czechoslovakia, a small power fighting for its independence, had little choice but to accept these unfavourable terms. The alternative was isolation and destruction.

Although Czechoslovakia had no military pact with Britain, Moravec also worked closely with the SIS. Beneš recognised that Britain could play a key role in any crisis over the Sudetenland. If London showed its determination to resist aggression, Hitler would be deterred and France and Russia encouraged to stand firm in their commitment to the Czechs. If Britain remained aloof, Czechoslovakia was likely to be abandoned by its erstwhile allies. It was therefore vital to mould British perceptions of Nazi Germany, a mission which was entrusted to Czech military intelligence. Information from Moravec's networks was used to

convince London of the German danger and to neutralise the favourable impression made by Henlein in certain high political circles. By 1936 a good working relationship had been established with the SIS station chief in Prague, Major Harold 'Gibby' Gibson, who operated from the legation under the threadbare cover of Passport Control Officer, a post notorious throughout Europe as synonymous with spying. He was an old SIS hand who spoke fluent Russian and had operated against the Soviet Union from Istanbul, Bucharest and Riga before his posting to Prague in 1933. His background and experience reflected the obsession with communism which had dominated SIS since the 1920s and had produced a service dependent on a network of Russian émigrés which was thoroughly unreliable and penetrated by the Soviet security services. The year after his arrival in Czechoslovakia, however, Germany was defined as the ultimate potential enemy, a move which reflected growing unease in London about the Nazis, and priorities changed. Gibson began to run agents into the Reich but their contribution was soon overtaken by the high-grade intelligence supplied by Moravec. This was welcome both to Gibson and to his superiors, who experienced difficulties establishing their own networks and remained under tight financial constraints. Although the Treasury increased the SIS budget in 1936, the organisation was hampered by lack of funds until the beginning of the war: 'Until 1939 it was unable even to afford wireless sets for its agents.' Moravec was thus subsidising the British intelligence effort and, as with the French and the Russians, was forced to give more than he received. In the long term, however, his co-operation with Gibson was to have unforeseen consequences which ensured the survival of Czech military intelligence after the country it served had been swallowed up by Hitler.

The Czech reputation in the intelligence field rested largely on one particular agent, codenamed A-54. It was information from this source which attracted attention in Paris, Moscow and London and made co-operation with Moravec worth while. Although he boasted about his success in penetrating Heydrich's security screen after 1934, Moravec did not find his most successful recruit; A-54 found him. The leading Czech agent was a 'walk-in', one of the most ambiguous categories in the shadowy world of intelligence. His association with the Czechs began in March 1937 when Moravec received a personal letter containing details of German mobilisation plans and offering further information in return for cash. By his own admission, Moravec found this approach almost too good to be true and his assistants unanimously concluded that the whole thing was a Nazi plant. Nevertheless, Moravec decided to take the risk, starting an association with A-54 which was to produce increasing quantities of high-grade material both before and during the war. The real motivation of A-54 has remained a mystery and even his identity was unknown to Czech intelligence for some time

after he began to pass information. He was in fact a member of the Abwehr based in Dresden called Paul Thümmel. Since Dresden was the main base of operations against Czechoslovakia, Thümmel was well placed to inform Moravec about German military plans and links with Henlein. His importance, however, went beyond that. Thümmel was an old Nazi, a holder of the coveted gold party badge, and a personal friend of many important figures from the days of political struggle, including Heinrich Himmler. This gave him access to information which he might not otherwise have had and allowed him to straddle the worlds of the party and the army in a way open to few others. The question remains why such a figure should have offered his services to the Czechs. Although he was paid, he was never given enough to compensate for the risks he was taking and he continued to work for Moravec after Hitler had extinguished the Czech state. This leaves open the possibility that he was a double agent, something which was sometimes suspected by Beneš, but there are problems about such a conclusion. Some of the information which Thümmel supplied was unlikely to have been deliberately leaked by the Germans even as part of a cover and deception plan. It was simply too important. According to someone who was later imprisoned with him in Terezin, the key to Thümmel's character was resentment. He had hoped for social advancement in the Nazi movement only to find that his working-class origins continued to count against him after 1933. By contrast he was accepted by smart society in Prague while on assignment there and dated Czech film stars. His spying was a form of revenge on a system he had come to despise. He was contemptuous of the Nazi state security system and had no doubts about his ability to outwit his superiors. Whatever his true role, A-54 was to prove a bankable asset for Moravec until he was uncovered and arrested in 1942.

Despite his best efforts, Beneš was unable to mobilise international support for Czechoslovakia when Hitler engineered the Munich crisis in 1938. Neville Chamberlain refused to commit Britain to the support of France in the event of war and instead attempted to secure a negotiated settlement of the Sudeten question. The French used this as an excuse for not fighting. Since France would not go to war, Soviet treaty obligations became a dead letter and Czechoslovakia was isolated. Beneš, who had represented the new Czech state at Versailles in 1919, found himself excluded from the Munich conference of September 1938 when Britain, France, Germany and Italy agreed to the cession of the Sudetenland over his head. It was a bitter moment for Beneš as it was for all Czechs. He was under great pressure from the army to reject Chamberlain's mediation and to fight Germany alone but decided that this would simply mean the annihilation of his country. It was a controversial decision and one which many held against him ever afterwards, for in handing over the Sudetenland with

its frontier defences Beneš left Prague at the mercy of Hitler. The Führer was not long in asserting his power. In the immediate aftermath of Munich, the Germans made it clear that they would not deal with the rump Czech state as long as Beneš remained president. Hitler hated him and identified him correctly with the spirit of Czech nationalism which he was determined to crush. Beneš was forced to resign and was succeeded by Emil Hácha, an ageing ex-bureaucrat who was already a sick man when he was appointed. At the age of fifty-four Beneš had once more to contemplate exile, for it was clear that his life would be in danger if he remained. At the end of October he flew to London for medical treatment, arriving unannounced at Croydon airport where only weeks before Chamberlain had returned from Munich promising cheering crowds 'peace for our time'. Early in the new year he sailed for the United States where he had been offered the professorship of sociology at the University of Chicago. Beneš, however, had not abandoned politics for the life of a scholar. As he explained to a group of friends before he left his country, Hitler would one day go too far and provoke a European war. The international coalition which had failed at Munich might yet emerge to defeat Germany. When that happened he hoped to become the spokesman of the Czech cause as he had been in an earlier conflict. The shame of Munich would be wiped out and Czechoslovakia restored as a member of a triumphant anti-Nazi alliance. For Beneš the reversal of Munich became both a national crusade and a personal obsession. As he later recalled: 'From September 1938, sleeping and waking, I was continually thinking of this objective – living for it, suffering on its account and working for it in every one of my political actions.'

The new government, abandoned by its allies, hastened to make the best deal that it could with Berlin. Czech policy was subordinated to the Nazis. The Soviet pact was denounced and the communist party banned. The army, the symbol of the nation, was hastily demobilised. Pictures of Masaryk and Beneš disappeared from the schools. Hitler was even invited to nominate a German as a member of the cabinet. Slovakia was granted autonomy, a situation which was soon to be exploited by the Nazis, and Czechoslovakia became Czecho-Slovakia, signifying the retreat from the unitary principles on which the state had been founded. As for the Germans who still remained within the reduced territory of the republic, they were granted extensive privileges under pressure from Berlin and defined themselves as part of a national socialist community led by Adolf Hitler. The attempt to placate the Führer had an immediate effect on Moravec, who was ordered to cease operations against the Reich. The efforts of his counter-espionage service in the Sudetenland had made him an unpopular figure with Henlein's supporters and there was pressure for his dismissal and arrest. He was

constantly watched by SD agents, who made no secret of their presence in Prague, and it was clear that his life was in danger. Under these circumstances, Moravec came to a dramatic decision. He would transfer the operations of Czech military intelligence abroad, outside the murderous reach of Heydrich's Gestapo. Like many army officers he disapproved of the Munich agreement and believed that Czechoslovakia should have gone down fighting rather than surrendering to Anglo-French pressure. The events of September 1938 were not an end but a beginning. Whatever the policies of his government, Moravec had declared war on Hitler. But where to establish a new base? Moravec, like most Czechs, could not forgive the French for backing down during the Munich crisis. A profound sense of bitterness and disillusion ruled out moving to Paris. The Russians had emerged from the events of September with more credit. Stalin was not a party to the infamous deal over the Sudetenland and could not be blamed for avoiding war while France pursued a policy of appeasement. Whatever the popularity of the Russians in Czechoslovakia, however, Moravec did not want to join the Czech communist leader, Klement Gottwald, in Moscow. He remained suspicious of Stalin and was unwilling to evade one dictator only to fall into the grip of another. This left Britain, perhaps a strange choice in the light of Neville Chamberlain's conduct at Munich. Whatever the British role on that occasion, however, London had broken no solemn treaty obligation and thus avoided the scorn and contempt visited on Paris by the Czechs. It was therefore to his friend Gibson that Moravec turned for assistance with his plan of escape.

In his dealings with the British, Moravec had one trump card, his control of A-54. He had expected his key agent to vanish in the aftermath of Hitler's triumph. As he later argued, A-54 had the opportunity open to few spies of simply disappearing to live on his earnings rather than running further risks on behalf of a beaten and humiliated country. Instead Thümmel contacted his control officer, Captain Fry, at the new frontier and made it clear that he was prepared to continue working for the Czechs. SIS was anxious to guarantee access to what A-54 produced. In the autumn of 1938 all kinds of alarming tales about Hitler's war plans were emerging from Germany. As one British intelligence officer later recalled: 'There were so many authentic rumours . . . that whatever happened, someone could say "I told you so".' The head of SIS, Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair, was under pressure to supply the government with information and was often embarrassed by what he had to provide. In these circumstances it was important to guarantee access to a well-established source. Moreover, if Hitler did break loose, British strategy and the reputation of SIS might depend on the kind of information which A-54 could provide. The Czechs were not the only foreign intelligence service exploited by SIS. In January 1939 at a meeting in Paris between British, French and

Polish intelligence officers, the first steps were taken towards co-operation in the field of cryptology. This gave SIS access to Polish research on the Enigma coding machine employed by the German armed forces and later provided the basis for the greatest intelligence coup of the war, the cracking of Nazi ciphers or ULTRA which reduced the value of old-fashioned agents like Thümmel. In the early stages, however, ULTRA remained scrappy and puzzling. While this situation continued, the Czechs could exploit their possession of the mysterious A-54. According to Moravec, he did not have to make the first move in the conspiracy with SIS. It was Gibson who approached him that winter with the offer of a plane to carry the head of Czech military intelligence and his senior officers to Britain. Whatever the truth of this version, it is clear that Thümmel was the key to the negotiations. By the beginning of 1939, the groundwork for Moravec's daring plan had been established. He had devolved operations on a series of out-stations in foreign capitals, transferred secret funds abroad, and drawn up a list of the personnel who would accompany him into exile. SIS had agreed in principle to provide him with a refuge. Only the timing of the last act remained to be decided. In the event this was dictated by Hitler and only a warning from A-54 prevented Moravec's scheme from being overtaken by events.

The ink was scarcely dry on the Munich agreement before the German army swept through the abandoned Czech defences into the Sudetenland. In the wake of the advancing columns came Heydrich's special security commandos. As the Nazi party newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, proudly announced on 1 October: 'In the security police field Gestapo men working in close co-operation with the troops immediately commenced combing out Marxists, traitors and other enemies of the state in the liberated territory.' As Major Groscurth rapidly discovered on a tour of the area, these definitions were wide ones and included many of Henlein's closest associates. Heydrich was using the opportunity to resume the feud temporarily suspended on Hitler's orders in the spring. Henlein's wife was terrified that her husband would be murdered. As she complained to Groscurth: 'They are doing all they can to get rid of him. He has as many enemies in the Gestapo as among the Czechs. Heydrich hates him.' The behaviour of the SD squads and of the Waffen SS units which accompanied the regular army confirmed Groscurth's prejudice against the SS 'swine'. The Abwehr tried to protect the Sudeten leader and his associates but with little success. Henlein had played too great a role in Nazi propaganda to be physically eliminated but he found himself pensioned off as gauleiter of the Sudetenland, a post with little real power. His associates in the Kameradschaftbund were not so lucky. After months of harassment by the Gestapo they were arrested early in 1939 along with several hundred members of the Sudeten youth league and

charged with homosexual offences. Condemned as enemies of the state, they were consigned to a concentration camp where they remained until 1945. The real winner amongst the Sudetens was not Henlein but Karl Hermann Frank, who was soon to reap the rewards of his loyalty to the SS.

Despite his triumph at Munich, Hitler felt cheated by Chamberlain's intervention. In October 1938 he was already planning to eradicate the rump Czech state and he assigned a key role in this process to Himmler, Heydrich and the SS. As he explained to senior military commanders during an inspection tour of the Sudetenland: 'We don't need the army to take over Bohemia and Moravia . . . all the preparatory work will be done by political means. All I ask of you is that you have the armed forces ready to march. No mobilisation. No unnecessary expense. The Czechs may squeal, but we will have our hands on their throats before they can shout. And anyway, who will come to help them?' Hitler planned to destroy Czechoslovakia by a combination of internal intrigue and external military pressure. The Slovak provincial government would be encouraged to declare independence and ask Berlin for protection. German troops would then enter the Czech lands of Bohemia–Moravia to preserve order and the area would become a permanent part of Nazi living-space. In January 1939, Hitler held a secret meeting in Berlin with Himmler and Heydrich to arrange for the subversion of Slovakia. As he explained to his listeners, after that it would be 'quite easy . . . to deal with the remaining Czech portion of the Republic'. The mission was assigned to the man who had bungled the kidnapping of Rudolf Formis from Czechoslovakia in 1934, Alfred Naujocks, who was soon busy contacting separatist politicians and smuggling arms to Slovak fascist organisations. At the beginning of March, the German army was ordered to prepare for a 'pacification operation' in Bohemia–Moravia, co-ordinated with the SD plot. The generals were informed that Czech resistance was not expected.

As soon as Thümmel learned of the impending invasion, he crossed the Czech border and contacted Captain Fry. He brought with him details of the German military plan which called for the advance of four German divisions at dawn on 15 March and the occupation of Prague by 9 a.m. The troops would be accompanied by special squads of security police with orders to hunt down members of Czech intelligence and interrogate them with 'special severity' to discover their sources in Germany. Thümmel was not unnaturally anxious about this prospect but was assured that the Czechs had contingency plans. Satisfied on this point, he agreed to continue his activities and was given contact addresses in Holland and Switzerland for use after the seizure of Prague. Moravec had now to decide what to do with the explosive information which had just landed in his lap. As a loyal officer his first instinct

was to warn the government, however much he disapproved of its pro-German line since Munich. His warnings were not taken seriously. Ministers could not believe that Hitler would launch such a flagrant act of aggression against the already subservient Czech state. Moreover Moravec was identified with the discredited policies of Beneš and had made no secret of his anti-Nazi leanings. He was suspected of engineering a provocation to disrupt relations between Prague and Berlin. Called before a meeting of the cabinet on 11 March, he recommended that the government go into exile after destroying all stores of military equipment, blowing up the War Ministry and sabotaging key munitions plants. This drastic prescription was sneeringly dismissed. Moravec was told to calm down and ‘bring us better news in future’. It was the most humiliating moment of his life.

Moravec had planned to request official permission to transfer his operations abroad as part of this wider strategy of denying resources to the enemy. Now he had to act on his own, justifying his position on the grounds that the government had betrayed the nation and lost any claim to moral authority. Time was short and he turned to his colleague Gibson for assistance. Late at night on 13 March, a vehicle from the British Embassy entered the underground car park of the War Ministry, where it was loaded with Moravec’s most important files. These were later smuggled out of the country in the British diplomatic bag. The next morning Moravec left home as usual without informing his wife and two children of the dramatic events which were about to occur. As he later recalled: ‘I merely said that I was going on an overnight trip to Moravia and asked my wife to pack a couple of shirts and a toothbrush.’ When he arrived at the War Ministry he summoned his eleven best officers and exploded his bombshell. That afternoon they would accompany him to London on an unscheduled KLM flight diverted to Prague by Gibson. They were not allowed to say goodbye to their families. With the capital swarming with Nazi spies and the government determined to demonstrate its loyalty to the Reich, the slightest leak could prove fatal. The men listened to Moravec in silence. Nobody complained. He had rightly judged that none of his chosen companions would put personal considerations before their duty to the nation. In the afternoon, Moravec emptied the safes and made arrangements for the destruction of his remaining secret files while his officers left the War Ministry in ones and twos to avoid the attention of watching Gestapo agents. At the airport sympathetic customs officers looked the other way while Moravec and his staff boarded their KLM flight in the midst of a blinding snowstorm which had grounded all other aircraft. The contrast between this surreptitious escape and the victorious entry of the Czech legion into Prague in 1919 was bitter but unavoidable. As Moravec later recalled: ‘While sitting in the Dutch plane flying towards

England . . . I found myself suddenly swept by black thoughts. The bitter struggle of the past years, the blood and sweat of so many, what had it all amounted to? The republic of Masaryk was dead. For the second time in my life I was an exile. My wife and children were lost to me, abandoned in the stricken country below, somewhere under the swirling flakes, left to the mercies of the invaders. Bitterness welled within me. As our plane passed over the frontier mountains of Czechoslovakia, I put my head in my hands and cried.'

While the British press speculated next day about the arrival of a secret flight with twelve mysterious passengers at Croydon airport, the last vestiges of Czech independence were being suppressed by the Nazis. On 14 March, under strong German pressure, Slovakia declared its independence. Later that evening an ailing Hácha boarded a train for Berlin where he hoped to persuade the Führer to uphold the authority of the Prague government. Instead Hácha found himself faced with the blunt announcement that German troops would occupy Bohemia–Moravia the following day. If any resistance was encountered, the Luftwaffe would bomb Prague into rubble. He must place his people under the protection of the Nazi Reich. After hours of browbeating, during which he fainted and had to be revived.

with an injection, a weeping Hácha signed the proffered document in the early hours of the morning. Waffen SS troops had already crossed the Munich frontiers which had endured for just over four months. Skidding and sliding in the snow, the first units of the Wehrmacht entered Prague, watched by a stunned population: 'Some of the onlookers broke down and wept; some abandoned themselves to impotent rage; some rushed shouting abuse at the German troops.' The Czech army, demoralised and broken, remained in its barracks. Only the Eighth Silesian Regiment at Mistek disobeyed orders and put up a brief but hopeless resistance. In the wake of the troops came the Gestapo, which launched an immediate round-up of German émigrés, communists and other subversives. In the first week of the occupation 1600 were arrested in Aktion GITTER (Operation FENCE), a figure which soon grew to 4639 as Heydrich's men tightened their grip on the Czech police. The failure of the government to act on Moravec's warning netted Hitler not only the great Skoda armaments works at Plze but also the complete equipment of the Czech army and air force including 600 tanks and 1000 aircraft, material which proved useful in the French and Russian campaigns. In addition to this booty the Nazis laid hands on stockpiles of Czech raw materials and the entire gold reserves of the National Bank. Only in the area of intelligence were the Germans thwarted. When a special Abwehr unit arrived at the War Ministry to carry off Moravec's precious files before they could be seized by the Gestapo, it found nothing but powdered ashes blowing forlornly amongst the trampled snow.

On the evening of his bloodless coup, Hitler arrived in Prague and was greeted at the Hradany castle, the official presidential residence, by an SS guard of honour. He preceded Hácha whose train had been deliberately delayed. When the old man finally reached the castle which he had left as the head of an independent state only the day before, he was forced to use the servants' entrance. It was a symbol of the status which the Czechs were to be accorded by their new masters. The future of the area was rapidly settled. On 16 March Hitler proclaimed Bohemia–Moravia a Nazi protectorate, avoiding outright annexation to the disappointment of party officials in the Sudetenland and other neighbouring provinces who had hoped to extend their own authority. The Czechs were allowed to retain an 'autonomous government', shorn of responsibility for defence and foreign affairs, supervised by a Reichsprotektor appointed by Berlin. For this post, the Führer selected Konstantin von Neurath, a career diplomat and former Foreign Minister, dismissed in 1938 because he lacked enthusiasm for Hitler's expansionist plans. It was a totally cynical move, dictated by a desire to win international respectability. As Hitler explained to Goebbels, who had pressed for the appointment of a Nazi fanatic, Neurath was the best man for the job: 'In the Anglo-Saxon world he is considered a man of distinction. The international effect of his appointment will be reassuring because people will see in it my decision not to deprive the Czechs of their racial and national life.' Hitler's long-term aims, however, had not really changed and were revealed in the appointment of Heydrich's creature Karl Hermann Frank, now an SS Brigadeführer (Brigadier-General), as state secretary of the new protectorate. Frank, whose hatred of the Czechs and their culture was notorious, was placed in control of the police and in this capacity answered not to the 'respectable' Neurath but to Heydrich and Himmler in Berlin. The situation could hardly have seemed more hopeless for a country which had enjoyed only twenty brief years of independence. But even at this dark moment an exile movement was forming, dedicated to the destruction of the Nazis and the restoration of the Czech state. It was a development which was to prove fatal for Heydrich, who had done so much to destroy the republic of Masaryk and Beneš.

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