



Václava Janděčková

# False Borders – Secret Police Kámen Operations in Czechoslovakia (Today’s Czech Republic) 1948-51



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**Abstract:** Between 1948 and 1951, the Czechoslovak Secret Police set up false checkpoints in the western border areas complete with fake German customs posts and US Counter Intelligence Corps offices. Those who ended up in these places did not do so by chance – these were meticulously arranged traps set by the newly established communist regime. The portrait of the US president of the day and even the stars and stripes hung in the sham offices. Escapees were offered American cigarettes and drinks; children were given Swiss chocolate. Their subsequent “return” to the Czechoslovak security forces was a carefully scripted affair. Refugees were intentionally branded communists or spies who “had to be returned”. As late as 1950, some women escaping Czechoslovakia were dragged back from “Germany” by border guards, a year later other escapees were traded by “German” customs officers for cigarettes and food. For the rest of their days some political prisoners were convinced that was how things had played out. The preselected victims hardly ever got the chance to study the background to, or point of the trap the state had laid for them. Despite an exchange of diplomatic notes, traps laid by the security forces continued to be set for at least four years. Punishments for “crossing the border” and for divulging state secrets to bogus American officers varied. Politically-influenced courts even handed down life sentences. These illegal practices were at odds with international law, but Czechoslovakia had launched into building a communist utopia along Soviet lines which meant justice was banished to the side lines. This study looks at how sophisticated the “Kámen” operations were and the practices that became second nature for the security services in a nondemocratic setting. One remarkable aspect is the way those involved and their peers view the events of the period, some reliving their personal experience and disappointment on the one hand, others acknowledging the locations in question, the silent witnesses of unpunished crimes, on the other.

## 1. Introduction

Soon after the communist putsch of February 1948, the Czechoslovak secret police launched a series of highly effective operations against those attempting to emigrate from the country. Mock barriers and German customs posts complete with “American” officers sitting behind desks just a few hundred metres from the actual border sprang up like mushrooms. Leaving the country without official permission was strictly prohibited. Even today, over three decades since the fall of communism, the underhand method which was the “Kámen” operation (Czech: Akce “Kámen” – the Stone Operation) still continue to astound.

Under tight security and with perfect cover, plainclothes secret police operatives of the Czechoslovak State Security service (Czech: Státní bezpečnost – StB) used this ruse in the southern and western border regions of Czechoslovakia (the border with the American Zone of Occupation in Germany) until at least the end of 1951 [1]. To this day no one knows exactly how many victims there were and how many false borders were set up. The one thing that is certain is that the operation was illegal even according to laws valid in Czechoslovakia at the time. Until recently, some historians believed that nothing new could be found in the Czech archives. Through my careful and thorough research since 2011 it has been proved how wrong they were.

## 2. The Intelligence Services and Their Secret Crimes

### 2.1. Tailor-Made Traps

“Kámen” operations worked in the following manner: Preselected individuals were provoked into an escape attempt by StB agents, then, after a long and arduous journey, they were led to a bogus American CIC post (Counter Intelligence Corps) where they were interrogated in a foreign language. Completely unaware they were being duped, the refugees felt they had reached safety in the US occupied zone of Germany, and that they could now talk openly about anything they liked, without the risk of punishment from the totalitarian authorities. Under no pressure whatsoever, they would reveal why they wanted to leave Czechoslovakia and what they intended to do once abroad, as well as who had assisted them escape and what they really thought of the communist regime “back home”. StB operatives in disguise and agents acting as interpreters managed to glean secrets and passwords used to make contact with resistance groups, as well as pocketing the last remaining possessions (often jewellery and cash) belonging to former wealthy entrepreneurs.



**Figure 1.** Overview of all the localities so far documented which were used on the Czech-German border between 1948 and 1951 for “Kámen” operations. © Václava Janděčková.

After filing reports and filling in forms in two languages, the refugees were “sent back” to Czechoslovakia under a variety of pretexts, or were arrested “by chance” as they

walked to accommodation on the “German” side. For the rest of their days victims often never realised they hadn’t actually crossed the real border. Punishments handed down for illegally “crossing the border” and allegedly divulging state secrets to “American officers” were disproportionately harsh. Would-be escapees were probably convicted in their hundreds, though court records make no mention whatsoever of the “Kámen” operation – we have just 42 of their names. These and many others were the victims of tens if not hundreds of officers, in the early days mostly from the StB headquarters and those around Evžen Abrahamovič, a team that worked out of secret rooms within the Dunaj Palace on Prague’s Národní Avenue.

This kind of trap became a preferred method used by the Czechoslovak secret police while keeping law and order fell by the wayside in favour of a remorseless struggle with opponents, both real and fictional, of the newly-established communist regime.

### 2.2. Places and Props

Phoney people smugglers didn’t have to lead daring escapees into the deepest parts of the forests at night. Meticulously arranged backdrops were set up when required at convenient locations along the southwest Czech-German border. A convenient embankment next to a lake was selected, a primitive barrier was used or installed, a stove lit for one night only in a deserted house fitted out to play the part. A paradox of these post-war episodes is that the fake German customs posts were created in taverns and villas that had belonged to the original Sudeten German population. The Germans were forced out of their homes after WWII; two years later they were requisitioned by members of the security services.

For instance, on the 26th January 1950, the day before an operation was due to take place near the town of Aš, StB officer Kuželka, alias commander of the “German” customs post aka “Grenzkommisär Müller” [2], signed a set of instructions on numbered sheets of paper along with all others involved. Having digested their contents, he set up a covert listening device and fetches a suitcase with the things he needed on the list: an American flag, a portrait of US president Harry Truman and some foreign spirits and cigarettes. The room also needed to contain a kerosene lamp, a typewriter (German if possible), forms in German and/or English, stationary, a kettle, cups, sugar as well as torches, machine guns, pistols, belts, riding britches and felt boots.

All of those involved knew well in advance what their role would entail, which words in which language they were going to need and what they meant. But the instructions also covered the bizarre possibility of a dog barking at the nearby sawmill, as we see in those given to StB officer Frolík, referred to as No. 4, alias Sepp (Mitglied der Zollwache Wildenau): “If the dog begins to bark at No. 4, he should return to the customs post, then proceed with No. 3 [StB officer Telín, alias Fritz, Wachmeister der Zollwache Wildenau] at 18.30 to the barrier where they should apprehend the subject [“Kámen” operation victim Jiří Fikr].





victims saw things, Janoušek was the de facto organiser of the illegal crossings, but he also had no idea that Hejný, who had offered to act as driver, was in fact a planted StB agent running the show. All “Kámen” operations were given their own cover names – “Barnabáš”, “Šutr”, “Anna”, “Perštýn” and “Dřevorubec” for instance. Agents provocateurs who infiltrated resistance organisations and got among those brave enough to lend escapees assistance despite the huge risks involved, were one of the key factors in the “success” of the operations.

that. However, Janoušek managed to warn their friend, former intelligence officer Karel Zavadil, in time. At the last minute his family managed to flee the Modrá hvězda Hotel in Kdyně, but Janoušek paid dearly for his actions and was sent to prison for several terms [8]. In January 2013 his brother Jan wrote to me the following words: “Once on his way for interrogation, my brother managed to escape from the court on Karlovo Square [in Prague] and reached our uncle who was living in Braník at the time. But his son, our cousin, immediately turned him in” [9]. Sadly, that was the reality of Cold War Czechoslovakia.

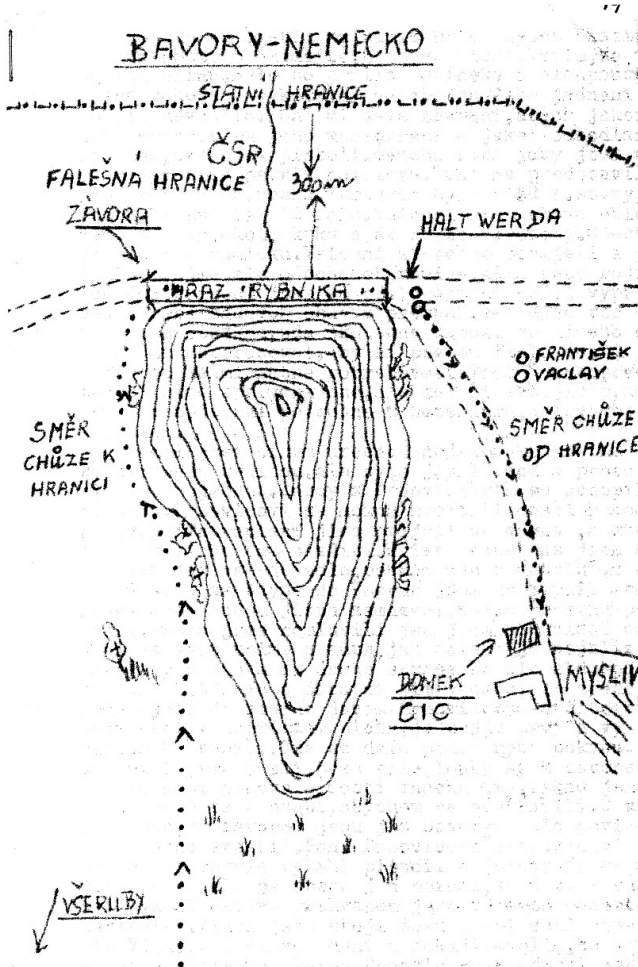


Figure 3. Mysliv Lake and the victims’ journey from Vseruby to Mysliv © Stanislav Liška, FALSE BORDERS, 1959.

On the night of the 23rd April 1948, in a deserted farmhouse equipped as a German customs post on the edge of the village of Mysliv, an American officer and his interpreter filed a report in German with Jan Prošvic. The happy and highly relieved family were informed they had reached the small Bavarian town of Neukirchen beim Heiligen Blut. After completing the report they were quietly transported to Vseruby where they were all arrested for illegally “crossing the state border”. On 28th April 1948, aviation mechanics Karel Doutháč and Otto Slavík also found themselves at the same false border post, as did former intelligence officer Oldřich Maláč and his wife two days after

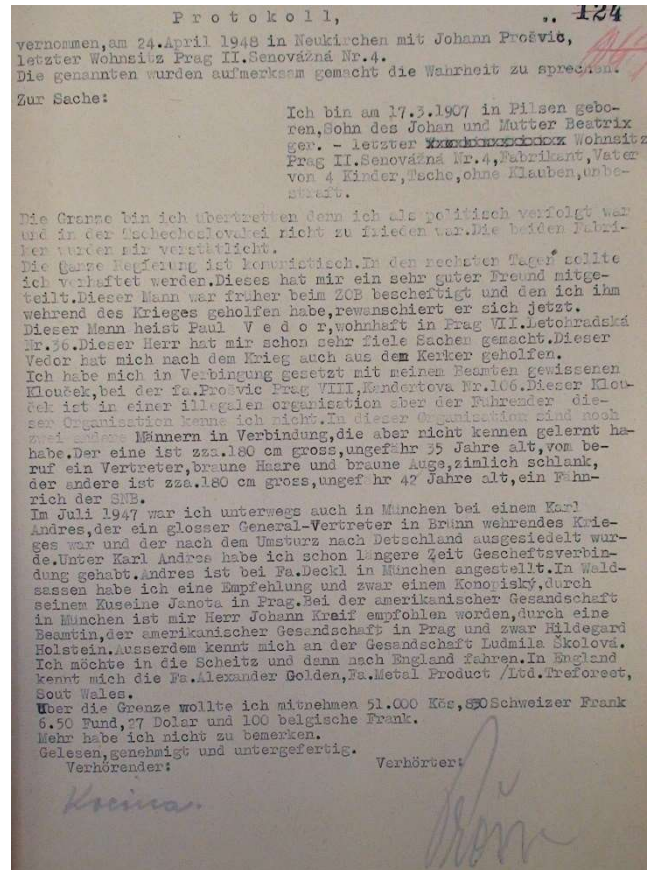


Figure 4. Report filed with Jan Prošvic in German in a fake CIC office in Mysliv © ABS, V-5317 MV.

## 2.6. American Diplomatic Notes

In the late 1940s fraudulent practices became the norm for the StB, and the “Kámen” operations are the most conclusive proof of how the communist security apparatus secretly and systematically broke the country’s laws. This was despite an exchange of diplomatic notes, triggered by the Americans and Stanislav Liška in the middle of 1948. Evžen Abrahamovič had no idea that Liška had been working for the Counter Intelligence Corps since 1946, but the first US diplomatic protest dating from the 15th June 1948 was perhaps a bit too detailed, and made it obvious to members of Abrahamovič’s StB unit that the information it contained had come from someone on the inside: “For approximately four weeks, representatives of the Czechoslovak State Security

Police (S.N.B.) [more precisely StB], dressed in the full uniform with insignia of officers of the United States Army, have been conducting on office in a house on Czechoslovak territory in the western outskirts of the village of Vseruby. In the conduct of their business, these representatives are seated behind a desk on which there is conspicuously displayed a bottle of American whiskey, packages of American cigarettes and a small American flag. On the wall behind their desk is a large American flag and pictures of Presidents Truman and Roosevelt. These S.N.B. [StB] representatives, dressed in uniforms of the United States Army, are assisted by other S.N.B. representatives who are dressed in uniforms of the German border police (sic)" [10].

At first, neither the Ministry of Foreign Affairs nor the Interior Ministry intelligence control centre were too concerned by the Americans' protest. So it was only a matter of time before they would receive another warning. "The Embassy is in receipt of further information from the American military forces in Germany that Czechoslovak border guards are driving along the border between Czechoslovakia and the American Zone of Germany in American cars and wearing United States Army uniforms. While as stated heretofore the American authorities have no desire to interfere with the legitimate efforts of the Czechoslovak authorities to protect their border, nevertheless the Embassy takes a most serious view of the misuse of American uniforms and insignia by Czechoslovak officials which is contrary to all recognized rules of international law and procedure. Inasmuch as the report mentioned above confirms information previously received by the Embassy and reported to the Czechoslovak authorities, the Embassy again requests immediate steps be taken to terminate the practice (sic)" [11], wrote the USA embassy in Prague in a second diplomatic note sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2nd July 1948, in a bid to put an end to these illegal practices. Meanwhile within the StB suspicion was increasingly falling on Stanislav Liška, commanding officer of the Vseruby SNB station.



Figure 5. Stanislav Liška (1911–1980) © ABS, personnel file No. 59/11.

## 2.7. Dangers of Being a Witness

The Americans received a response to the diplomatic notes a month later, but the blame was placed on a rogue agent. "Nowhere on the western outskirts of the village of Vseruby did or do members of the Czechoslovak Corps of National Security duty in the uniform and with the insignia of officers of the United States Army. There is no house in the western outskirts of Vseruby, which could have been used for the purpose set forth in the Embassy's notes (sic)" [12], stated the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs 9th August 1948 in its three-page reply to the US embassy. "In view of the fact that in spite of the most conscientious investigation at Vseruby not even the slightest trace or suspicion could be ascertained of any wrongful use in Vseruby of American insignia or portraits of American statesmen, it may be presumed that the whole thing is a fabricated story of a shifty informer. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs would greatly appreciate any concrete information by the American authorities which should assist in the tracking down of any persons who do in such a way misuse the uniforms and insignia of the United States Army (sic)" [13].

The aim of the seemingly courteous but wholly dishonest reply was to glean more details on who might have spilled the beans on the top secret police operations. Stanislav Liška was arrested 10th December 1948. He spent almost five months in custody on suspicion of treason and misuse of public office. The High Military Court in Prague subsequently released him for lack of evidence, though he remained under tight surveillance thereafter. For that reason, on the 12th August 1949 he fled Czechoslovakia with his wife and three small children [14].

In a refugee camp in the German town of Ludwigsburg Liška described in a four page tirade exactly what Interior Ministry intelligence had been up to in Vseruby, and what his superiors had asked of him: "I would also note that in July of 1948, these false border operations resulted in diplomatic intervention by the American consul in Prague, around the time I was ordered to sign a statement for [Jan] Šenolt from the StB in Klatovy declaring that no fake borders had ever been set up in my district" [15]. The former Vseruby SNB commanding officer also successfully defended himself against serious allegations put by Jan Prošvic. The latter had managed to escape from a communist labour camp and made it to Bavaria. After meeting Liška (who he recognised as the bogus people trafficker from the "Jonny" operation) by chance, he naturally had little hesitation in reporting him to the authorities.

Liška was one of the lucky ones – he managed to emigrate along with his family to Canada, but two of his comrades, Staff Sergeant Václav Šnadr and Lieutenant Colonel František Havlíček, who both knew about the "Kámen" operations and remained in Czechoslovakia, were executed 12th November 1952. Another of Liška's colleagues from Vseruby, Sergeant Bohumil Mikeš was found hanged in suspicious circumstances in a refugee camp in the German town of Murnau in April 1949.

### 3. Communist Crimes in the Czech Memory

#### 3.1. *Všeruby Seven Decades Later*

Shortly after my first book *Kámen* was published in late October 2013, Salesian priest and theologian Zdeněk Jančařík headed out to Všeruby, fascinated as he was with the story of SNB commanding officer Stanislav Liška. I had managed to unearth a pretty incredible paradox. On the one hand Liška had helped spirit prominent individuals over the border at huge personal risk, individuals sent to the border by my grandfather Ota Tulačka's (cover name "Cyril") resistance group. However, on the other hand, albeit under orders from his superiors, he had also led other escapees into the trap near Myslív, a mere 200m or so from the real border, the location of the first bogus crossing point.

Zdeněk Jančařík was keen to find out what the locals living there now thought about the events of the late 1940s. In February of 2014, he told me about the experience he had had with a driver from Všeruby. It is still a place where the families of former members of the 15th Company of the 3rd Battalion of the 9th (Domažlice) Border Guard Brigade (Pohraniční stráž – PS), live today. Mr Jančařík was politely asking around where he might find a memorial commemorating the false border operations. He had no idea he was a little ahead of his time and watched with surprise as a local driver got out of his car and marched over to him, almost as though he was about to punch him. "Nothing of the sort happened here – no matter what you might have heard from some Prague hack," he exclaimed. Jančařík tried to stay calm, mentioning that the *Kámen* book was an honest, well-founded piece of work by a local writer, but the driver was having none of it. "It's all lies," he shouted angrily, started his car and drove off, repeating the words "We're not interested," as he did so. Zdeněk Jančařík later declared the false border in Všeruby a historical wound, still sore after more than six decades.

On the trail of the "Kámen" operations near Všeruby in 2018, I was acting as guide for a historian who had travelled with his girlfriend all the way from Slovakia. We were crossing a field when a local man in dusty overalls went by on a miniature tractor, almost dislocating his neck as he turned to stare at us. Having parked the tractor in his garden, he came bounding after us, calling out: "Mrs Janděčková, I'm so glad to see you. Are you working on a new book?" It took us several hours to get round the crime scene, getting soaking wet in the process, so in the end we decided to retreat to the local pub. After several beers we were just leaving when drinkers at an outdoor table called out: "Hey, Mrs Janděčková, if we'd known you were here we'd have brought our books for you to sign". We chatted for a while about history, and for a long time afterwards the Slovak historian couldn't get over the fact that local cooks who work in Germany are among the readers of my specialist, widely reviewed works.

#### 3.1.1. *No Justice in Sight*

Not everyone, however, thinks crimes committed by the communist police should be brought to the public's attention. During a recent talk in Všeruby, one of the locals stood up and declared resolutely: "I think we should just let the whole thing lie!" I really appreciated the fact the guy had come with his family and stated his opinion in such a public manner. I was there with my *False Borders* travelling exhibition that I had created for the Association for the Research of Communist Crimes, and I was looking forward to showing people that had not been alone. After all, none of the local people were in any way responsible for the wrongdoings near their village. It really didn't matter who had been a card-holding member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ). These hadn't been actions perpetrated only against the victims directly, but if no one talks about these recently unearthed, unpunished, unexpired crimes and we just let them lie, we will never come to terms with our troubled past. Why hesitate to point the finger at those who bear responsibility for crimes perpetrated by the former regime? Even symbolic convictions would send the right message to future generations.

#### 3.1.2. *No Dignified Closure*

These days, visitors to Všeruby can read bi-lingual information boards erected by the local mayor, Václav Bernard, to mark seven decades since Jan Prošvic found himself at the fake crossing. The day they were unveiled we all prayed for the victims on the embankment of Myslív's lake. The daughter of Karel Procházka, a former member of the post-war Interim National Assembly, came all the way from the Hradec Králové Region. Her father received a life sentence after finding himself at the false border on the 12th November 1948. Sadly, we only know nine names of those unlucky enough to have crossed the aforementioned embankment and been interrogated by a "foreign power".

#### 3.1.3. *Child Victims*

In other places we know of at least 33 most likely terrified individuals who were sent to communist jails and concentration camps after being ensnared by unscrupulous StB officers and special agents. However, small children by the name of Jan and Vladimír Minařík were removed from their parents the day they were arrested (6th May 1948) and taken to the Masaryk Childrens Home in Marienbad (Mariánské Lázně). Ten-year-old Jana Prošvicová spent several days in the Domažlice poorhouse, but when she subsequently had to be collected by her relatives, Josef Janoušek was tipped off as to what was going on. More schoolboy errors! The infamous name containing the tougher-sounding word "stone" came into use several months later.

#### 3.2. *Commemorative Plaques in Kdyně and Tři Sekery*

Under the supervision of special agent František Hejný, alias "Jonny", all of the victims of the April 1948 operations were initially taken to the Modrá hvězda hotel in Kdyně.

There they were allowed to rest while they waited for Stanislav Liška to arrive. Now home to the Municipal Culture Centre, the town of Kdyně recently unveiled a commemorative plaque on the wall outside, an illustration of how a community can successfully come to terms with an inglorious past. The ceremony took place on the 28th November 2018 on the occasion of the opening of my *False Borders* exhibition and in the presence of some of the victims and their relatives. The plaque reads: *FALSE BORDERS 1948–1951. TO COMMEMORATE THE UNFORTUNATE VICTIMS OF THE “KÁMEN” OPERATIONS AND AS A FIRM WARNING TO GENERATIONS PRESENT AND FUTURE.*

The same commemorative plaque was also unveiled in the village of Tři Sekery. The community also erected two information boards with most of the local inhabitants, including the mayoress Dagmar Strnadová, supporting the move. However, few are aware that the text was composed by the granddaughter, daughter and niece of the victims, Irena Tyslová, maiden name Minaříková. Created using a real photograph, the image of her divided family transforms a cold chunk of metal into something that appeals to our emotions. It gives all those affected the hope that several generations did not suffer in vain, and that there is still time to learn from the events of the period.



**Figure 6.** The commemorative plaque unveiled by the victims of “Kámen” operations © Karel Fiala.

### 3.3. Planá near Mariánské Lázně

On the instructions of another agent provocateur, Irena’s grandfather and erstwhile editor of *Svobodné slovo* Vladimír Minařík arrived with his wife and two young children at the railway station in Planá on the evening of the 5th May 1948. They soon realised there were several others intending to make it across the border with them that night, including former Royal Air Force pilot Josef Hnátek. Who could have known then, that on 3rd June the 38-year-old major would be sentenced to death by hanging. Fortunately, the sentence handed down by the High Military Court for “crossing” the border and contact with a “foreign power” was, for mitigating circumstances, never carried out. The communist legal system came up with a different punishment for the victim of its own ruse: a hefty 16-year prison sentence!

And what about the good folk of Planá? Well, even they had the chance to see my exhibition as well as listen to Jan

Minařík who toddled around the bogus border as a two-year-old. That night, just two weeks after the start of the operations in the Všeruby area, 14 people left Planá in a truck heading towards the border. Beyond Stará Voda they got out and wandered with a people smuggler several kilometres on foot to the fake crossing near the hamlet of Háj. Branded an enemy of the state, Jan Minařík later learnt to be a cook, then became involved in the world of dance. In the end he became a soloist at the Tanztheater Wuppertal, working closely with the legendary Pina Bausch [16]. No reminder of the false border operations can be found in Háj today.

The day the exhibition opened in Planá (4th April 2019), I had agreed to have a special session for students in the morning, then give the lecture for the public in the evening. However, the day before I received news that the talk for the students had been cancelled. The headmaster had changed his mind about the whole thing and none of the teachers seemed bold enough to allow pupils to attend. The official reason given was that the lecture examined a window of history which was too limited in its scope. This was the second time I had given a lecture in the area, a place where before the coronavirus crisis the border guards ball and other gatherings involving former officers of the PS took place on an annual basis. Attendance at the evening lecture wasn’t much to write home about, but the atmosphere was lively. “There’s little point in going to places where the lecture halls are filled to the brim,” the manager of Planá’s Kinonekino venue, Blanka Borůvková, had once said to me in encouragement: “You should focus on the places where people don’t show up. So come again!” Later I found out the real, unofficial reason why the event with the students had been cancelled: If Mr Kvasnička wasn’t allowed to give his lecture, neither was Mrs Janděčková!

### 3.4. Jalový Dvůr and Pavlova Hut’ near Bärnau

Now no longer with us, I only met Stanislav Kvasnička once in person. A former border guard and later teacher, his name resonated in both the Pilsen and Carlsbad regions. I received many reports that he was still teaching pupils that Pilsen was liberated at the end of WWII by Soviet soldiers dressed in American uniforms. So I was slightly taken aback when Mr Kvasnička and his sympathisers once showed up at an event to commemorate the “Kámen” operation that took place at now defunct Jalový Dvůr (German: Galtienstallung) deep in the Bohemian Forest. “The Chateau”, as a building that once stood there was dubbed, was home to a PS platoon and used as a CIC post. False borders were set up just a few kilometres to the north, on the embankment of Kajetán Lake near Chodovská Hut’, and to the south at Pavlova Hut’, not far from the village of Obora (near Tachov).

The embankment at another destroyed village – Pavlova Hut’ (German: Paulushütte) – is another place where you won’t find anything commemorating the criminal acts committed by the communist regime there. That’s despite the fact the StB were still operating the phony border crossing alongside the infamous 12th Planá Border Guard Brigade as late as 1951. A feature of the “Kámen” scam was to make



would-be escapees believe that the German customs officers were corrupt, trading refugees for cigarettes and food that the Czech border guards were to bring them next day. Even the linguistically talented Dr Emanuel Valenta, deputy director of the Škoda Works in Pilsen, didn’t see through the expertly set trap into which he fell on 1st March 1951 [17].

Once I’d managed to unearth most of the organisers of this false border operation, in 2016 I filed a criminal case against them. The Office for the Documentation and Investigation of Communist Crimes examined the case for a year before putting it on hold when it was discovered that the accused, such as Hubert Budín, Matěj Bálek and Karel Svoboda, had long since passed away. But it was this case that led me to one previously unknown victim, as well as to the location of the sham border and the office of the “American CIC” at Jalový Dvůr. As mentioned above, in August 2019 an information board in Czech and German was unveiled, Stanislav Kvasnička and his sympathizers looking on in silence, their only act of defiance a dog head emblazoned on the chests of their green uniforms. This symbol was hijacked by the PS in an attempt to appear as though they had taken on the role of modern-day Chods (a Slavic tribe in West Bohemia historically charged by the kings of Bohemia with guarding the border with Bavaria), loyal guardians of the Czechoslovak border once again under “threat” from outside forces.

### 3.5. From the Highlands Region to Tři Sekery

In 2014, my book *Three Men against the Totalitarian Regime* about my grandfather Ota Tulačka’s “Cyril” resistance group drew me into a lively debate about the so-called Third Resistance Movement [18]. It seems not everyone can come to terms with the fact that any kind of resistance to the communist regime ever existed. That might be bordering on an admission that it was necessary to fight in any way possible, even with gun in hand, against the unbearable injustice that became the norm after the communist takeover of February 1948. In my book *False Borders* I uncover evidence that the “Kámen” operations were widely used to wipe out resistance units, as was the case in the summer of 1949 with resistance fighter and former partisan Vincenc Koutník and his accomplices.

“I would like to submit a suggestion,” writes one of the phoney resistance fighters who was really an StB officer (cover name 61) on 7th July 1949, “that a Kámen operation be carried out, by means of which all illegal actors in the Highlands Region will fall into our hands” [19]. Two months later the leader of a resistance unit Rudolf Hájek disclosed all the group’s passwords while held at a false border post near Tři Sekery, almost 400km away in the Bohemian Forest. But that wasn’t all. Under the impression he was being held in a German prison, four weeks after the “Kámen” operation on the 16th September 1949 Hájek revealed even more. He was convinced a resistance unit associated with the French secret service had helped him and his accomplice Vincenc Koutník get over the border [20].

### 3.6. Undesirable Returnees

At Svatý Kříž near Cheb a place people used to call the “Little Chateau” was also once home to a PS unit. Today it is a casino. It was here on 7th December 1950 that a bogus American officer interrogated Mirko Šíkola and members of his family, wealthy jewellery dealers. At the time he was of secondary school age and still recalls the events of that frosty night. On the 26th May 2017 in Jablonec nad Nisou he told me the whole story: “Having apprehended us, they subjected us to a mock execution, shooting their machine guns into the air”. At that moment he felt nothing. He didn’t know if he was dead or alive [21].

-31-

Wish.   
 Tajně.

Questionnaire.   
 Dotazník.   
 For a Czechoslovakian Subject.   
 Pro čsl. statni příslušný.

ZRUŠEN STUPEŇ   
 UTAJENÍ   
 5

1. Name and Surname: *Josef Šíkola*   
 Jméno a příjmení:

2. Date of Birth: *29. III. 1900*   
 Data narození:

3. Profession: *Glass Worker*   
 Zamestnání:

4. Last Postal address in CSR: *Zásada 207 District Semily*   
 Posledně bytem v CSR:

5. Political views in any: *Kot. Party*   
 Politická příslušnost:

6. Reason for Leaving CSR state exactly why if Political or otherwise: *economic reason + political*   
 Důvod k odchodu z CSR zda politický či jiný důvod, konkrétně uvést: *have financial supported people working underground against the Czech government*

7. Have you Relatives in any other country where? *USA: New York*   
 Máte v cizině příbuzné, kde? *Harry Stern, New York 29/31 Street 38 NY 18.   
 Weissmann " "   
 Balchin " "   
 address: Teplice*

8. Do you wish to work in any Revolutionary activity against the new regime in CSR in what manner? *Yes prepared to work against the communist but not against Czechoslovak*   
 Chcete se zúčastnit v cizině odbojové činnosti proti nynější CSR jakým způsobem?

9. Where you in any illegal organisation or active in any way against the present regime? State which organisation who is the leader and where are the headquarters, state Briefly their activities? *stated in 14*   
 Byl jste v CSR členem nějaké ileg. organizace neb jinak cinný proti tamnímu zřízení? Udejte o jakou organizaci se jednalo, kdo ji vedl, sídlo a stručně popište její popis?

Figure 7. Fake form filled out by Josef Šíkola in Svatý Kříž near Cheb, page 1 © ABS, V-2624 MV.

Former restaurateur Marie Štěrbová and her daughter Vlasta, both of whom were recently recognised for their contribution to the anti-communist resistance, had been interrogated at the same spot half a year earlier, in June 1950. Marie died prior to her trial just before Christmas 1951, and the StB could think of nothing more dignified than to toss her body into a mass grave in Prague’s Ďáblice district! The accusation against the 42-year-old woman dating from May of 1951 reads: “The above is a sworn class enemy with no hope of rehabilitation or return to human society” [22]. Her daughter Vlasta was sentenced to seven years in jail. She also was under the impression they had become lost and that the Czechoslovak border guards had kidnapped them in



Germany. Sadly, while the huge market there continues to swell, Svätý Kříž is another place bearing no reminder of these terrible events.

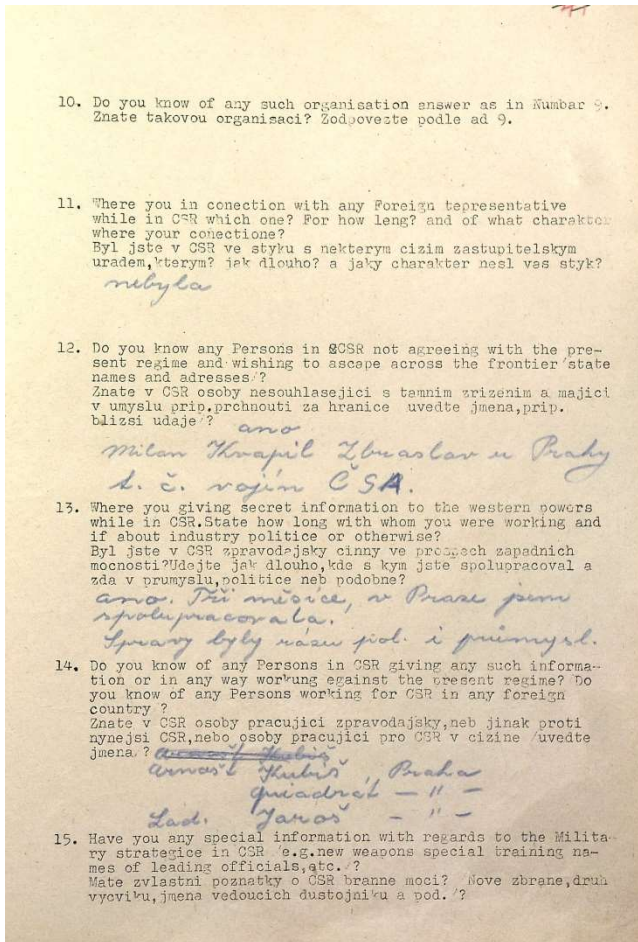


Figure 8. Fake form filled out by Vlasta Štěrbová in Svätý Kříž on 23rd June 1950, page 2 © ABS, V-138 MV.

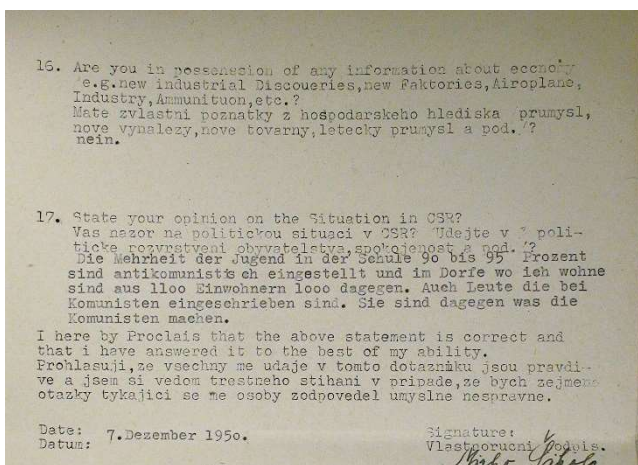


Figure 9. Fake form filled out by Mirko Šikola in Svätý Kříž on 7th December 1950, page 3 © ABS, V-2624 MV.

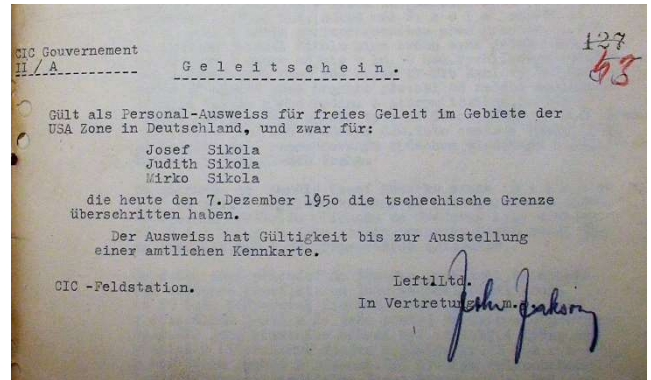


Figure 10. Confirmation issued by the bogus CIC office at Svätý Kříž © ABS, V-2624 MV.

## 4. Shameful Aspect of the Cold War

### 4.1. Reactions of Old and Young

I also presented an open-air version of my exhibition in the town of Klatovy. I was happy this took place as all of the “Kámen” operations in the Všeruby area were organized by the Interior Ministry intelligence control centre working closely with the StB Regional Office in Klatovy. Before the exhibition opened in the presence of several classes of schoolchildren, an elderly lady attempted to deter people from visiting by trying to convince them, including my own father, that I had simply invented everything on the panels. Another person who remembered the times, evidently born in Slovakia and of limited education, once gave his reaction during a public discussion to one of my appearances in the media: “It was a superb operation – we agents also cooperated with Western intelligence. That’s something no one knows about. It was a superb trap to catch those who wouldn’t toe the line! Riffraff mostly. But we were always one step ahead. I’m proud to have been a part of it.” But had it ever occurred to that vocal gentleman that the Yanks weren’t from the US and that the Germans were fake?

I gave my first talk on the fake borders in Mariánské Lázně in March 2019. At the end of the lecture, a female student from the town’s grammar school jumped out of her seat and launched into a rant: “How come we knew nothing about this before? I’ve lived here since I was little and I’ve never heard of the dreadful things that went on around here!”



Figure 11. The author’s False Borders exhibition in Domažlice in autumn 2019 © Association for the Research of Communist Crimes.

**4.2. The Longing to Rule over Others**

Interrogated during a “Kámen” operation near the town of Aš, anti-communist resistance member Jiří Fikrt passed away in Canada in November 2019. He simply never accepted the fact that the border he had crossed wasn’t the real one. In my book *False Borders* there is no mention of the fact that the faux US officer whose identity I had revealed (who somewhat ironically was played by a German, Horst Baumgarten) was wanted by Europol. I also informed the police about his case which was then dealt with by the relevant public prosecutor in the region. Naturally it all came too late, but at least it was ascertained that the former CIC employee, who joined the StB at the end of 1949, had died in Leipzig. How much evil had he perpetrated in the meantime? Shortly before crossing from Germany into Czechoslovakia Baumgarten stated: “According to some Czechoslovak escapees the StB uses rubber truncheons to beat people and deprives them of food for days on end, while they are kept in a horrendous underground vault. These individuals have made these statements about the StB in Prague – so I have acquired the address which I am taking with me so that, once across the border, I can show the SNB where I want to work as I don’t speak Czech” [23].

A message I found in the guestbook after presenting my exhibition at the Czech Embassy in Berlin in June 2019 and then in Tři Sekery seems particularly relevant when thinking about these events: “They remain among us and are still using the same tactics. They abuse the desire of the weak to control others, to influence their lives – the desire to feel important. We need to open up history for all... we know only too well that it often repeats itself.”

**4.3. Rekindling Relations with Our German Neighbours**

It may only seem as though our German neighbours aren’t interested in what went on along their border. For almost all the inhabitants of the border areas of Bavaria it all remains something of a mystery, but a mystery they would like to know more about. Inspired by my research, the theatre production *Operation KAMEN* by the Staatsschauspiel Dresden was a huge success and more projects are planned. What went on in all those houses the Sudeten Germans were forced to leave behind after WWII? And what exactly were those Czechs doing to their fellow citizens?

Jiří Fikrt and Dr Václav Cihlář may not have suffered entirely in vain. The “Kámen” operations of which they were the victims in January and April of 1950 respectively took place in a building that once stood on a busy track called the Mühlbacher Kirchsteig. The so-called Pearl Cycling Trail (Perlenradweg) may be specially routed to cross the border there. A combination of history and future events could, in the coming years, help the town of Aš to restore this once tree-lined route. Linking the two neighbouring worlds, as well as creating a dignified reminder of the victims of the communist regime who passed that way before being arrested, could bring benefit to both communities on each side of the border. Commemorative sites in the countryside

attract history buffs and hikers who bring much-needed development in the border areas. The OVIGO Theater from Regensburg also intends to make its contribution in this respect – for the 2022 season they are planning outdoor theatre performances in the various places where the fake border and customs points once stood. My script entitled *Fingierte Grenzen – Auf den Spuren der Aktion “Kámen”* is of course based on actual events.

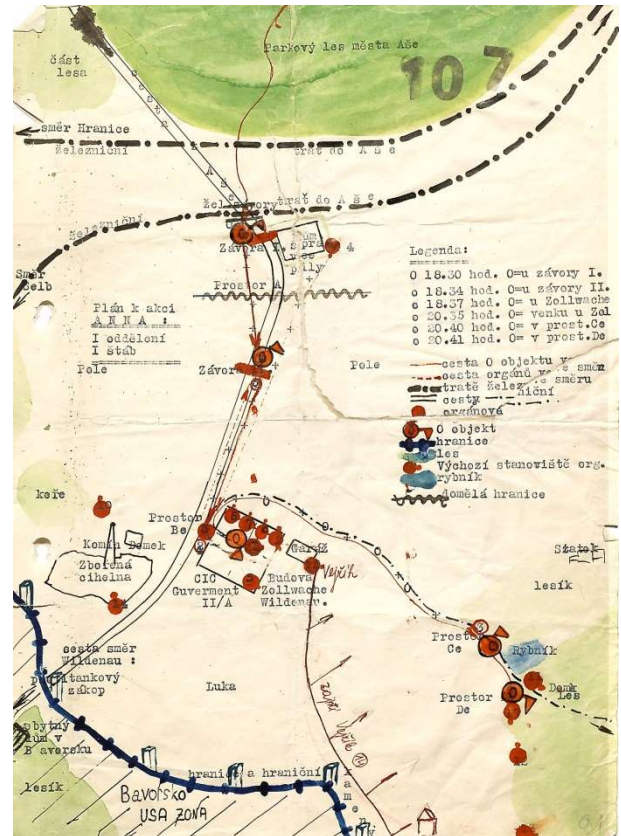


Figure 12. Plan for the “Anna” operation of the “Kámen” type close to the Czech-German border near Aš 27th January 1950. © ABS, S-3973 KV.

**4.4. The Role of the Iron Curtain**

The “Kámen” operations in the late 1940s were nothing new. Some parts of the method had been utilized by Soviet special services even before the outbreak of WWII. Today there is little sense in arguing over who might have been the architect of this evil scheme [24]. There is also no point in discussing whether the whole thing was implemented on the advice of, or even under direct instruction from former partisans and commissars trained in the USSR. In August 1951 the high-ranking StB officer Evžen Abrahamovič, one of the “fathers” of the operations, retired for good, but even then the practice continued to be implemented [25]. After he was injured in October 1949, victims were thereafter protected from his excesses, but not from his superiors, colleagues and other reckless individuals who had an interest in seeing “Kámen” live on [26]. The practices meanwhile spread among security units of lesser importance along the entire western border. Top secret and illegal “Kámen” operations gradually took root in the period following the



putsch of February 1948. It is a huge irony that the intelligence service's criminal trickery was brought to an end when the Iron Curtain fell in the early 1950s, closing the border with West Germany for the next four decades, until communism collapsed in 1989.

## 5. Conclusions

The long process of opening communist archives, especially in the Czech Republic, provides us with new perspectives on the recent history of Central Europe. Secret police agents did not hesitate to make use of criminal methods to consolidate the totalitarian regime's power. This work aims to highlight the sophistication that came to be standard procedure in the planning behind State Security operations, and not only to younger generations who are unaware of its activities and "working" methods.

Only after studying a number of cases in some detail have I managed to show that as operations of the "Kámen" type were organised on a lower, regional StB level, this meant that a lot more evidence was preserved. As the number of cases grew, it became necessary for the authorities to send off all manner of applications and reports to numerous different places, the entire paper trail efficiently filed away. When preserved, all of this documentation has made it possible to reconstruct top secret intelligence service subterfuges down to a surprising level of detail.

It may surprise some that until recently historians had only managed to get to the bottom of a handful of cases and only pinning down the key facts at that. The basic way the "Kámen" operations worked has been known for decades. But most historians and research institutions were seemingly deterred by the fact that the evidence has to be actively rooted out – it mostly lurks in several different files and it's often quite a painstaking task. The structure of the archives containing the StB records doesn't enable those interested to search according to the type of operation employed or the manner in which the victims were apprehended. Of course a significant amount of evidence was destroyed forever. Nevertheless, based on my own private research, my publications present proof that there is sense in diving into these uncharted waters. It is reasonable to assume there are those still living among us who have little idea they were sent to prison for many years for something they had not done. It's unbelievable that no one has ever been punished for this criminal scheme.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to Marc Di Duca for translating this study. I would also like to express my gratitude to Stanislav Liška's family who, in 2013, provided me with the copies of two unpublished documents – *Falesne hranice*, a four-page document about secret state police operations written in Ludwigsburg in 1950 and the sixty-page memoirs named *FALESNE HRANICE*, written in Edmonton in 1959. I am grateful for the conversations I have had with

many former political prisoners as well as their relatives.

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