

The Hot Summer of 1939. Polish and Czechoslovak Military Intelligence on the Eve of the Outbreak of War in the Light of Reports by Polish Officers

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In the era of the war threat to Czechoslovakia from the Third Reich in 1938, Poland's approach towards its southern neighbour was rightly described by Marek Piotr Deszczyński, a Polish historian, as “unfriendly neutrality.”¹ Previous relations between Warsaw and Prague were far from exemplary, but during the Munich Conference these relations definitely cooled. This cooling in Polish-Czechoslovak relations was reflected in Polish actions towards Trans-Olza and Subcarpathian Ruthenia as well as support for Hungarian plans to reclaim the border with Czechoslovakia.

Until the mid-1930s, mutual relations, although far from ideal, were basically stable. In terms of military relations and intelligence cooperation, they could be considered good. Military bodies on both sides of the border were more or less aware that since both countries were faced with the conflict with Germany, it would be necessary to put mutual animosity aside. It should be added that in Poland, the danger from the Soviet Union played a key role in the country's security policy. Having a vivid memory of the Polish-Bolshevik war, Polish authorities considered the threat from the East to be more likely. In the first half of the 1930s, joint conferences of Czechoslovak and Polish intelligence officers were held; they were combined with the exchange of information about operational methods and their results in various sectors. Their main purpose was to discuss dangers posed by the Third Reich, but Polish participants of these conferences drew attention to the threat of Ukrainian irredentism and contacts to radical Ukrainian emigrant circles in Czechoslovakia with German intelligence.

While there was an agreement in these military bodies on the need to maintain good relations regardless of previous issues (primarily regarding Trans-Olza), the political and governmental bodies from both countries generally ignored the importance of mutual relations in the security system of their

¹ Marek Piotr Deszczyński, *Ostatni egzamin. Wojsko Polskie wobec kryzysu czechosłowackiego 1938–1939* (Warsaw: Neriton, 2003), 99.

countries. The political ambitions of the leaders (President Edvard Beneš and Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Józef Beck) also had a role to play.

Proper bilateral relations, and therefore also intelligence cooperation, broke off in the mid-1930s. The root cause laid in the signing of the Polish-German declaration of non-aggression in 1934, and then the Czechoslovak-Soviet agreement on mutual cooperation in 1935. Although these acts were not directed against either countries, whether on the Vistula or the Vltava River, and their aim was to increase the security of both countries, they resulted in a significant decline in political trust. The authorities in Prague were afraid of military rapprochement between Poland and Germany, while the authorities in Warsaw pointed to Czechoslovak consent to anti-Polish actions of the Soviet Union and the Czechs' support for the anti-Polish operations of communists in their own country.

The deterioration of relations with Prague required that the Poles transform the principles of operation of their own intelligence structures in Czechoslovakia. At the beginning of September 1937, Colonel Stefan Mayer, the head of the Intelligence Division of the 2nd Department of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces (hereinafter referred to as the 2nd Department of the PAF), acting at the order of his superior, Colonel Tadeusz Pełczyński (then head of Polish military intelligence), developed a structure of intelligence service in the southern sector, which was accepted in December 1937. Colonel Mayer claimed that Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union were involved in far-reaching cooperation, combined with intense Soviet infiltration into the territory of Poland's southern neighbour. Therefore, in this structure, he suggested that the control over the intelligence operations targeting Czechoslovakia remain in the hands of the "East" Unit, within which it was decided to create the "Czechoslovakia" Sub-Unit. It was led by Captain Józef Robak since March 1938 and his tasks included coordinating actions of intelligence units in Czechoslovakia, which were located in Prague, Moravian Ostrava, Bratislava, and Uzhgorod. Additional support was provided by several so-called officer posts located in Poland. They dealt with cross-border intelligence. The "Bohemia" Sub-Unit (operating within the General Studies Units by the Division of Studies of the 2nd Department) was responsible for analysing information sent from the other side of the border by individual diplomatic missions and posts. It was led by Major Seweryn Kotarba. As a side note, it should be added that in his later report on this period of his activity, he had pointed out that he had no leverage over the opinion of his superiors regarding Czechoslovak affairs and was not asked about his position on these issues. In private, he pointed out that both countries could create an effective barrier against

German expansion.² Major Kotarba grew up in Moravia, he spoke the Czech language, graduated from the Czech high school in Brno and was undoubtedly an expert in Czechoslovak affairs in Polish intelligence.

The tasks of intelligence units operating within the “Bohemia” Sub-Unit included collecting information on the deployment of Czechoslovak troops and their organization, weaponry, numbers as well as ethnic composition. An interest was also developed in communication networks, fortifications, reinforcement, and the arms industry. In Slovakia, attention was drawn to operations and influence of German services. However, units operating within the structures of the “East” Unit were mainly focused on observing communist circles, actions taken by the Soviet services as well as Ukrainian nationalist circles.³

Another example of the negative attitude of Polish government bodies, and therefore the military attitudes, towards the authorities in Prague in the second half of the 1930s were instructions received by certified Lieutenant-Colonel Bronisław Noël from his superiors when taking up the position of a military attaché of the Republic of Poland in Prague in April 1938. The Chief of General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, Brigadier General Waław Stachiewicz, recommended refraining from taking any actions or expressing views inconsistent with instructions given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He suggested blaming the Czechoslovak side for worsening the relations with Poland. He made the improvement of relations dependent on the successful resolution of disputable issues (primarily the incorporation of Trans-Olza into Poland). Recommendations given by Colonel Tadeusz Pełczyński to Lieutenant-Colonel Noël were similar. The former ordered Czechoslovak-Soviet observation. He also pointed out that relations with Czechoslovak General Staff and military bodies should be orderly, but rather cool. Just like General Stachiewicz, Colonel Pełczyński advised emphasizing the impossibility of establishing good relations between Warsaw and Prague before settling the issues of Polish minority in Trans-Olza in accordance with Poland’s wishes.⁴

² More in: Archiwum Instytutu Polskiego i Muzeum gen. Sikorskiego w Londynie [The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London] (hereinafter referred to as the IPMS), Relacje sygn. BI6f/40, mjr Seweryn Kotarba, Meldunek do Biura Rejestracyjnego Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych z 23.02.1940., L. dz. 324 [1940].

³ Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe, Kolekcja Wojskowej Komisji Archiwalnej [Central Military Archives, Collection of the Military Archival Commission] (hereinafter referred to as the CAW, KWKA), sygn. VIII. 800. 61. 5. Sprawozdanie z organizacji wywiadu na Czechosłowację, 111–30.

⁴ “Raport ppłk. dypl. Bronisława Noëla dla Biura Rejestracyjnego Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych,” in: *Stosunki polsko-czechosłowackie 1932–1939 w relacjach dyplomatów II Rzeczypospolitej*, ed. Sławomir M. Nowinowski (Łódź: Ibidem, 2006), 23–24.

It is worth mentioning here that Czechoslovak military bodies were already trying to explore options of restoring dialogue at the end of 1937. In December of that year, Major Otakar Buda, the military attaché of Czechoslovakia in Bucharest, met for this purpose with Polish attaché, Lieutenant-Colonel Tadeusz Zakrzewski. Another meeting, this time held by Lieutenant-Colonel František Dastych (attaché in Moscow) with Polish deputy attaché Major Stanisław Maleciński, was of a similar nature. However, the authorities from Warsaw prohibited Polish military diplomats from holding these types of meetings.⁵

Tense relations between Warsaw and Prague, which hit high points during Polish subversive operations in Trans-Olza and Subcarpathian Ruthenia (autumn 1938), resulted in a decision to undertake operations against Poland by the Czechoslovak intelligence.⁶ Based on the observations, it was concluded that in the first months of 1939, there was a Polish intelligence unit operating at the Polish diplomatic mission in Prague, focused on Germany. Its goal was to search for agents coming from the anti-Nazi emigration community in Czecho-Slovakia.⁷ Individuals who agreed to cooperate were to get a paid ticket to Warsaw, where they were going to be interrogated and their job opportunities in Germany were supposed to be examined. These people were to develop a network of agents who collected intelligence materials or who were ready to engage in sabotage missions. A person named "Hinterhof" was allegedly recruited during this procedure; he was assigned to work as the diplomatic mission's press attaché.⁸ In Czecho-Slovakia, agents were handled by a Polish intelligence employee known as "Ostaszewski,"⁹ who warned them not to collect information on Czech affairs during their work because they were of no interest of Polish intelligence services. He also claimed that conducting anti-Czech operations would make it impossible to work against the

⁵ More in: Jerzy Kupliński, *Polsko-czechosłowackie kontakty od wiosny 1938 do jesieni 1939 roku*, (Gdańsk: Uniwersytet Gdański, 1977), 1–12; Henryk Bułhak, "Czechosłowackie próby wznowienia rozmów na temat sojuszu wojskowego z Polską (1937–1938)," *Studia z dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej*, vol. XII (1976): 205–209; Jiří Friedl and Pavel Šrámek, "Pokus o československo-polské vojenské sblížení v březnu 1938," *Vojenská historie* 4 (2005): 92–101.

⁶ Jan Gebhart, "Poznámky k čs.-polským zpravodajským kontaktům do 15. března 1939," *Slezský sborník* 1 (1996): 35.

⁷ The name "Czecho-Slovakia" was introduced after the transformation of Czechoslovakia into a federal state in October 1938, which operated until mid-March 1939.

⁸ It is about Eugeniusz Hinterhoff (1895–1972), the Polish Army officer and a journalist. He did arrive in Prague in March 1938 as a correspondent of PAT, a government press agency. After the Germans invaded Prague in March 1939, he was arrested for three months. In July 1939, he returned to Warsaw. He spent the war years in Great Britain never to return to Poland. He was working as a journalist, conducted Soviet studies and lectured at the NATO Defence College.

⁹ Personal details could not be established.

Germans. Ostarzewski's statements showed that Polish-German relations were very tense and therefore the war would break out eventually. Reportedly, the authorities in Warsaw were asked to consider the fact that the Czechs would support Poland and the Western Allies, and then leave their homeland in large numbers to fight together with the Poles against the Germans.¹⁰ Without Polish documents, it is difficult to confirm information contained in the above-mentioned materials of the Czechoslovak services. However, the figure of Eugeniusz Hinterhoff makes them credible to some extent. The content of the document shows the evolution of the attitude of Polish services towards the authorities in Prague, even before German invasion of the country in March 1939.

A decision taken in February 1939 to reorganize the "Bohemia" Sub-Unit was a clearer symptom of changes in the approach of Polish intelligence, more specifically by the "East" Unit, to the Czecho-Slovak issue. As a result, the Special Sub-Unit was created in its place, led by Major Stanisław Paprocki.¹¹ At the beginning of March 1939, the units of the Special Sub-Unit sent information confirming that the Germans could invade Czecho-Slovakia. Despite this, the headquarters in Warsaw was sceptical about this information. Although Polish authorities were not surprised by German troops invading the territory of their southern neighbour, they were not ready to draw applicable conclusions and create a plan related to the invasion. This was demonstrated by the fact that in the territory incorporated into the Third Reich, Polish intelligence units subordinated to the "East" Unit were still operating, staffed mainly by officers specializing in Soviet affairs, most often not knowing the German language. The reasons for such a situation remain unknown. It seems, however, that it was related to a competence dispute between the "East" and the "West" Units. The former, led by Captain Jerzy Niezbrzycki, enjoyed much greater trust from military superiors and the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose employees had an enormous impact on the intelligence service. From an operational point of view, this was undoubtedly a mistake because it weakened intelligence operations south of Polish border. The period of several months before the outbreak of the war was too short to correct this error.

According to certified Colonel Marian Smoleński, the last pre-war head of the 2nd Department of the General Staff, who in February 1939 had replaced certified Colonel Tadeusz Pełczyński, a decision to shift the focus of Polish

¹⁰ Vojenský ústřední archiv – Vojenský historický archiv Praha (hereinafter referred to as the VÚA–VHA), fond 37, sign. 29-10. Document is not dated.

¹¹ CAW, KWKA, sygn. VIII. 800. 61. 5. Odprawa z dnia 21.02.1939 r., 98–99.

intelligence towards investigating a threat of war coming from Germany was made at the turn of February and March 1939.¹²

Therefore, the units of the Special Sub-Department from the former Czechoslovakia were included in the “West” Unit. However, until the outbreak of the war, the military men failed to fully reorganize the work of Polish intelligence service in the former Czechoslovak sector. Due to the loss of documents of the 2nd Department of the General Staff during the war, it is currently impossible to reconstruct the exact composition of Polish intelligence network in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Most likely, until the outbreak of the war, the employees of both the “West” and “East” Units operated there. What is certain, however, is the fact that cooperation in the intelligence sector between Polish and Czecho-Slovak officers was re-established, which reflected the change in attitude towards Czech issues in Polish policy immediately before the outbreak of World War II.

On March 14, 1939, a day before the Nazi troops marched into Prague, a group of officers of the Czecho-Slovak military intelligence, including its head, Colonel František Moravec, were evacuated to London. Already from Great Britain, the Czechoslovak military men decided to refresh contacts with Polish intelligence that had been suspended since mid-1930¹³. The first attempt was made in the form of a meeting of certified Major Tadeusz Szumowski¹⁴, head of the “West” Unit of the 2nd Department of the General Staff of the Polish Army, with Lieutenant-Colonel Prokop Kumpošt, a Czecho-Slovak

¹² Sprawozdanie płk. dypl. Mariana Józefa Smoleńskiego z 1. 11. 1939, in: Andrzej Grzywacz, “Funkcjonowanie Oddziału II Sztabu Głównego w 1939 roku,” *Zeszyty Historyczne* 125 (1998): 76.

¹³ See Dariusz Dąbrowski, “Organizacja wywiadu polskiego na terenie Czechosłowacji w 1938 roku. Zarys problemu badawczego,” *Východočeské listy historické* 25 (2008): 104–14.

¹⁴ Certified Major/Lieutenant-Colonel Tadeusz Szumowski (1899–1971). From 1935, he was an officer of the 2nd Department of the General Staff. In the years 1936–1939, he worked as an attaché at the Polish diplomatic mission in Stockholm, where he was a head of the “Saigon” intelligence unit. From March 19 to August 27, 1939, he was a head of the “West” Unit of the Intelligence Division of the 2nd Department of the General Staff. Then he was transferred to Bern in Switzerland, where from September 1939 he was to manage local Polish intelligence facility. He blamed the intelligence leadership for such a quick change of position, as they marginalized the threat of Nazi invasion of Poland. In his reports drawn up during and after the war, he severely criticized some of the intelligence management staff and Polish authorities. During the war, he worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the government in exile (as a head of the Personnel Department and the General Department). From February 1940 until the end of the war he served as a secretary, and then a counsellor at the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in London, at the same time he also served as a head of the Special Affairs Department of the Ministry of National Defence (1943–44) and a military attaché of the Republic of Poland to the Czechoslovak government in exile in London (October 1940 to July 1945). After the war he returned to Poland.

military attaché in Warsaw who remained in Poland after the March events, and his deputy, Major Alexander Fritscher. The Czechs provided their Polish counterpart with information received from their superiors in London about their readiness to establish cooperation.¹⁵

For this purpose, on May 9, 1939, Major Josef Bartík, who served as a head of the defence division in the Czecho-Slovak 2nd (Intelligence) Department of the General Staff, came to Warsaw.¹⁶ He brought with him four radio stations for an organization being created at that time to be responsible for conducting acts of sabotage and subversive operations in the Protectorate,¹⁷ as well as a letter from his superior, Colonel Moravec, to Colonel Marian Smoleński. During the meeting, also attended by Lieutenant-Colonel Kumpošt, a proposal was made for Czechoslovak soldiers to participate alongside or as part of the Polish army in the event of the outbreak of the war with Germany. The Czechs also declared that they would provide information materials about the Nazi army units deployed in Bohemia and Moravia, their strength, size, and weaponry. The sources of information were to come from both the Protectorate and the Reich. Additionally, they committed to organize and conduct acts of sabotage and perform subversive operations in the Protectorate. In return, Czecho-Slovak military men asked for permission to form their own military units in Poland, which, for conspiratorial reasons, would operate under cover as labour camps. These troops were to be commanded by Czech officers. They asked for letting specialists (officers and non-commissioned officers) from aviation, anti-aircraft artillery, armour and heavy artillery join the Polish army until larger Czechoslovak units could be formed. Efforts were made to make it easier for Czech and Slovak soldiers to cross the border without the risk of being turned back and to gather them at established crossing points for selection. They also asked for facilitating communication with their country by giving consent to set up a radio station at a Czecho-Slovak diplomatic mission, for enabling radio and leaflet propaganda, as well as for sending and receiving coded messages.¹⁸

As a gesture of good will, Major Bartík handed to Colonel Marian Smoleński a secret German sabotage and diversionary instruction for German

¹⁵ IPMS, Relacje z Kampanii 1939 r. Oddział II Sztabu NW, sygn. B.I.6i, Protokół z przesłuchania mjr. dypl. Tadeusza Szumowskiego, 142.

¹⁶ Pavel Kreisinger, *Brigádní generál Josef Bartík: zpravodajský důstojník a účastník prvního i druhého československého odboje* (Prague: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2011), 61–62.

¹⁷ Karel Pacner, *Československo v zvláštních službách. Pohledy do historie československých výzvědných služeb 1914–1989*, vol. 2: 1939–1945, (Prague: Themis, 2002), 93.

¹⁸ Jan Gebhart and Jan Kuklík, “Československo-polské vojenské zpravodajské styky na jaře a v létě roku 1939,” *Historie a vojenství* 2 (1992): 76–77.

minority living outside the Third Reich, regarding the actions of the fifth column in the event of the war. Moreover, he informed that Polish diplomatic code was known to the Germans. Information about breaking this code was immediately handed over to Minister Beck, but it was ignored by Polish authorities.¹⁹

The Czech offer was reported to General Waław Stachiewicz. The Chief of Polish General Staff agreed to allow Czecho-Slovak soldiers to cross the border (up to 300 people per month) and to commence intelligence and sabotage cooperation.²⁰ Even though not all demands were met, the Czecho-Slovak authorities accepted Polish response and began providing intelligence information from the Protectorate. The border was opened, in fact more than 300 people crossed it per month (which was necessary for humanitarian reasons). Thereby, fifteen senior Czechoslovak officers found their way to Poland.²¹

In order to improve the intelligence cooperation, Lieutenant-Colonel Kumpoř and Major Fritscher among other officers, were issued Polish documents.²² A Polish liaison officer was appointed to coordinate these operations, namely Captain Bronisław Gorgolewski.²³ The cooperation was to focus on three issues: the evacuation of former Czecho-Slovak soldiers to Poland, the use of the Czech intelligence networks in Bohemia and Moravia, and the organization of acts of sabotage and subversive operations in the Protectorate and in Slovakia. The latter problems were to be dealt with by a Polish officer

¹⁹ More in: Jan Bury, "Polski szyfr dyplomatyczny zdekonspirowany przez Niemców," *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny* 6 (2007): 120–22.

²⁰ IPMS, Relacje z Kampanii 1939 r. Oddział II Sztabu NW, sygn. B.I.6i, Protokół z przesłuchania mjr. dypl. Tadeusza Szumowskiego 143; Kupliński, *Polsko-czechosłowackie kontakty*, 173.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

²² IPMS, Relacje z Kampanii 1939 r. Oddział II Sztabu NW, sygn. B.I.6i, Protokół z przesłuchania mjr. dypl. Tadeusza Szumowskiego, 144.

²³ Major/Lieutenant-Colonel Bogusław Gorgolewski (1895–1965). From the mid-1920s, he worked in the 2nd Division of the General Staff, including in Branch Office No. 3 in Bydgoszcz and in the "West" Unit. In the years 1934–1936, as an attaché of the Polish Diplomatic Mission in Stockholm, he was in charge of the "Krystyna" intelligence facility aimed against the Germans. From 1936, he was a head of the Offensive Counter-intelligence Unit in the "West" Unit. After the outbreak of the war, he was detained in Romania. He spent the entire war in in France and Great Britain, where from November 1943 he served as a head of the Defence Intelligence Department (counterintelligence) at the command of Army Units (until November 1945). After the war he remained in Great Britain and died in London. He was awarded the Czechoslovak Order of the White Lion, 4th class. He was critical of the period when he was working as a liaison officer with the Czechoslovak military centre in Poland, drawing attention to the too late consent given by Polish authorities to contracting Czechoslovak military specialists to join Polish army (mainly pilots and aviation technicians).

from the Branch Office No. 2 of the 2nd Department of the General Staff (responsible for off-front sabotage and preparation for war), i. e., Major Feliks Ankerstein.²⁴

According to Captain Gorgolewski, the conferences of intelligence representatives of both countries, were also attended by certified Lieutenant-Colonel Stefan Mayer (head of the Intelligence Department of the 2nd Division of the General Staff) and certified Lieutenant-Colonel Wilhelm Heinrich (head of the Counter-intelligence Department of the 2nd Division of the General Staff). Colonel Kumpošt, Major Bartík, and Major Fritscher²⁵ represented the Czech side. Major Szumowski most likely also participated in at least some of the meetings.

Major Bartík visited Poland again in June 1939. On June 19, he met with the head of the Intelligence Division of the 2nd Department of the General Staff, Colonel Stefan Meyer, who suggested that intelligence cooperation be intensified. The idea was to include employees of the Czecho-Slovak intelligence operating in Poland to the 2nd Department. As early as in early spring, a Czech intelligence headquarters codenamed "Drak" began to set up in Poland. Its tasks included collecting information about the Third Reich through refugees from the Protectorate coming to Poland and its own network of agents in Germany. The information obtained by radio or through couriers was forwarded to the command of Czecho-Slovak intelligence in London. These headquarters maintained contact with the Polish intelligence service. The suggestion made by Colonel Meyer was supposed to facilitate operations conducted by the headquarters members.²⁶ The organization had representatives in Cieszyn (from where contact was maintained with agents from Ostrava and the neighbourhood), Katowice (they maintained contact with railway workers in Moravia and planned to establish contact in Slovakia), and in Bielsko (contacts in Slovakia).²⁷ The most important unit of the "Drak" headquarters was located in Kraków. Its members included the above-mentioned Major Fritscher, who

²⁴ IPMS, Relacje z Kampanii 1939 r. Oddział II Sztabu NW, sygn. B.I.6e, Relacja B Gorgolewskiego, k. 565–566, 626–627. Major Feliks Ankerstein (1897–1955). From 1928, he served as a deputy head of the so-called off-front sabotage (Branch Office No. 2) of the 2nd Department of the General Staff. After the outbreak of the war, he worked in Polish intelligence in Romania. From 1940 he lived in Great Britain, where he joined the British intelligence service. After World War II, he remained in exile.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Jiří Friedl, *Na jedné frontě: vztahy československé a polské armády (Polskie Siły Zbrojne) za druhé světové války* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky, 2005), 84.

²⁷ Archiv bezpečnostních složek Praha (further herein referred to as the ABS Praha), sign. 302-89-1, Zpráva Poseidona, 3 VIII 1939, 27.

was responsible for maintaining contacts with the resistance movement from former Czecho-Slovakia and intelligence activities, and Lieutenant-Colonel Alois Fišera, responsible for keeping intelligence files and interrogating military volunteers.²⁸

In addition to the “Drak” intelligence unit, its subordinate unit, responsible for acts of sabotage and subversive operations, was also set up. It was code-named “Perun”. The Branch Office No. 2 of the 2nd Departments had doubts about its ability to manage this type of work. At that time, the Branch was working on its own plan for off-front acts of sabotage on the border with Germany, where cooperation was established with representatives of the Serbo-Sorbian minority,²⁹ as well as with minorities from Slovakia (more specifically, with representatives of the Polish minority in Spiš and Orava), Lithuania, and the Free City of Gdańsk. They also had contacts in Latvia and Romania, where the cooperation was based on Poles living there. Major Ankerstein, deputy head of the Branch Office No. 2 (which in 1938 conducted subversive operations in Trans-Olza and Subcarpathian Ruthenia), was initially sceptical about the possibility of using the local resistance movement to operate in the Czech Republic.³⁰ He appointed Captain Wincenty Medyński to talk with Czech partners. He joined the Branch Office No. 2 in July 1939.³¹ Medyński contacted Colonel Kumpošt, to whom he handed a list of possible tasks to be performed by the Czech side in the Protectorate. A short account of these events is given in the minutes of his interrogation by the communist Security Office in 1954. During this interrogation, he testified that the act of sabotage was to concern communication lines, armaments centres and telecommunications headquarters. Allegedly, Colonel Kumpošt was sceptical about the possibility of performing this type of tasks. However, he promised to check

²⁸ Friedl, *Na jedné frontě*, 84.

²⁹ More in: A. Woźny, “Dywerysyjna grupa Oddziału II SG na Łużycach w latach 1935–1939,” in *Działania nieregularne w Polsce i Europie*, ed. Stanisław Jaczyński, Hubert Królikowski and Wojciech Włodarkiewicz (Warsaw: Akademia Podlaska, 2007), 98.

³⁰ IPMS, Relacje z Kampanii 1939 r. Oddział II Sztabu NW, sygn. B.I.6i, Protokół z przesłuchania mjr. dypl. Tadeusza Szumowskiego, 146.

³¹ Piotr Kołakowski: “Uwagi i spostrzeżenia mjr. Feliksa Ankersteina z 1940 r. dotyczące przygotowań i działań dywerysyjnych Ekspozytury nr 2 Oddziału II Sztabu Głównego WP,” *Dzieje Najnowsze* 1 (2009): 159. Infantry Officer, Captain Wincenty Medyński (1898–1976). He served in the Polish intelligence service of the interwar period for no longer than a few months. After the outbreak of the war, he got to Hungary, from where he returned to the country and was active in the underground. During the war, the Germans arrested him and after the war the communists made the arrest.

whether they could be carried out and to give an answer within a month. Nonetheless, Medyński did not get his response until the outbreak of the war.³²

At the same time, probably in July 1939, the Branch Office No. 2 sent another officer on a mission to the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, namely Lieutenant Stanisław Machnicki.³³ He confirmed the existence of a secret Czech organization that would be able to effectively commit acts of sabotage and perform subversive operations. Another trip took place the following month. The meeting concerned the initiation of subversive operations by the Czech side in the event of German attack on Poland. It seems that the talks were fruitful, as the Czech organization requested explosives together with the related French-made watches. The news conveyed by Machnicki changed Major Ankerstein's attitude about the possibility of committing acts of sabotage in the Protectorate by the Czech organization. Therefore, the Branch Office No. 2 was to ship the materials to Czech allies. In Ankerstein's opinion, the outbreak of the war made another transport impossible.³⁴ It should be noted that at the same time Captain František Klvaňa³⁵ was staying at the border (in Cieszyn) as part of operations performed by the "Perun" organization. He was sent to Cieszyn on 12 July 1939 from Krakow (where he worked in the local Czech intelligence unit) in order to smuggle weapons from Poland to Czech resistance movement in the Protectorate.³⁶ It is highly probable that he participated in the smuggling of explosives. This is indirectly evidenced by a report of Major Ankerstein, in which he mentioned the common Polish-Czech "communication system" operating flawlessly on the border.³⁷

The war outbreak, which surprised the Branch Office No. 2, most likely prevented the development of off-front subversive operations. Additionally, in

³² Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Warszawie [Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw] (hereinafter referred to as the AIPN Warszawa), sygn. IPN BU 0192/31/1, Sprawa krypt. "Medyk", k. 70; also the AIPN Warszawa, sygn. 01178/39, Medyński Jasiewicz Wincenty, 69.

³³ Reserve Lieutenant, an engineer Stanisław Machnicki. After the outbreak of the war, he was to remain in the country with a group of people associated with the Branch Office No. 2 in order to perform unspecified assigned tasks. His further fate is unknown.

³⁴ "Uwagi i spostrzeżenia mjr. Feliksa Ankersteina z 1940 r. dotyczące przygotowań i działań dywersyjnych Ekspozytury nr 2 Oddziału II Sztabu Głównego WP," 162. In his reports, Major Szumowski claimed that Major Ankerstein himself went to the Protectorate; however, in the light of the report of an officer of the Branch Office No. 2, it seems unlikely.

³⁵ ABS Praha, sign. 302-89-1, Zpráva Poseidona, 3 VIII 1939, 26.

³⁶ VÚA-VHA Prague, kvalifikační listiny – František Klvaňa.

³⁷ "Uwagi i spostrzeżenia mjr. Feliksa Ankersteina z 1940 r. dotyczące przygotowań i działań dywersyjnych Ekspozytury nr 2 Oddziału II Sztabu Głównego WP," 162.

Bohemia and Moravia, the forces of the Third Reich took large-scale repressive measures on the eve and at the beginning of the war, which prevented major acts of sabotage. On August 25, 1939, Zdeňek Schmoranz, made head of the press department by the chairperson of the Protectorate government, was arrested among other activists. Together with a group of employees of the Czech Press Office and pre-war employees of the Czechoslovak army and intelligence who remained in the country, he built up an intelligence network. Through the Defence of the Nation, it provided military and political information to London. About seventy-five people were detained in a relatively brief time.³⁸ As a result of the arrest, the Germans were able to expose the Defence of the Nation more effectively and to discover the connections of the resistance movement with the Protectorate government. Its prime minister, General Alois Eliáš (member of the Defence of the Nation), as well as Zdeňek Schmoranz were executed in 1942. From 1 September 1939, the security agencies of the Third Reich launched the "Albrecht I" operation in Bohemia and Moravia. It involved preventive arrests of people suspected of underground activities or supporting the resistance movement. The number of detainees could amount up to approximately 2,000 people, some of whom were placed as special prisoners in concentration camps in Dachau and Buchenwald.³⁹ It seems that the large-scale arrests made by the Germans resulted in the failure of Polish-Czech plans for sabotage against German forces in the Protectorate.

It is difficult to attempt a more specific summary of the results of Polish-Czechoslovak intelligence cooperation at the threshold of the war due to very little information on this subject. This cooperation undoubtedly encountered difficulties related to the deepening divergences in the international policies of both countries in the 1930s. These, in turn, affected the directions of intelligence work. It turned out that the reshuffling on the map of Europe resulted in unexpectedly quick changes. In 1938, Polish intelligence was involved in subversive operations in Trans-Olza and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, as less than a year later both sides were developing a joint plan for acts of sabotage against the Germans. Organizing these acts encountered many difficulties. The most important of them were related to politics. While Polish military bodies, including the intelligence community, showed considerable interest in cooperation with the Czech military community, the position of Polish government

³⁸ More in: Jan Vajskebr and Radka Šustrová, "Niemieckie środki bezpieczeństwa na terenie Protektoratu Czech i Moraw przed i podczas ataku na Polskę," in: *Kampania polska '39. Militarne i polityczne aspekty z perspektywy siedemdziesięciolecia*, ed. Jerzy Kirszak and Daniel Koreś (Wrocław: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, IPN, 2011), 275–85.

³⁹ Ibid., 280–82.

was much more distant. It seems that the least interest, if not signs of hostility in this regard, were shown by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For a long time, it ignored information provided by the intelligence service (also by the Czechoslovak side) about an increased threat of an attack by the Third Reich. Tardiness of the Polish side in responding to Prague's proposal to sell its military equipment in the face of upcoming occupation of Bohemia by the Third Reich proves this kind of approach of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the end, this equipment was taken over by the German army. Another example, additionally showing the negligence of Polish diplomacy, was the Ministry's reaction to the information from the Czecho-Slovak intelligence about the takeover of Polish diplomatic code by the Germans in the spring of 1939.

This problem is mentioned in the report of Major Szumowski, prepared in the autumn of 1940. According to him, in April 1939, Major Bartík, acting on the orders of Colonel Moravec, provided information to the Poles that Polish code was broken on the premises of the Polish Diplomatic Mission in Prague. In July 1939, Polish intelligence received confirmation of this information through its own channel. Despite this, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not decide to change the code before the outbreak of the war. Later, Major Szumowski received information that this code had fallen into the hands of Czechoslovak intelligence even before the Munich Agreement was signed in September 1938, which suggested that the authorities in Prague knew in advance about Polish attitude towards German plans for the partition of Czechoslovakia.⁴⁰

The attitude of the Polish side towards General Lev Prchala was a significant political problem. In the summer of 1939, he was involved in the creation of a volunteer Legion of Czechs and Slovaks in Poland. As we know, Prchala was a main opponent of Edvard Beneš's policy at that time. Therefore, he took advantage of the unfriendly attitude of Polish authorities towards the president of Czechoslovakia in his plans to create a military unit. The situation was easier for him because he knew General Waław Stachiewicz, with whom he studied at the Parisian Military Academy and whom he met in Warsaw in early June 1939.⁴¹

⁴⁰ AIPN Warszawa, sygn. IPN BU 1572/877, Polski szyfr dyplomatyczny w latach 1921–1944 zdekonspirowany przez Niemców (kopia raportu mjr. Dypł. Szumowskiego Tadeusza, Attache Wojskowego przy Rządzie Czechosłowackim do Naczelnego Wodza i Premiera gen. Sikorskiego, 20.11.1940), k. 4–6. More on this topic: Bury, "Polski Szyfr Dyplomatyczny," 103–28.

⁴¹ More in: Jan Němeček, "Armádní generál Lev Prchala a čs. odboj v Polsku," *Historie a vojenství* 43, no. 3 (1994), 107–132; Dariusz Dąbrowski, "Powstanie i organizacja Legionów Czechów i Słowaków w Polsce w 1939 roku," in *1939. Rok zlomu*, ed. Marek Syrný (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum Slovenského národného povstania, 2019), 87–100.

Views on the attitude towards Prchala were divided among heads of individual Polish intelligence departments. Major Tadeusz Nowiński⁴² from the “East” Unit met with General Prchala. He shared his observations from this period in his memoirs written after the war: “[...] I contacted General Prchala. He had a soldierly and diplomatic demeanour. Until recently, he was a strong member of the Prague government with almost dictatorial powers in Subcarpathian Ruthenia.⁴³ He was knocked off his perch by political events taking place on the broad European arena. Presently, the general found himself in a situation of a poor relative in Poland, where public opinion has begun to universally condemn our policy towards Czechoslovakia. [...] We approached the general as politely as possible. Prchala was a virulent opponent of Beneš, considering him (who knows, maybe rightly) the *spiritus movens* of Polish-Czech misunderstandings in the last twenty years. His attitude in relations with Poles made it much easier for him because the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and President of Czechoslovakia did not enjoy popularity among us. We managed to do a lot in terms of forming Czech troops. Finally, we managed to designate an area of ‘Leśna’ training grounds and school camps in the Brest district for these formations. We also arranged for initial concentration of volunteers in Krakow. [...] Things were on the right track. [...] However, one question kept tormenting me, namely who would have wanted a delay in forming the Legion? I concluded: only the Germans. If we had taken this matter seriously and used it appropriately for propaganda purposes, we could have tried to use the Czechs in acts of sabotage in the German rear.”⁴⁴ Of course, this account should be approached extremely carefully, because Major Nowiński returned to Poland after World War II, where he served for some time in the communist intelligence service and was called as a witness in trials of anti-

⁴² Major Tadeusz Nowiński (1900–1972). From 1933 in the 2nd Department II of the Polish Army’s General Staff, initially in counterintelligence, from 1935 in the “East” Unit. From the beginning of 1936 to January 1939, he was responsible for intelligence missions at a post operating by the Polish Consulate in Leningrad. Then he returned to work in the “East” Unit in the country, and shortly before the outbreak of the war he worked for a month in the “West” Unit. During World War II, he initially organized the work of Polish intelligence in Paris, where until March 1940 he headed the “West” Unit. After evacuation to Great Britain, he served as a commander of an informal School for Intelligence Officers. In 1947, he returned to Poland. He served in communist military intelligence for a brief period. In 1949, he was arrested and then sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment. In 1955, he was freed and then vindicated. He gave incriminating testimonies during communist trials.

⁴³ In March 1939, he served as a military commander in Subcarpathian Ruthenia as a member of local autonomous government.

⁴⁴ Biblioteka Zakładu Naukowego im. Ossolińskich we Wrocławiu, T. Nowiński, *Z pamiętnika oficera polskiego wywiadu*, sygn. akc. 114/65, 127–29.

communist activists. His observations about the possibility of using the Legion soldiers in the German rear do not seem realistic. It should be noted that using refugees from the Protectorate for these type of actions would be a pretext for Berlin to accuse Poland of provocation and an argument for declaring war. On the other hand, the Polish side investigated and conducted secret subversive operations, but based on the Czech resistance movement in the Protectorate.

Major Tadeusz Szumowski from the "West" Unit had a completely different attitude towards Prchala. Furthermore, he criticized all measures taken by the "East" Unit regarding the Czech issue. He drew attention to the involvement of his unit in supporting the evacuation of Czech military commanders. In his report (although not very precise), he emphasized: "Very fruitful contact was established with the headquarters of the Czechoslovak intelligence located in London (Colonel Moravec and Major Bartík) and its branches in Warsaw (Lieutenant Colonel Kumpošt and his deputy, Major Fritscher), [...] border crossings were organized. At the beginning of July 1939, Captain Gorgolewski picked up a group of 15 senior officers on the border, some of them with their wives, including General Ingr, General Viest, Main Staff Colonel Sklenovský (Bosý), who later staffed the Czechoslovak Ministry of Defence in London."⁴⁵ He pointed out that thanks to the "West" Unit providing radio and courier communication (which was possible because Polish passports were issued to Czech intelligence workers), Czecho-Slovak intelligence service was able to rapidly revive and therefore, the Polish side began to obtain more valuable materials and information from the Protectorate. Major Tadeusz Szumowski's opinion about General Prchala was interesting (and at the same time very different from the memories of Major Nowiński): "Meanwhile, at the beginning of July, General Lev Prchala, a Czechoslovak fascist and opponent of Beneš, turned up in Warsaw. He was a friend of General Stachiewicz from the École Supérieure de Guerre in Paris. Both generals meet in the 'West' Unit underground premises at ul. Polna in Warsaw. Prchala was brought by Gorgolewski, and I brought General Stachiewicz. As a result of this meeting, all Czechoslovak affairs in Poland (including intelligence) were taken over by the "East" Independent Unit based on the decision of the Chief of the General Staff."⁴⁶

Major Szumowski did not spare criticism of the "East" Unit, which he even accused of provocative actions. Whether this was actually the case is not the subject of this paper. However, one should agree with Szumowski regarding

⁴⁵ AIPN Warszawa, sygn. IPN BU 2603/3033, Sprawozdanie mjr. dypl. Tadeusza Szumowskiego, szefa Samodzielnego Referatu "Zachód" Oddziału II-go (wywiadu głębokiego, czyli strategicznego na Niemcy) za czas od 19. 03. 1939 r. do 27. 08. 1939 r., 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 15–16.

the shortcomings of the “rival” unit: “In terms of intelligence, the area of Czechoslovakia was assigned to the ‘East’ Independent Unit many years ago due to the then imaginary political and military connections between the Czechoslovak Republic and the USSR. There were three to four officers from the ‘East’ Unit permanently residing in Prague, Bratislava, Moravian Ostrava, and Uzhgorod. [...] When Germans took over Czechoslovakia, these officers turned out to be useless because they knew neither the German language nor the Wehrmacht structure. However, the “East” Unit had no intention of giving up the allocated area; on the contrary, it treated Czechoslovakia as a stepping stone for further usurpations.”⁴⁷

Undoubtedly, the case of General Prchala, who was supported by the Polish authorities and the Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, was a problem for the “West” Unit employees involved in cooperation with intelligence officers loyal to President Beneš. Captain Gorgolewski wrote: “This situation was nervous, sensitive, and difficult. On the one hand, the organization is well-connected and active, it holds promise, has very specific prospects for positive results, is deeply rooted in its country and mutually committed, which also had an impact on the subsequent practical solution of the problem, a positive solution for both parties. On the other hand, there is the strong personality of the general, who cooperates with Poland without any reservations, but has no structure at his disposal – apart from a small group of his personal friends and former close subordinates.”⁴⁸ Fortunately, in this case the matter was resolved successfully: “Ultimately, in August 1939 General Prchala was given a mission from the Chief of the General Staff to form the Czech Legion in Poland; he set about forming this staff immediately. Representatives of the organization, including Colonel Kumpošt, watched the action of General Prchala with some indulgence, but did not cause any difficulties, probably deciding that despite the increasingly worsening general situation, there was no time for personal matters.”⁴⁹

The purpose of presenting the above-mentioned quotes is to highlight the fact that Polish intelligence did not have a coherent vision of cooperation with the Czechs and the use of their potential to strengthen the state’s defence.

On the other hand, the Czecho-Slovak authorities did not develop a common position regarding cooperation with Poland, either. The conflict between

⁴⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁸ IPMS, Relacje z Kampanii 1939 r. Oddział II Sztabu NW, sygn. B.I.6e, mjr Gorgolewski Bogusław, Współpraca referatu “Z” Oddziału II Sztabu Głównego z tajną organizacją byłego czeskiego Oddziału II Sztabu Generalnego, 04. 1940, 624.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

President Beneš and General Prchala was not without effect on this situation. The latter was an advocate of closer cooperation with Poland and was in favour of the greatest possible use of Czechoslovak troops alongside the Polish Army in the upcoming war. The formation of the Legion of Czechs and Slovaks in Poland encountered a number of difficulties. It should be remembered that consent to form foreign units alongside one's own troops meant that the military men were convinced that the outbreak of the war was inevitable.

Intelligence cooperation between both sides did not fully meet the expectations of the Czechs. Major Bartík, in his report of August 3, 1939, emphasized that this cooperation was one-sided and only the Poles benefited from it. He also complained that the Polish side did not exchange its own information.⁵⁰ Initially, the Poles had reservations about the value of materials provided by the Czechs, but it was noted that with time, such materials had been gaining more value.⁵¹ It seems that after initial problems, the Polish-Czechoslovak intelligence cooperation developed successfully. This is evidenced by a letter from the head of Czechoslovak intelligence, Colonel Moravec, to the head of the 2nd Department of the General Staff, Colonel Smoleński, of August 14, 1939:

Dear Colonel,

I am enclosing some reports to supplement those sent on 25 July 1939; I presume that they are important to you and that you will be able to make good use of them in your official capacity. Allow me on this occasion to mention again the nature of our co-operation. I am prompted to do so by the report of Major Bartík, which he added to me after his return from Warsaw. You know very well that I started active cooperation with you immediately after the events of March [1939], even before any political questions were raised. It was obvious to me that the willingness of intelligence cooperation with our side and its practical implementation would not be understood by you as a conjunctural phenomenon, but as a proof on the part of myself and my group that the present time and the expected events require the closest friendship and the closest cooperation between my nation and yours. [...] You will understand, Colonel, that from the first moment I have been a supporter of the closest co-operation with you in the interests of both our nations, and that I must be equally anxious that the revolutionary action which is to save my nation in these most fateful times should be as effective as possible, which can only be the case if it is united in all respects. I know very well how sympathetic your position is to our professional activity and to our whole Czechoslovak cause. I therefore

⁵⁰ ABS Praha, sign. 302-89-1, Zpráva Poseidona, 3 VIII 1939, 25.

⁵¹ IPMS, Relacje z Kampanii 1939 r. Oddział II Sztabu NW, sygn. B.I.6e, relacja B. Gorgolewskiego, 566.

appeal to you to continue to support our cause, or to share with me your views on a course of action which might positively resolve the disputed questions, I have the impression that there are no insurmountable obstacles on either side. I am a soldier who is in the habit of acting rather than talking; I think that I have proved by my professional progress so far that the Czechoslovak-Polish friendship is wanted by us and that it brings practical results. I see no reason why this harmony should not be realised in all other directions. [...] For your information I would like to mention that right in the beginning, Dr. Ed. Beneš was informed about the cooperation with you in March [1939] and that he not only gave his full consent to it, but also recommended deepening and maintaining the most friendly relations [...].⁵²

In his report, Captain Gorgolewski attempted to make his own assessment of the results of Czech intelligence service. Particular emphasis was placed on the work of the Warsaw centre (i. e., operating from Poland) and the London headquarters. As for the former, he pointed out that materials received from him were fragmentary information about German army and actions taken by the Germans in Bohemia as well as about the Czech railway network. This information had a form of numerous short dispatches, which only after collation could form a bigger picture. Such dispatches regarded military units, orders related to railway traffic, the construction of roads and fortifications, organization of hospitals, communications networks, and military railway transports. In addition, some of them regarded mobilization orders and the remains of Czecho-Slovak army. Among materials provided by the army intelligence headquarters in London, Captain Gorgolewski considered a copy of an organizational plan of a German agency and sabotage network in Poland to be particularly valuable. A dispatch from one of deeply hidden Czech agents, which concerned actions to be taken in the Free City of Gdańsk, was equally valuable.⁵³

Although the coordination of operations of Polish and Czecho-Slovak secret services did not bring intended results when it comes to the fight against the Third Reich in September 1939, it was a successful introduction to a rapprochement between the authorities in exile of Poland and Czechoslovakia, which actually occurred later on during the war. The Western Allies welcomed this rapprochement positively. The cooperation of the intelligence services was appreciated by the authorities in exile of both countries. The heads of both

⁵² VÚA-VHA Prague, fund 37, sign. 37-29-14, 1–3. The letter does not have an addressee and is not signed, but its content clearly shows who the addressee is and to whom it is addressed.

⁵³ IPMS, Relacje z Kampanii 1939 r. Oddział II Sztabu NW, sygn. B.I.6e, relacja B. Gorgolewskiego, 629.

Polish and Czechoslovak intelligence units were honoured with high state awards, respectively.

Individual units did not develop a coherent strategy towards the Czechs, reflecting the situation of Polish government after the conference in Munich. It can be noted that only after the fall of Czechoslovakia did the Polish authorities understand that this fact significantly weakened Poland's strategic position. Although the attitude of the Polish side in this matter changed dramatically at that time, there was not enough time to introduce broader changes regarding the cooperation between Polish military intelligence and Czech intelligence officers in the last months before the outbreak of World War II.

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present contacts between Polish and Czechoslovak military intelligence in the last months before the outbreak of World War II. The paper outlines the military and political relations of both countries in the second half of the 1930s and the related organization of Polish military intelligence directed at Czechoslovakia. Sudden developments in the situation of Poland's southern neighbour after the Munich Conference of 1938 made it necessary to introduce changes regarding Polish intelligence objectives in the south. The pace of changes increased after the collapse of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. The establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia became a clear signal to Warsaw that its existing strategies must be redefined. Facing the threat of a German attack on Poland, direct contacts were established between Czech emigration intelligence centre in London and Polish intelligence service. Based primarily on the accounts of Polish officers, this paper is an attempt to discuss the course of negotiations and indicate problems the new allies had to face.

Keywords: World War II; Polish military intelligence; Czechoslovak military intelligence; Polish-Czechoslovak relations

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