

# PARALLEL HISTORY PROJECT ON NATO AND THE WARSAW PACT (PHP)

## Oral History Interviews with Czechoslovak Generals: Soviet-Czechoslovak Military Planning in the Cold War

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This publication is part of a publications series by the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact (PHP). The PHP provides new scholarly perspectives on contemporary international history by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting formerly secret governmental documents. Since its establishment in 1999, the project has collected thousands of pages of material on security-related issues of the Cold War, published a large number of online documentaries on central issues such as mutual threat perceptions and alliance management, and organized several major international conferences on war planning, intelligence, and intra-bloc tensions. Further information is provided at the PHP Website: [www.isn.ethz.ch/php](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php).

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## **Preface**

**Vojtech Mastny**

The second in the [series of oral history interviews with former Warsaw Pact generals](#), the Czechoslovak collection published here highlights some of the significant differences among the alliance's member states as well as their military. Unlike Poland, the largest of Moscow's involuntary allies as well as the one with the most pronounced anti-Soviet tradition, Czechoslovakia was a smaller, but strategically most exposed country, whose historical traditions had been most consistently pro-Russian and pro-Soviet. At the same time, it was not a nation where the army enjoyed high respect and affection, as was the case in Poland even under communism. But neither did the lack of a strong military tradition preclude a substantial degree of professionalism of the high Czechoslovak military during the Cold War, particularly prior to 1968, the year when the Soviet military intervention crushed the "Prague Spring" and with it much of the country's officer corps.

The watershed year marked the Czechoslovak military in a way no other Warsaw Pact member state was marked. It sharply divided the officer corps, including the generals whose testimonies are published here, into those who had been active before 1968, many of whom had subsequently become victims of the Soviet intervention and speak accordingly, and those who made their careers after that year as beneficiaries of the intervention. Few of the latter agreed to be interviewed, and among those who did candor has been exceptional rather than typical.

The primary value of the interviews is in the light they throw on Czechoslovakia's role in Soviet military planning prior to 1968, when its army was assigned to bear the

brunt of any confrontation with NATO because of the absence from its territory of Soviet or other Warsaw Pact troops. Conversely, the stationing of Soviet forces there after 1968, amid doubts about the reliability of the Czechoslovak army in the event of war, reduced the country's strategic exception and with it also the importance of the information that could be supplied by its highest ranking officers.

All the same, the interviews make for fascinating reading. Unlike their Polish or East German counterparts, most of the Czechoslovak generals were willing to speak without inhibitions about the secret operational plans to which they had been privy. Some of their testimonies provide the most authoritative and illuminating views that we have on the [1964 war plan discovered and first published by the PHP](#), which has prompted a spirited discussion about its significance on this website. Another intriguing topic is the deployment of Soviet nuclear warheads on Czechoslovak territory, whose very presence there appears surprisingly in doubt according to the recorded testimonies. Little doubt remains, however, about the severity of the economic strain that membership in the Warsaw Pact imposed upon Czechoslovakia, forcing it to maintain a military establishment way out of proportion with the country's resources.

The [introduction by Karel Sieber](#) describes in detail the manner in which the interviews were conducted, their accomplishments as well as their limitations. In addition to the [original transcripts](#), published in full, a [topical selection](#) of the highlights appears here in an [English translation](#). The translated portions amount to about one-seventh of the total length of the interviews. Deleted passages are indicated by dots and references to the pages of the respective interviews allow any reader familiar with the Czech language to consult the full texts.

For possible publication on its discussion forum, the PHP welcomes readers' [comments](#) about the collection.

## Introduction

**Karel Sieber**

In his work on the Czechoslovak Army in 1968 – 1970, Czech historian Jindřich Madry has written that any efforts to obtain comments from the key players at that time were meaningless, as the latter did not have any interest whatsoever in giving a true account of the events. Within the context of Czech Cold War research, interviews with former communist dignitaries have been an exception rather than the rule.<sup>1</sup> There was a fairly high number of interviews with former communist officers and generals made early in the 1990s by the Governmental Commission for the Clarification of the 1967-1970 Events; however, most of them concerned only the year 1968 and have never been published.

[The talks with top Polish generals](#), which were conducted by Polish historian Professor [Jerzy] Poksiński and other military historians in the late 1990s and which were published by the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact in 2002, show that oral history methods and techniques offer as yet untapped opportunities to historians focusing on the evolution of Warsaw Pact armies. To what extent does the success of the Polish interviews reflect the specific social climate in Poland and to what extent is the Polish model transferable to what used to be Czechoslovakia? This was the question present throughout the duration of the project of interviews with generals of the former Czechoslovak People's Army, an important segment of the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact.

Naturally, the key question was the selection of the narrators. In this respect, we attempted to have the broadest possible representation of all generations of Czechoslovak Cold War era generals. Early into the project, we prepared a list including all persons who had held important positions at the Ministry of Defense, General Staff of the Czechoslovak People's Army and in the armed forces between 1948 and 1990 (Ministers of Defense, Chiefs of the General Staff, First Deputy Ministers of Defense, Chiefs of the Main Political Directorate, Chiefs of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff and its departments, Chiefs of the Organizational and Mobilization Directorate, Intelligence Directorate and Materiel Planning (later Central Planning) Directorate, Commanders of the Western and Eastern Military Districts, Commanders of the First and Fourth Armies and the Tenth Air

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<sup>1</sup> However, the Center of Oral History of the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences represents a successful combination of the theory and practice of oral history. See the first volume on the new series, *Voices of the Past: Miroslav Vaněk, Orální historie ve výzkumu soudobých dějin* [Oral History in Research on Contemporary History] (Prague: COH ICH CAS, 2004).

Army, Czechoslovak representatives in the Unified Command and the Committee on Technology of the Warsaw Pact, Chiefs of the Military Economic Directorate of the State Planning Commission). In other words, we were trying to find those “in the know” among those who had been involved, and those “willing and able to talk” among those “in the know”.

However, it soon became obvious that the broad concept outlined above would be difficult to meet. Of course, there were some natural, or biological, limitations of the project; of all the Czechoslovak Ministers of Defense of the Cold War era, only the two last ones, Army Generals Milan Václavík and Miroslav Vacek, are still alive. The specific situation in Czechoslovakia is best demonstrated on a comparison with the interviews with Polish generals—a group of people representing a generation with similar destinies and attitudes. The Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 divided the Czechoslovak officers’ and generals’ corps into two groups, each of which was to face quite a different future in the years to come. Those who were forced to leave the army in the years of normalization found themselves to be out of their profession for the next two decades, and only the political changes of 1989 provided a chance to return to some of them. Most of them had undergone a painful re-evaluation of their political opinions and value concepts. Most members of the second group identified themselves with the normalization policy of the Communist Party and Soviet interests; naturally, their attitude has been reflected in their past (or event current) opinions regarding the disintegration of the Soviet Bloc, Warsaw Pact and—last but not least—Czechoslovakia. Their world outlook is significantly different even from that of their Polish counterparts of the 1970s and 1980s, whose recollections often echo traditional Polish anti-Soviet and anti-Russian sentiments.

The Czech Republic, one of the two successor states of Czechoslovakia, has yet another specific feature: there still exists an influential and all but unreconstructed Communist party as a reminder of the normalization era. At the same time, the Office for the Documentation and Investigation of Communist Crimes, a division of the Police of the Czech Republic, has been prosecuting former Communist dignitaries (e.g., Gen. Konstantin Rusov, ex-Chief of the General Staff). The project of interviews with Czechoslovak Cold War era generals has not pursued any political goals; however, it is not possible to ignore the context of the interviews—the political environment in which the project took place and in which the old-timers still live—the more so since the issues of recent history continue to be burdened with political and legal connotations and ramifications. Similarly, it is impossible to disregard various conscious and sub-conscious loyalties impeding the narrators’ openness. Not even the far-reaching political changes in post-Communist countries do necessarily mean that these old-timers are willing to share the secrets that they had been privileged to know and guarded so jealously in the past. In this regard, one of the essential requirements of a successful implementation of oral history techniques, namely a relationship of trust between the interviewer and the narrator, was not fully met.

The interviews have shown that one of the most important and obvious taboos is, for example, the issue of nuclear warheads on the Czechoslovak territory. The existence of “special munitions” depots—no matter how obvious it was in view of the needs and requirements of flexible military planning—was one of the most carefully guarded secrets of the Communist army. Although information on US nuclear munitions depots in the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany has long been published, some of the narrators were vehemently denying the existence of similar facilities in Czechoslovakia, often without being asked the question. Undoubtedly, the reasons are multiple—the fact that only a narrow circle of people from the top echelons of the Ministry of Defense and Operations Directorate of the General Staff had had access to the information, or that the control of the facilities had been taken over by the Soviets in 1968, or that the issue was such a rigid taboo. The everyday double-think and almost maniacal obsession with information security, so typical for the communist rule, are best revealed in the most sensitive issues, such as the one referred to above.

Another difference between the Czechoslovak and Polish interviews has been the person of the interviewer. The interviews made in Poland by Professor Poksiński (whose only comparable Czechoslovak counterpart was the late military historian Tibor Hochsteiger) reflected efforts of individual narrators—including General Jaruzelski, whose Czechoslovak opposite number simply did not exist—to record their respective life stories and to adopt an attitude toward one’s own past. Thus, the Polish interviews were based not just on initiatives by military historians, but also on the willingness of the narrators themselves to tell their stories.

Most of the Czechoslovak old-timers whom we had approached with a request for an interview refused to oblige.<sup>2</sup> Some did so in their responses to our letters of request, others after reviewing the list of questions that was prepared individually for each of the interviewees on the basis of the available data on the command and staff positions the person in question had held during his career. Some of them excused themselves on the grounds of poor health or advanced age, others expressed doubts as to the project’s objectives, and still others explained that they believed their knowledge was not relevant to the project. Reactions of many of those whom we had addressed suggested a prejudice that their answers might be “misused”; there were even questions about whether the project was being financed by foreign intelligence services. Two or three [officers] made it clear that they did not wish to make any public appearance whatsoever. In addition, there were naturally

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Generals Karel Rusov, Miloslav Blahník, Václav Horáček, Jaroslav Klícha, Jiří Nečas, Josef Vincenc, Rudolf Ducháček, Ladislav Stach, Miroslav Vampula, Zdeněk Jašek, Václav Dvořák, Viktor Šurka, Pavel Vrlík, Ferdinand Hanzal and others. The former Minister of National Defense, General of the Army Miroslav Vacek, also refused an interview, explaining that he was working on another book of his memoirs. [Ch. 6 of Miroslav Vacek, \*Generál studené války \[Cold War General\]\*](#) (Prague: Erika, 2004) is reproduced on the PHP website. He nevertheless provided a number of contacts to his former colleagues. He provided a number of contacts to his former colleagues.

many potential interviewees whom we did not contact at all, one of the reasons being that we could not track them down.

We paid a great deal of attention to the selection of questions. Of course, any selection is problematic and questionable, so we decided to concentrate on several broader topics. In view of the recent research focus of the Czechoslovak operational planning for war, our primary concerns included operational issues, including their broader consequences and ramifications, the Czechoslovak position within the Warsaw Pact, relations between the Czechoslovak army command and the Soviets, and the crucial year 1968. If an interviewee required so, he was given a prepared set of questions to get acquainted with them in advance. The set of questions also comprised some documents that the interviewee was asked to comment on.

Although some of the interviews resembled a biographical narration, their principal purpose was not to examine the narrator's value system, his individual fate, personal motives, life strategy, or family background. The interviews were a sensitive enough affair for the interviewees even without our attempting to explore the "micro-histories" of their lives in addition to our main job, i.e., "macro-history". As a rule, the interviewees were first asked to list, in chronological order, the positions they had held in the Czechoslovak Army. In the remaining part of the interview, the chronological order might be sacrificed for the sake of specific, topic-oriented questions.

Before the interviews proper, all interviewees were given an explanation of the project's goals and methods, and asked for their consent to record the interview. More often than not, the interviews were preceded by a discussion on the purpose and meaning of the project, the prepared questions, the scope of the interviewee's knowledge and the manner in which the recording would be used. Narrators often spontaneously answered questions during unrecorded discussion; in such cases, they were asked, subject to their consent with the interview being recorded, to answer some of the questions raised during the discussion once again or in a greater detail. The questions were by no means intended to be suggestive.

When interpreting or analyzing the interviews, it is particularly the specific character of oral communication that has to be taken into account. Typical features of oral communication include immediateness and emphasized individualization of experiences, but naturally at the expense of a risk of inaccuracies, poorly formulated thoughts, or tendencies to mythologize (especially if the interviewee is recalling events which occurred, for example, fifty years ago). Generally, it holds true that a narrated story can be perceived as a symbolical proof attesting to the narrator's relationships, not as a source of accurate information on factual details. The narration is not only based on recollections, but it also reflects the process of "reliving", including elements of suppression, interpretation and



reinterpretation. Such a narration is thus bound to be a subjective reconstruction of the narrator's subjective version of the past.

Every recording is a reduction of the interview's contents and every transcript of a recording is another imperfect form of intermediation of the abridged interview. Consequently, we also tried to record, albeit briefly, non-verbal means of communication. Thus, for example, if Lt. Gen. František Šádek says, "Well, we did not conquer them at that time", as he leans over a map showing the main thrust of the Czechoslovak Front, which ends somewhere in the middle of France, a "[laughing]" insert denotes that this is an ironically rather than seriously meant comment.

As there is a substantial difference between standard written Czech and colloquial spoken Czech, transcripts of the interviews underwent some grammatical and stylistic modifications, particularly in converting colloquial idioms and phrases into the standard language, except where the narrator used them with an obvious intention. In any case, we observed the rule of retaining the original meaning of what the interviewee wanted to say. If the narrator wished so, he was given the interview transcript to authorize it, but he was only allowed to make stylistic changes or add details improving accuracy. The factual contents and pace of the interview have been retained.

Because of specific local conditions, the composition of the interviewees is rather heterogeneous; this also means that each narrator adopted a different approach to the interview. The purpose of the project was not to divide the interviewees into groups, some of which would be deemed "illegitimate". Similarly, the interview was not perceived (at least not by the interviewer) as an opportunity for a discourse about the narrator's political or ideological beliefs. The unwillingness of some of the interviewed generals to share their memories or to be confronted with new sources of information naturally limited the project; yet we believe that the project has been a success in many respects.

Oral history is generally regarded as an indispensable supplement of written sources in studies focusing on recent history; insofar as the communist regimes are concerned, its importance may be even higher, as official written documents only seldom reflect sensitive issues, which are often crucial, no matter how suppressed they may have been. An example of such an issue which, although not reflected very much in archival documents, kept buzzing in the minds of Czechoslovak commanders and burst to the surface during the Prague Spring, is the conflict between the Czechoslovak commitments to the Warsaw Pact and the Czechoslovak economic capabilities.

The greatest openness is manifested in interviews with the generation of the "68ers"—Czechoslovak officers ousted and persecuted for their attitudes during the Prague Spring and their rejection of the Soviet invasion in August 1968. Some of them returned to the army in the early 1990s, e.g., General of the Army Karel Pezl, who was the Chief of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak (and subsequently Czech) Army from 1991 to 1993, and

who made an undisputedly significant contribution to preparing the Army of the Czech Republic for joining NATO. Regarding the generation of the Cold War era generals, who left the army during the purges in the wake of the Soviet invasion, it would seem rather unfortunate to label the present collection as “interviews with communist generals”. Actually, at the time they were members of the communist party, many of them were only colonels, [whereas later] they were expelled from the party, stripped of their rank, and eventually rehabilitated and promoted to generals only after some twenty years of persecution.

Much useful information can be found in interviews with a younger generation of commanders, from the 1970s and 1980s, who offered detailed comments on the consequences and ramifications of the Czechoslovak [war plan of 1964](#) (its translation into Czech was attached as an annex to the questions sent to the interviewees). Discussions dealing with operational planning made use of a map containing data from the abovementioned “Plan of Actions of the Czechoslovak People’s Army for War Period” (published on the PHP web pages).

The interviews follow a more or less chronological order. The first group comprises interviews with World War II veterans who served in the Czechoslovak Army Corps in the Soviet Union and many of whom advanced to top military command slots after the war. One of them is *Oldřich Kvapil* (1918), the chief of the intelligence division of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Section of the General Staff (military intelligence) from 1948 to 1950 and the commander of the Sušice Division from 1955 to 1957, who was forced to leave the army in the 1970s because of his attitude to the Soviet occupation. The “Oranky Group” of war veterans also included Col. Gen. *Miroslav Šmoldas* (1917-2003), the founder of the Border and Interior Guards in the 1950s, later the First Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Czechoslovak representative in the Armaments Committee of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance, and Inspector General of the Czechoslovak People’s Army. The talk with him was particularly helpful in shedding light on the importance of the Czechoslovak arms industry and arms exports.

Not very informative on issues of operational planning was the interview with another “frontline man”, *Vlastislav Raichl* (1920), who had been a counterintelligence officer for a short period of time after the war; having graduated from the Voroshilov Military Academy in the Soviet Union, he held the post of the Commander of the Frontal Air Defense Command from 1961 to 1967. Although he was the Czechoslovak representative on the Staff of the Unified Command (then being formed up) from 1967 till 1969 (i.e. also during the Soviet invasion), Lt. Gen. Raichl’s interview has not brought much new information in this respect.

Two Slovak generals were also World War II veterans. A former guerrilla fighter, *František Šádek* (1921) held the posts of the Commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army, Deputy Minister of Defense and Commander of the Western Military District in the 1960s. At the time of the “normalization”, he took over and for a long time commanded the Border Guards. The career of *Jozef Činčár* (1922) also peaked in the 1970s; at that time, he was the Deputy Minister of

Defense responsible for aviation and national air defense. The value of the two interviews is diminished by the uncritical attitude of the narrators toward the Czechoslovak People's Army and lack of credibility of some of their statements. It is true that Lt. Gen. Šádek did not deny the authenticity of the 1964 Czechoslovak Operations Plan when confronted with the document, but he said very little about the planning of operations in the 1960s. Lt. Gen. Činčár repeatedly stated that the Czechoslovak Air Force had not had the capability to deliver nuclear strikes. When authorizing the interview, he deleted the segments in question, replacing them by a brief statement to the effect that Czechoslovak pilots had also trained for nuclear strikes.

Much more in this respect is revealed in the interview with *Václav Vitanovský* (1916-1996); this is the only interview not conducted by the authors of the project, but by members of the Governmental Commission for the Clarification of 1968 Events in the early 1990s. In the key period of the 1960s, Lt. Gen. Vitanovský was the Chief of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff and then the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, responsible for command development. He was an unquestioned authority on issues of operational art and made an attempt to develop an independent Czechoslovak defense doctrine, which—combined with his disapproval of the Soviet invasion—was one of the reasons why he was forced to leave the army.

A similar fate was in store for Maj. Gen. *Vladimír Pícek* (1927), Chief of the Operations Department of the Operations Directorate between 1967 and 1969, and Chief of the Operations Directorate from 1969 to 1970. He offers an insight into the minds of Czechoslovak operations officers during the 1960s, a period in which nuclear weapons played a hitherto most important role in Soviet military considerations. Czechoslovak attempts to extricate from (and loosen the grip of subordination resulting in) disproportionately tough demands that the Soviet General Staff was imposing upon the first-echelon Czechoslovak Front, as well as to achieve a more equal position within the Warsaw Pact are reflected in the interview with *Karel Pezl* (1927), Chief of the Operations Department of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army and then Chief of the Operation Preparations Department of the Operations Directorate in the 1960s. Among other things, he describes the mechanism of preparations of the Czechoslovak Operations Plan.

Lt. Gen. *Stanislav Procházka* (1922) held a number of top command posts in the Czechoslovak People's Army before 1968. From 1964 to 1965, he was the Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army, from 1965 to 1968 he commanded the Western Military District into which the 1<sup>st</sup> Army had been transformed. In addition to the operational considerations during that period, he spoke mainly about the Soviet invasion. Although a graduate of the Voroshilov Military Academy and personally acquainted with many of the Soviet commanders, he sided with those who rejected the August 1968 occupation by Warsaw Pact forces and was relieved of command a few months later.

The same applies to *Jaroslav Vinkler* (1924). Having graduated from the Voroshilov Military Academy, he became the Deputy Chief of the Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff. He, too, paid by forced retirement for his disapproval of the Soviet invasion, but he was rehabilitated in the early 1990s, and promoted from Colonel to Major General. He was talking mainly about the work of the military intelligence service in the second half of the 1960s, and recounting events of the August occupation, as a result of which he had become the Chief of the Intelligence Directorate for a short period of time (after the removal of Gen. Burda).

The last of the generation of “68ers” is *Vojtěch Mencl* (1923), a lecturer (in the 1950s and 1960s) and subsequently (in 1968) the rector of the Military Political Academy. During the Prague Spring, he was one of the most reform-minded officers in the army and a co-author of the so-called Memorandum of Staff Members of the Military Political Academy, a document calling for the definition of a Czechoslovak military doctrine.

Among the 1970s generals, most of whom generally refuse to talk, Maj. Gen. *Ján Franko* (1925), Chief of the Czechoslovak Chemical Warfare Troops from 1968 to 1981, is a significant exception. His extensive interview does not avoid even the most sensitive topics, such as the Czechoslovak role in chemical warfare. In the end of the interview, he describes his work as military attaché in Budapest from 1981 to 1987.

The last three interviews of the collection were provided by relatively younger generals, who held top command or staff posts during the 1980s. The first of them, Maj. Gen. *Zdeněk Štorek* (1938), was the Commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Air Force in Hradec Králové from 1983 to 1986. At that time, the 10<sup>th</sup> Air Force comprised basically the entire peacetime Czechoslovak military aviation. In his interview, he emphasizes the non-nuclear nature of operational planning in the 1980s.

The contrast between the Czechoslovak War Plan of 1964 and the operational planning of the mid-1980s was stressed in the interview with Lt. Gen. *Mojmír Zachariáš* (1939), Commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army between 1983 and 1986 of the Western Military District from 1987 to 1990 (which means he would have been the Commander of the Czechoslovak Front in the event of an outbreak of hostilities). He also speaks very openly about relations with the Soviets, symptoms of partial technological lagging and nuclear weapons in the inventory of the Warsaw Pact. In the end of the interview, Gen. Zachariáš describes the depressed atmosphere that prevailed in the Staff of Unified Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact in 1990.

The youngest of the interviewees is Lt. Gen. *Anton Slimák* (1941), a graduate of the Voroshilov Military Academy and the Chief of Staff of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division in České Budějovice in the 1970s. After several years spent at the Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff, he became its Deputy Chief and Chief in 1986 and 1988, respectively. Following General Vacek's appointment to the position of the Minister of Defense, he was the Chief of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak Army (1989-1991). When commenting on the 1964

operational plan, he claims it was not realistic and speaks about the reworking of operation plans in the mid-1985. He describes the structure and focus of the military intelligence, a reform of which he was attempting to carry out in the late 1980s. In the second part of his interview, he talks about changes after 1989, a growing discord in relations with Soviets, and the search for a new enemy at the end of the Cold War.

There were altogether 15 interviews, 11 with Czech generals and 4 with Slovak generals (residing in the territory of the Czech Republic). Two of the latter (Generals Činčár and Franko) responded in Czech, the other two (Generals Šádek and Slimák) in Slovak. For technical reasons, the two last-mentioned interviews were translated into Czech. The project did not contact any Slovak generals who currently reside in the territory of the Slovak Republic.

Special thanks are extended to Lt. Col. (Ret.) Dr. Pavel Minařík, until recently a staff member of the Central Military Archives, for much valuable data made available on the <http://vojenstvi.kvalitne.cz/> website and directly to the persons working on the present project. The Office of Defense Standardization of the Ministry of Defense supported the project by providing the recently published Czech-English Dictionary of Military Terminology. The interview with Gen. Vitanovský appears courtesy of the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, whose archives contain a transcript of the interview referred to above.

*[Translated by Jiří Mareš, Prague]*

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## 1. A Special Ally

### The Czechoslovak Predicament

Q: You've mentioned the specifics of Czechoslovakia, namely that in case of war, the Czechoslovak People's Army would become a Czechoslovak Front. Which wasn't the case with other countries...

General Pezl: No, it wasn't. [ . . . ] In northern GDR, there was a group of Soviet forces, in Hungary there was a group of Soviet forces, in Poland there was a group of Soviet forces. The strongest one was the East German group, there were twenty-two divisions, a huge force, right in the strategic direction Berlin – Paris.

So that was a sort of specific situation of Czechoslovakia. The others were, so to speak, on secondary axes of advance, they represented secondary echelons and were intended to be deployed only as operations unfolded.

Q: What was the reason for Czechoslovakia to have such a specific position? [ . . . ]

General Pezl: Well, the main reason was that Czechoslovakia back then [prior to 1968] was the only country of the Warsaw Pact with no Soviet forces. And to carry out such a maneuver, which would have a field deployment of a force like the one the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> [Czechoslovak] Armies<sup>1</sup> were – together with the first echelon – able to form, would have meant a preparation time of several months, and therefore would have cost us the strategic surprise in the war theater. And back then, I'd say everything depended on the minute nuclear readiness.

Like that, I don't know, in 45 minutes it was possible to carry out mutual nuclear strikes or pre-emptive nuclear strikes – that was the big strategic hit in those times; who will know first, who will strike first and who will first take advantage. That was what the whole strategy of both the NATO and the Warsaw Pact was all about. All that mattered were nuclear weapons, and not even those in the field, but rather the strategic ones, i.e. those carried by aircraft in the air and by nuclear submarines in the ocean. [Pezl, 3]

General Vitanovský: Back then when I was still serving [prior to 1968], the Soviet forces were not here. It means that we actually formed the first strategic echelon of the whole Order of Battle of the Warsaw Pact. And as the formation was offensive – and that is something I can easily say – everything, all those forces, was crammed along the Western borders of our state. Especially the full divisions, all the way from Karlovy Vary to Mariánské Lázně to Plzeň, Klatovy and down to the Austrian borders. First echelon divisions, selected, fully manned and equipped, all this.

The effort involved was so tremendous that... and if you were able to picture this concept, you'd see that these echelons were expected to first intercept and repel the enemy attack and then counter-attack, so you can imagine what would have been left of them. Those were units earmarked for disposal, because the first echelon is always the one that pays. I'm saying this only because even though the Soviets had not been here back then and only came in August 1968, they still did not constitute a part of the first echelon. It would have seemed logical for them to replace at least some of our first echelon forces, but they just left everything to our army.

I once said a few words on this issue in the [Soviet] Union – and it didn't do well for me, but it should be mentioned as something of a comment. I said: "Look, of course, once the war

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<sup>1</sup> In 1958, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> frontline armies were established in the territory of Bohemia and Moravia.

begins, we will boldly intercept and repel the first strike, launch a counteroffensive, conclude the war with a victory – on the Rhine or the English Channel, and then some twenty men with a Czechoslovak flag will climb Říp,<sup>2</sup> and they will just stand there, hollering ‘We have won the war’ – and apart from those twenty, nobody else will survive in the country. This is not what I’d call a victory.” [ . . . ] When I dared to say [ . . . ] that we should also – besides providing units to the Unified Armed Forces – have a division or two on the territory, to defend the territory, because every war is about winning, and surviving, too. [ . . . ]

And I mentioned then just one division, because they took everything from us, everything went into the Unified Armed Forces, so I said that we too had to have some territorial forces – against raiding parties, against diversions, against everything that would be happening in the rear. I cannot pull forces from the front every time something happens. Well, and they of course strictly rejected this, said that this was not right, and once, during one of those speeches of mine, Marshal Zakharov<sup>3</sup> called me a revisionist. You know, when I came back from Moscow with such a label, I was seen here as a revisionist and it never let go off me, and was one of the reasons why I was retired.[Vitanovský, 2-4]

Q: It is often said that Czechoslovakia had to pay for the absence of Soviet forces by higher commitments to the Unified Command, that Czechoslovak officials made too big concessions with respect to requirements regarding the size of the Czechoslovak Army. Is it true?

General Pezl: It was enormous, the size of the army was enormous. And if it was a result of, of the fear that if it hadn’t been done, the Soviets would have come here – I believe it was some kind of a natural compulsive force in the background, which had never been voiced or expressed openly. It only took to show a few doubts.

Back then the only thing in fact was the co-operation with Soviet Special Forces, which were stationed in GDR. It was a sort of... a joint brigade – of those who had the nuclear warheads and were responsible for their assembly. Only these units were included in the Order of Battle. And the special VCh units<sup>4</sup>, designed to provide secure communications, which were then assigned to staffs, armies and the front. But it was an independent communication system, in addition to integral encrypted communications systems, which the task forces had. But that was from the High Command, which went all the way to Moscow. [Pezl, 3 – 4]

General Vitanovský: Our peacetime army always had around 150 thousand men or so. I personally heard in the General Staff, from Marshal Zakharov – the Chief back then – that a maximum level of a wartime army should be 10 percent of the population, which would have meant an army of one and half million for us. Now imagine what that meant for us. It was such an immense burden imposed upon people, but not only people, also in material terms. To have all these stocks and resources ready and available for mobilized forces was, in some cases, on the brink of tenability [Vitanovský, 3]

## The Stalinist Origins

General Šmolčas: The big turning point came in 1950, when Alexej Čepička<sup>5</sup> took Svoboda’s<sup>6</sup> place. Čepička was no soldier, he was a political apparatchik and also Gottwald’s<sup>7</sup> son-in-law, a member of the Politburo, and so he had an exceptionally strong

<sup>2</sup> A legendary mountain in Central Bohemia, in mythology related to the arrival of Czech tribes to what is now Bohemia.

<sup>3</sup> Marshal Matvei Vasilevich Zakharov was Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet forces in Germany, and Chief of the Soviet General Staff in 1960-1963 and again in 1964-1971.

<sup>4</sup> *Vysokochastotnoe* – high-frequency communications.

<sup>5</sup> Army General Alexej Čepička was Minister of Justice from 1948 to 1950, and Minister of National Defense in 1950-1956.

<sup>6</sup> Army General Ludvík Svoboda was Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Czechoslovak Army Corps in the Soviet Union. In 1945-1950, he was Minister of National Defense, and President of Czechoslovakia from 1968 to 1975.

<sup>7</sup> Klement Gottwald was Secretary General of the Communist Party since 1929 and Chairman of the Communist Party since 1946. In 1948-1953, he was President of Czechoslovakia.

position. He transformed the army very radically, all its components. First, he fired all of the old officers from the times of First Republic, and launched a large recruitment campaign in factories, from worker cadres, who received a quick half-year or one year officer training courses. [ . . . ] And these quickies got relatively high posts in the army. Unfortunately, this transformation got a bit out of hand. The factories usually didn't send the best of their people. They were glad to get rid of some people. And these slobs were to become officers. But some of them had no idea about the army, not to say about morals. And they started showing off, pulling the rank, behaving cruelly to their subordinates. When Čepička left in 1956, it all came out. But of course it is a fact that Čepička did totally change the army in terms of quality. [Šmoldas, 8]

Q: And do you think that the – so to speak – oversized nature of the Czechoslovak Army, even when compared to neighboring armies, to the Polish army – when put in relation with population count, the numbers seem even higher than in the Soviet Union – do you think that this oversized nature was a result of the requirements laid by the Warsaw Pact's Unified Command?

General Raichl: I cannot answer this question, I don't know what the requirements were. But I'd admit that when ratifying the Warsaw Pact our side had agreed to these counts. [ . . . ] And then they realized that this would simply have been too much for us. I believe Čepička also played a role in the case of the size of our army. He was not really a soldier, and his views were probably a bit different back then, and it took him a while to get into this and realize that the republic couldn't afford what he wanted. And then he left. But I believe he pushed for the army to be self-sufficient, fit for fighting, so that the army would simply have everything. He had his support at the Castle<sup>8</sup> of course, that counted. And whether the Soviets had any impact on this – I cannot tell, I don't know because I was not there. But certainly there were not against it. [Raichl, 5]

## War Scares

General Raichl: Čepička was convinced that if not today, then not later than tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, the third world war would start. And I don't wonder; he was a lawyer, not a soldier, they'd just made him a minister and an Army General overnight; so that was his concept. Of course, it was a false concept. [Raichl, 15]

General Kvapil: I encountered Čepička then... I prevented a local mobilization twice. [ ... ] At that time I was the Head of Intelligence at the Intelligence Department of the General Staff – I believe it was in 1951 – [ . . . ] we had come against him, Čepička, for he wanted to call for a mobilization on account of a communication message he had received, which said the US Army was preparing an attack against the Republic to be launched the very next day. [ . . . ] And the second time, when the Ministry of Security intercepted a message according to which US aircraft were to bomb Prague at 3 AM [ . . . ] As it turned out, it was a provocative message from a guy who knew that the Ministry was wiretapping him, so he just spilled it out like this. [Kvapil, 6]

General Kvapil: The first message [said] that US tanks were already at the borders, right at the state borderline – of course I cannot tell you exactly when it happened, but it was a summer of... it must have been the summer of 1951. And Čepička told me, when I asked him about the source of this information, he told me he'd got it from the Ministry of Security. So I asked these people, who were responsible for this – they said it had come from the Border Guards. When I got this far as to whom they had learnt that from, where the message had

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<sup>8</sup> Prague Castle – the traditional residence of the head of state. Metaphorically speaking, also the office of the president.



come from, I got into my car and hurried to the border. There I discovered that the information was interpreted in a completely different way than it was presented to the Minister of Defense, where they simply announced that during an exercise, US tanks had reached the state borderline – so nothing more than training. Possibly not even an exercise. There in the area of Grafenwöhr.<sup>9</sup> And that nobody reported them to be preparing for attack. On my way back, I figured out that... back then both we and they had been using those special teletype coding machines, we called it “Andula”. And sometimes it just dropped a few letters. So it garbled the whole message issued by the Border Guards, and nobody seemed to bother whether it was correct or not.

Second time, it was that “expected” air strike on Prague. Every attack by larger forces involved communication getting multiplied. And we had a perfect... or at that time we had a perfect overview of how it looked like at the other side. [ . . . ] And we knew that the communication there was as usual. So we figured that this was some kind of a hoax. [Kvapil, 17]

### **Arsenal of the East**

General Franko: How many divisions, how many cannons, how many tanks and... were the Czechoslovaks forced to accept – and that was in the times of Gottwald – on account of being such a developed country, the most developed of all the “people's democracies”, with the most advanced arms industry, so that it had to put in the most money, too. And they forced into the protocol that Czechoslovakia had to have fifteen combined-arms divisions. Fifteen. wartime divisions. In peace time – that is another story. And also – in what time they had to be capable of mobilization. And the officials who had a say in this were boasting of this. But – having fifteen divisions entails having equipment for fifteen divisions – a large budget we don't need.

Since 1950, the building of heavy industry began. They moved it to Slovakia – well not “moved it”, rather built new plants to manufacture tanks and armored personnel carriers at places where no such plants had ever existed, e.g. in Martin, in Detva, in Podbrezová – or simply in eastern Slovakia. Chemical plants were built, like the one in Humenné [ . . . ] Then came the five-year plans, and these plans showed that the numbers... that it was the army in particular that had caused the shortages. Because the army had to eat, needed iron. This was why so little was available for the civilian sector and the civilian economy.

And on account of five-year plans adjustments, it happened once that one of the then presidents – I believe it was Novotný<sup>10</sup> – expressed a wish to reduce the army, so that it wouldn't pose such a burden. And that our officials should push this with the Soviet side. But the Soviets, they simply replied: “If you could manage in the war time, then now, with all the advanced industry and having us to help with some technical issues, we hold on to this status, because if the figures were lower, they would be lacked in the all-European task.” [Franko, 21 – 22]

General Mencl: The implications for the society were minimized. “In the West they do this, they have this or that type of tank, this or that professional structure, so we have to do this, too, to have at least an advantage in conventional weapons.” So this was the only topic in the so-called military economy. In Russia it was no better, as far as I was able to see at the General Staff, during the short time when I had the contacts there. “We want this and that – give it to us and learn to live with it. If there are any shortages in meat, food or crop, we don't care.” [Mencl, 5]

<sup>9</sup> A training area in Bavaria, used by American troops during the Cold War.

<sup>10</sup> Antonín Novotný was Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1953 – 1968, and President of Czechoslovakia in 1957 - 1968.

## Dealing with the Big Brother

General Vitanovský: “It was the year 1961. [ . . . ] I was there together with my associates, who were working on this with me, advocating the issue of changing the system of armed forces command and control. I said: “Today we have computers, we have automation, so we also need to automate the army command. The amount of information involved in warfare is so enormous that conventional staffs – even inflated to any conceivable level – cannot handle it. And if information remains unprocessed, the resulting decision will be unrealistic and possibly wrong.”

One of the army generals back then, it was Kazakov<sup>11</sup> at the Unified Forces Staff, replied with a “*naplivat na vashu avtomatizatsiiu*” [vulgar Russian, meaning “I spit on your automation!”], when short of arguments to tell me [ . . . ]. And Marshal Zakharov, he was a Doctor of Sciences after all, told me: “It is obvious that you have not been to the front, ... When I was on the front, I took my trumpet like this and called ‘*Nu Vasia, kak tam u tebia armada?*’ [Hey Vasia, how’s the army there?], and he told me how things were with him.” I told him: “Comrade Marshal, you cannot mean this, this is not command and control. I know this can happen in the course of operation, during a day when you ask him at lunch time and he tells you ‘OK, everything is OK’. But then the commands must be adjusted for the following day, commands must be spread to the units all the way down to the regiment and so on, and this cannot be done today without the help of automation.”

[ . . . ] This was already pissing me off, as I hated being made a fool of myself, and so I said: “Comrade Marshal, please, I do nothing more than follow the work of Soviet theoreticians, for example the automation – here is an article published in the Soviet journal, *Voennaia mys!*,<sup>12</sup> where automation was being vexed...” He said: “Bring it, bring the review!” And it turned to be an article written by him. He was already boiling with anger – with a Lieutenant [General] opposing a Marshal of the Soviet Union – so I brought him another article, and it was also written by him, recommending automation all over.

[ . . . ] I told him: “Well yes, you are a Doctor of Sciences after all and these are all well-advised things you have written here,” and so on. And he repeated once again, that I have not been to the front obviously, and that was when I really started out... in this respect it didn't matter to me anymore, so I said: “Comrade Marshal, please, I sometimes think that experience from the last war can really be a disadvantage. For the next war – if it came to it – would be something completely different. We have to cope with automation somehow, Americans have already been doing it for a long time.” [Vitanovský, 4 – 5]

Q: Could you describe say the most important Soviet officials, whom you were in touch with?  
[ . . . ]

General Zachariáš: [ . . . ] All of them were professionally very well prepared. The rest were under the impact of their own nature or character, each was different. Some of them were almost intellectuals, I'd put general Vorobev<sup>13</sup> into such a group, he was an outstanding man, very learned, cultured and intelligent. Very polite, he never used a coarse or vulgar word. As far as I could see, he was always very firm, but just, even to the subordinates. And that was a quality not everyone excelled at.

[ . . . ]

Some of the marshals I only met at exercises. They were professionals, but aged gentlemen, veteran fighters of World War Two, with front line experience, excellent professionals.

[Zachariáš, 9 – 10]

<sup>11</sup> Army General Mikhail I. Kazakov was Commander of the Southern Group of Soviet Forces in 1956 – 1960. He was Chief of Staff at the Unified Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact in 1965 – 1968.

<sup>12</sup> *Voennaia mys!* – classified Soviet military journal.

<sup>13</sup> Colonel General Eduard Arkadevich Vorobev was Commander of the Central Group of Soviet Forces in 1987-1991.

General Štorek: Marshal Ogarkov,<sup>14</sup> [ . . . ] that was a personality. [ . . . ] Ogarkov had some arguments with his highest bosses, the marshals and the minister. I don't know, was it was Ustinov or Kulikov? – those highest bosses, defense ministers. He held some immensely reasonable views on airforce engagement, and he was fighting a big war with the people there. We respected him. [ . . . ] And the others, they were simply politicians, who were treading hard...

Q: Vacek<sup>15</sup> suggested in an interview that he respected Ogarkov for his ability to consider other people's opinions.

General Štorek: Yes, that's true. Consider others' opinions. It means that we simply could express our views. And not: "This is how it's going to be!" It was something we had seldom seen with such high-up officials. So Ogarkov is in my memory as a truly excellent general.

Q: I went through some of the documents from meetings with the Soviets. It appears that many of them – a great example would be probably Grechko,<sup>16</sup> but others as well – had known to behave in an incredibly rude way. [ . . . ]

General Štorek: Strict, very firm. Arrogant.

Q: Do you think that Ogarkov was a marked exception to this?

General Štorek: A marked exception. [Štorek, 12 – 13]

### **From Defensive to Offensive Strategies**

General Kvapil: When I was a division commander, I was acquainted with plans of republic's defense. And nothing more. Nothing more.

I was simply appointed a zone where some objects had been prepared, but besides that... when it came to, as they say, an offensive operation... Offensive operations had been practised in the field several times, i.e. when an enemy attack was intercepted, we could advance in a counter-attack. I was familiar with the plans, solely with the plans, for defense.

Q: We're talking about the time of 1955 – 1957, when you headed the ...

General Kvapil: I'm talking about the time when I was a division commander. [Kvapil, 15]

Q: You took part in the first exercise of Warsaw Pact forces, back in 1955. Could you tell us what was its story and what was your role in it? [ . . . ]

General Franko: [ . . . ] We had been trained for the role of NBC warfare officers at the divisional level. And suddenly I got the role of the NBC warfare officer at the front level. [ . . . ] And the story – as always: a strategic operation, when the Czechoslovak People's Army was featured for the first time as the Czechoslovak Front. [Franko, 8]

General Franko: The first one [exercise in 1955] – the Unified Armed Forces Staff itself was undergoing an on-the-job training there, learning what should be done. I assume again that it was a signal to work out a doctrine, for waging a nuclear war and for the relation between attack and defense.

The conclusion was that defense was just a temporary concept. And not a nationwide defense – as it had been in the times of the First Republic, with all those bunkers and so on – but defense is an enforced battle activity intended to provide, within a defensive operation

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<sup>14</sup> Marshal Nikolai Vasilevich Ogarkov was Chief of General Staff and Deputy Minister of Defense of the USSR in 1977-1984.

<sup>15</sup> Army General Miroslav Vacek was Commander of the Western Military District in 1985-1987, Chief of the General Staff in 1987-1989 and Minister of Defense in 1989-1990.

<sup>16</sup> Marshal Andrei Antonovich Grechko was Commander-in-Chief of Soviet forces in Germany in 1953-1957. In 1957-1960 he was Commander of the Land Forces, in 1960-1967 Commander-in-Chief of the Unified Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact and in 1967-1976 Minister of Defense of the USSR.

plan of an army – a single, let's say the Příbram<sup>17</sup> [1.] army – a grouping of forces and assets allowing for an active offensive plan. [Franko, 36]

General Picek: Those first years ... I don't know what the situation with the 1st Military District was, but I do know that after the reorganization of the army and formation of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies, we were preparing operational plans. And they were of a solely defensive nature, you could describe them as a mission to cover the state borderline. No offensive operation. So for the borderline divisions, where later on I was a divisional Chief of Staff, and until 1964 this was really the only option [ . . . ] And only in 1964 and 1965 – and that's when you have here the materials from – there appeared another alternative of using the army, i.e. the offensive option. Although I know that the first, defensive option remained valid, i.e. what the units and formations had prepared, they stored aside, in case of a special situation, and besides this they also had that other alternative, i.e. the offensive one.

Q: The historian Petr Luňák states in his study<sup>18</sup> that even in 1960, at one front formation exercise, the Czechoslovak units were to operate on Day 4 along the Stuttgart – Dachau line. And then for the exercise in March 1961, it was planned to reach the Dijon – Lyon line on Day 6 or 7. [ . . . ]

General Picek: I was talking about operation plans. Not about exercises. [Picek, 3 – 4]

Q: In 1958, the 1<sup>st</sup> Military District was dissolved and replaced with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies – what were the reasons of this reform? It is said that it had to do with the advent of nuclear weapons, both on the side of the enemy and of the Warsaw Pact.

General Pezl: Well – the Circuit was more like an institution to secure the peacetime operation and mobilization deployment; it was not intended for direct control and command of forces on a strategic level. It was never equipped with respective forces for such, it never had communication units for this, its connection with the air force was not straight enough. It was all about establishing a command, which would suit that front character, i.e. operational command on the front level and army task forces, whose structure and equipment would include forces capable of accomplishing the operation objective. And the Front was able to co-ordinate the activity of these task forces, it had sufficient reserves – not a second echelon, just reserves – and was in fact ready to control the operation. Whereas in the course of operation it was presumed that the territory command would be in charge of, that the second part of the unassigned front task force would be in charge of reinforcements of the forces with both combat units and materiel and of accomplishing tasks related to defense and protection of the territory. [Pezl, 2 – 3]

Q: Let's go back once again to the middle of fifties. [ . . . ] Could you describe the Czechoslovak military strategy, or doctrine – if we may say so – of those years? [ . . . ] For example, was it expected to advance on to enemy ground, and were there any military objectives laid down?

General Franko: [ . . . ] I don't want you to misinterpret this – but I have yet to see someone declare a defensive doctrine officially. Well – he could declare it, but whether he would accomplish it, that's another story. Because you cannot achieve victory over an enemy by defense, especially not on a global scale and not on the strategic level. Therefore it was said even back then that we could retreat, that were they that well equipped or were we that severely damaged, we could retreat up to Plzeň or the Vltava, and not a step further. And to prevent them from advancing further, we would simply have emptied all the dams on the Vltava.<sup>19</sup> But that would have had to be decided three weeks in advance. And if the front

<sup>17</sup> Příbram – a town in Western Bohemia, Headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army.

<sup>18</sup> Petr Luňák, "Za devět dnů jsme v Lyonu: Plán použití Československé lidové armády v případě války z roku 1964," *Soudobé dějiny*, 2000, no. 3: 403-419. For an English version see "Taking Lyon on the Ninth Day? The 1964 Warsaw Pact Plan for Nuclear War in Europe and Related Documents," on the PHP website, [http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php/collections/coll\\_1.htm](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php/collections/coll_1.htm).

<sup>19</sup> According to a plan from 1961, which was later updated, the Czechoslovak command was weighing up a possibility of emptying all dam reservoirs of the Vltava cascade in the case of a nuclear war threat. The purpose

operation took some 5, 7 or 12 days, then emptying them in the course of the operation would have been of no use, that would only have destroyed us. [ . . . ]

And if there had been a success, we would have found ourselves on the enemy ground. If it hadn't, we would have been fighting in retreat, but no further, I say, it never was to be farther than Plzeň and the junction of all those rivers which form a natural obstacle. [Franko, 10 – 11]

General Franko: It means – a temporary defense, that had been practiced in the sixties. And then maybe till the end of seventies. Since the end of seventies, it wasn't practiced any more. Because there was no one to hold the line with, with all those nuclear units out there – were we supposed to dig ourselves in like moles and wait for someone to drag us out of there? Defense was accentuated on the regimental level, maybe on the divisional level, but army-wide, I never saw in those 15 or 20 years of mine an exercise or an intention with somebody being assigned a defensive objective: "And you mustn't let the enemy beyond such and such line." So defense was more of an issue of tactics, while army defense was an issue of operation, and front defense was out of the question. [Franko, 36 – 37]

Q: Operational planning of Czechoslovak Army had been dealt with even before the structure of these two armies emerged. You took part in the exercises – do you think that at that time the traditional form of territorial defense, focused on an immediate interception and repelling of a potential attack, prevailed, or did some idea of mounting an offensive front-scale operation appear already in 1958?

General Procházka: At that time, divisions were already stationed so that they could be used – shortly after reaching the required level of combat readiness – in the first echelon of an offensive operation. Defense was not trained that much. It was trained, because it was a part of the training curricula, but usually only attacks were trained and exercised. [Procházka, 4]

General Šmoldas: The army eventually did get out of all this and I believe that in the beginning of the sixties, at the time of all those big crises (in Berlin and in Cuba), it was capable to play its role. And I'm convinced that if at that time a non-nuclear war had started, it would have taken us just a week to get to Normandy. A week! Because we had such superiority in tanks and such superiority in operational art and war concept that the West simply couldn't have lasted. Therefore I'm convinced that the army we had had before 1968 would have played its assigned role under that situation of bipolar division of the world. [ . . . ]

Q. You say we would have won, if the war had not been nuclear – but it probably wouldn't have been the case, would it?

General Šmoldas: I dare not answer this. [Šmoldas, 8 – 9]

Q: Would you recall how you – at the time when you were the Chief of Staff of the 19<sup>th</sup> Motorized Rifle Division – experienced the events of the second Berlin crisis (although I believe the events of the Cuban crisis were much more imminent)? What measures were taken?

General Pícek: The Cuban crisis, I went through that. In a pretty intensive way. As we were the borderline division and on a high combat alert, virtually for a long time. A lot of measures were taken, engineering and technical measures at the borders were being boosted.

Q: What exactly was it?

General Pícek: Well – gun-pits, shelters, underground command posts were built of prefabs, it was called "engineering and technical measures". Also, if I remember well, apart from the organization of the borderline regiments' units, self-propelled guns were added, deployed virtually right at the border together with the border guards. The border defenses were thus being reinforced. But what was the worst, we had three years' worth of conscripts there in the

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of this was to prevent the impact of a nuclear strike on big hydraulic structures, which would probably have resulted in a large-scale devastation of the Vltava region and the destruction of the bridges necessary for moving second-echelon Warsaw Pact forces to the European war theater.

units. The recruits arrived, they were untrained, and in view of the crisis, those who should have gone home were retained in the units in combat readiness. Of course, the barracks were overcrowded, it caused problems. Besides, more emphasis was placed on cooperation with the border guards, whom we co-operated on a normal basis with. Several measures were discussed there at that time, which were intended to provide help to border guard troops from our motorized rifle regiments. It could be said that at that time the division's units were fully combat-capable.

Q: You mean they were fleshed out above the scope of their peacetime strength.

General Picek: They were at full strength, simply at full strength, because these borderline divisions were almost at full strength even in peacetime, and there were just a few reservists reinforcing them in the event of a mobilization. They were virtually always at full strength. And as the fully trained third year of conscripts did not go home, the units and crews of the combat vehicles were virtually ready. [Picek, 4 – 5]

Q: Could you go back to the probably most crucial moment – the Cuban crisis? Those imminent days. How was it reflected in the Czechoslovak army?

General Pezl: [ . . . ] Of course, when the crisis really started, at some time the operational documents were changed. [ . . . ] So it was time to take the plans, check their feasibility with regard to the actual situation and capabilities, there were always some changes in the structure, manpower, equipment and so on. And the biggest issue in this case, if I remember correctly, the biggest problem was with the frequency ranges. The whole radio communications system was being re-worked. This meant revisiting every single piece of documentation and reworking its command and control security section. The documentation was reworked, some of the plans were amended and modified, and the staffs were ready on the highest alert; at some stage, there were some operational re-deployments, the 1<sup>st</sup> Tank Division was brought out, the 13<sup>th</sup> Tank Division was, if I remember correctly, brought out to the area of Doupov, to become an advanced division, to increase the first echelon coverage. In one of the stages, the army staffs took the command posts – not the operational ones, but close to them. The communication system was activated – that was a complete system, because at such times the Telecommunications Ministry was basically turned into a body... of a military nature. [ . . . ] Various links were activated, other links were blocked, frequency hopping maneuvers were done on some long-distance connections, and special links were established. Some measures were taken regarding national material stocks and reserves, also replenishment measures, some special mobilization speedup measures were prepared, especially related to certain special units – the S-units in particular, which were designed to secure the Soviet air force maneuvers on airfields and were also involved in the transfer of our air force to operational airfields. So I would say that it was pretty close, the staffs were dug in, everything was underground ... [Pezl, 5]

## **2. The War Plan Revealed**

### **The Warsaw Pact and the Soviet General Staff**

General Vitanovský: I worked on strategic and operational issues at the General Staff for 13 years, i.e. in operational posts at the Operations Department, then as Deputy Chief of the General Staff responsible for operational issues at the Operations Directorate. Because of this, I had a great opportunity to look into strategic conceptual matters, not only ours, but also those of the Soviet Union. It was because, in my capacity and as part of my duties with respect to operational plans, I often traveled to Moscow and dealt with these planning issues at the General Operations Directorate.

Colonel General S. P. Ivanov was the Chief of the General Operations Directorate back then. We talked to each other once, and then I started to use to see him every time I was there, even if it wasn't part of the visit schedule, I just used to visit him as a fellow professional in

operational areas and he always gave me a rough overview to make me familiar with some of problems, which were not just in the Western direction. It means that he talked to me about those other fronts, i.e. the Eastern front with Japan, the U.S. bases and so on.

[ . . . ] The primary line or the primary level of command in the entire Warsaw Pact was the General Staff of the Soviet Army, not the Unified Armed Forces, that needs to be said. The Unified Armed Forces were just some sort of a transformer, they could only transform wishes and commands of the General Staff of the Soviet Army. This is extremely important, for even though these Unified Armed Forces pretended to be a sort of a command authority, they were of course – were I to put it in such a rough way – just a megaphone for the General Staff of Soviet Army. I could see this very well when dealing with some issues at the General Staff of Soviet Army and at the Unified Armed Forces. The planning documents regarding our defense were invariably discussed only at the General Staff of Soviet Army.

It means that it came down to a strange paradoxical situation, because there was the Unified Armed Forces Commander, at that time there was Marshal Grechko, and there was also the Defense Minister of Soviet Union, Marshal Malinovskii.<sup>20</sup> And it could seem, because everybody was assigning troops to the Unified Armed Forces, all the Warsaw Pact countries, i.e. including the Soviet Union too, but still the relationship of the Soviet Union Defense Minister, who should have been subordinated to the Unified Armed Forces Commander, well it wasn't the case, the relationship was just reversed. It even came down to some conflicts, which were very interesting, between these two officials. It was interesting that Grechko was Deputy Defense Minister and yet the Defense Minister himself should have been subordinated to him at the Unified Armed Forces, to this Unified Armed Forces Commander. [Vitanovsky, 1-2]

General Raichl: At the Unified Command, at the Unified Command Staff, there was just one representative for each army. And there were talks that a staff of armies of the Warsaw Pact countries was to be established. And that was somehow always put off. [Raichl, 9]

Q: How – at the times when there was no Staff [of the Unified Armed Forces] yet – was the routine co-ordination going on? Did it all go along the chain of Unified Command representatives?

General Picek: It all went along the line of Unified Command representatives. Although the crucial issues, they went through them or directly, from the General Staff of the Soviet Army, not from the Unified Command. The Unified Command, it was what I'd call a token command, and I'm not really sure as to how far it was familiar with the operational plans or this... Maybe the Unified Command Commander knew it, but the Staff, those were just employees, liaison officers, who traveled. Even ours were intended to maintain the communication, but not to have any influence on army development or its combat readiness, not really. [ Picek, 16]

Q: You mentioned the Unified Command Staff and its role as a communicator of Soviet General Staff decisions. Lieutenant General Raichl, whom we have already interviewed, points out that he himself was the first Czechoslovak representative from 1967, that until then the Unified Command Staff had been...

General Pezl: ... a Russian staff, yes. Then they made a concession allowing individual officers to be seconded to this staff, to its sections, but they were lost there and didn't have any powers or clout. And there were army representatives of the respective countries in this staff, who, on the strategic level, were again what I'd call liaison bodies, meant to hand over and receive shared data to complement the primary directives.

Q: So they didn't really took part in agendas. When it came down to a ground discussion of substantial changes, it proceeded directly on the level of...

General Pezl: ...the General Staff. The General Staff back then played a much more important role, not the Ministry. The crucial say was in the hands of... the General

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<sup>20</sup> Marshal Rodion Iakovlevich Malinovskii was Minister of Defense of the USSR in 1957-1967.

Commander of the Warsaw Pact, the respective country's Politburo, the Warsaw Pact Staff, the general staffs. These links were much stronger than those of defense ministries. [Pezl, 3]

### The Planning Ritual

General Pezl: The General Staff at that time, the Operations Directorate was in charge of operational planning, which was strictly laid down by the Warsaw Pact Command. Yet the Warsaw Pact Staff was just a go-between for accomplishing the strategic plans of the Soviet Army General Staff in the European war theater [ . . . ], although it may have seemed to outwardly represent the participation of Warsaw Pact member countries in common operational and strategic interests. But most definitely, it was only forwarding directives of the General Staff, of the Main Operations Directorate of the Soviet Army General Staff. Subject to this, of course, were all tasks, which arose from it regarding the development of armed forces, i. e. tasks which were in this regard set and subject to the planned conduct of operations in the European war theater.

And as regards troop strengths, number of peacetime divisions and their mobilization deployment... It was a matter of the very structure of individual command levels, i. e. for example the Czechoslovak Army would have become a front, which was something unique, not found with the other armies. And this of course had an impact on equipment, its gradual modernization and upgrading, operational disposition of staff and army commanders and also annual plans of development and training, which were called for by Warsaw Pact directives.

These basic strategic and operation documents were of a political nature and formally adopted at annual meetings of the Warsaw Pact top representatives. And there was almost always a ritual where the Warsaw Pact Commander in Chief had visited all the political representatives of respective countries before the actual discussion of these directives took place, and had negotiated, politically, all those essential and major steps to be taken in the upcoming period. This concerned, in particular, which troops were lacked where, which equipment was to be purchased – those were, I'd say, arranged and approved Soviet equipment acquisitions – and possibly also commitments our country was then taking with respect to its own military industry and its production for other countries.

There were basic tasks set for large strategic and operational allied exercises, also basic tasks for troops training, all were defined as a specific means of determining which operations, which forces and which phases to prepare for. [ . . . ] In the long term, some intentions were prepared, i. e. in what direction the army should evolve in the next 2 to 5 years, towards modernization of both structures and equipment. That happened later on, as it was reflected in the state planning, in the budget and in the commitments which followed, so that funds for the purchases, trainings and potential reforms could be provided.

[ . . . ] Amongst the important factors, there was the strategic and operational planning adopted by the strategic directive of the Warsaw Pact High Command, which included specific tasks for Czechoslovak Army. Operational objectives were set here, also basic data, i. e. the direction of further operational deployment, activity areas where the Czechoslovak Front was supposed to launch and exploit its offensive, basic operation dimensions, stipulated in a more detailed front ops order, its basic logistic support and some data on the organization and command and control system.

On the basis of this strategic directive, the General Staff organized, through the Chief of General Staff, who was responsible for the implementation of this directive, its detailed downward planning within the Czechoslovak Army. This activity was limited to a selected group of people both at the Operations Directorate [of the General Staff] and at Operations Sections of Commands; these people were, as a rule, heads of sections, chiefs of operational preparation, of the air force. [ . . . ] Core groups of some five people from the armies took part in some subsequent basic planning tasks, developing the approved Ops Plan. On the basis of the above, the General Staff prepared a draft solution of this strategic



plan, assets and means, and selected the units, initial Order of Battle and formation, how the initial formation was to be assumed and echelons deployed, and also laid down objectives for each of the armies and services subordinated directly to the front command, i. e. above all the air force, rocket troops and the operational task force. The operational plan prepared in the way described above, with the planned objective outline coming first, was then submitted to the General Staff, the Chief of General Staff and to the Minister of Defense.

Then, after appropriate amendments, corrections, comments etc., this document was developed and elaborated in the necessary detail. The planned objective and implementation of this task were then usually presented by the Chief of General Staff and a selected group of people at the Unified Command. Once the planned objective was approved, the General Staff proceeded with detailed planning of the operation, i. e. its planning in a greater detail, at the level of the front, army, various services, rear. After that, it was presented to the State Defense Council. The Council didn't need to approve it; it only expressed its consent, because it had already been approved by the Warsaw Pact. The practicality of this plan was then documented by developing it downward, down to lower levels, into a set of implementing operational documents of a special nature. Everything was classified as top secret, as something of special importance.

According to special directives on security and operational documentation handling, the detailed documentation set was then sealed and stored in a designated place, appropriate signals were sent out, and infrastructure preparations were approved, which means command posts, communications links, buildup of strategic stocks, and preparations of roads and railways. It was brought to a system allowing it to be implemented. And the training of staff officers and troop commanders reflected the most typical tasks arising from the operation. [Pezl, 1 – 2]

General Vitanovský: There was this paradox – we were being told all the time: “Please, *vashe delo* [it's your business], you're a sovereign state.” But in reality, [ . . . ] the Chief of the General Staff was the Front Commander. And the Chief of Staff was the Chief of the Operations Directorate. I kept telling them all the time: “Excuse me, but who will be at the General Staff in the time of war, considering we are a sovereign state?” And they said: “That's none of your business.” This also involved precisely the territorial forces, it's like communicating vessels. And they rectified it at our compulsion only to the extent that we transferred the front issues to the Western Military District. [Vitanovský, 15]

### **The First Day and After**

General Vitanovský: The procedure was as follows. The Joint Armed Forces, or rather – as I repeat – the Soviet Army General Staff, issued a directive for all the national armies of the Warsaw Pact. This directive – a strategic one – laid down the objective for our army, i. e. what we were expected to do. But all this, all of this was, how to put it, planned for the first day, for the day the war was opened, but not beyond that. As to the following days, we could only gather from the exercises that had taken place, what it would have been like further on. Everything was done just for the first day, because we couldn't admit to the public, the world and say that we prepared an offensive war. Therefore the Operational Plan only dealt with the war opening, the first day.

On the basis of this directive, of which we got just a single copy, everything top secret, we got home, in a special airplane, escorted by armed staff etc. We got home and took the document to the General Staff to the so-called Operations Room, so that it couldn't get anywhere else, only there, and there it was worked out in a greater detail for the purposes of our army and the subordinate forces, i. e. armies. [ . . . ]

This directive from the Unified Command was formulated as a front objective, and it was about working out the objective, that is to lay down the so called intention or planned objective, i. e. how we wanted to implement the directive, the objective that was given to us from above. It means, what the first echelon will comprise, what the second echelon will

consist of, objectives for the armies, for the rocket forces, artillery, air force, air defense, rear support and so on, and all these documents which ensued from the directive were being worked out in detail. With no regard whatsoever as to whether it actually applies to specific conditions of Czechoslovakia. It was just like a task or mission at the front, e. g. when a soldier receives an order such as, "You'll attack from here to there and nobody will talk about this with you. You'll attack from A to B." And it was same with the Czechoslovak [army]: "You'll be doing this from here to there."

When it was all worked out, we took it back to Moscow and they reviewed it, signed it and said "Yes, we agree", or they just edited it, it was edited right on the spot. Just the three of us, we had to edit it, remake the maps if necessary or just do it all over in a different way. So this is how the whole planning looked like.

Q: General, the objective for the first day, what was it? Was it to intercept and stop the enemy?

General Vitanovský: To intercept or stop the enemy. [ . . . ] The Order of Battle resulting from the objective was giving an obvious opportunity to quickly launch a strategic counter-offensive and attack. And I can confirm it, as all the exercises were treated in this way. And of course it wasn't exercised just for the purposes of the exercise, but because there was some reason, right? [ . . . ] The interesting thing was, the defensive combat was never exercised. It was somehow assumed that it had been over, that the counter-offensive was started. For I don't remember any [measures] taken, i. e. that we would defend ourselves to a depth of some 100 or 200 kilometers, I just don't remember. [Vitanovský, 5 – 6]

Q: To what extent did you have the chance to become familiar with different parts of the Operations Plan? [ . . . ]

General Vinkler: Well it was all sealed up, nobody was allowed to tamper with it. All the documents were prepared by us personally, under very strict conditions. I recall the Soviets claiming that they were forbidden to even use typewriters. So imagine, all that war documentation, all just written [by hand]. We did it in a slightly more modern way, but it still was... I say, it meant two months of intensive work for us, to renew the operational plans. They were sealed up, and we used to take them to Příbram together with Pezl, then call up all the commanders etc. and each of them got his part, and signed for it. And then it was kept with the units, because it could only be opened using the special cipher-keys. But it never got that far.

Q: Thanks God.

General Vinkler: Yeah, sure. [Vinkler, 2]

## Lyon in Nine Days

Q: I have here that [Czechoslovak operation] plan<sup>21</sup> from 1964, which was declassified.

General Šádek: [browsing through the operation plan]

Q: This is a Czech translation, the original is in Russian, archived at the Ministry of Defense. It is signed by president Novotný, which I think corresponds to the operational plans approval procedure, then there are signatures of Lomský,<sup>22</sup> Rytíř,<sup>23</sup> Vitanovský as the Directorate Chief and Voštera<sup>24</sup> as the Chief of the Operations Section. [ . . . ] The interesting thing about this plan is that it is assumed here that in case of war, the single Czechoslovak Front would be able to not only resist NATO forces, but also advance at a relatively brisk clip. It is stated

<sup>21</sup> See footnote no. 18 above.

<sup>22</sup> Army General Bohumír Lomský was the Minister of National Defence in 1956-1968.

<sup>23</sup> Army General Otakar Rytíř was the Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Military District in 1952-1956, and the Chief of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak People's Army in 1958-1968.

<sup>24</sup> Major General Jan Voštera was the Commander of the 20<sup>th</sup> Motor Rifle Division in Karlovy Vary in 1958-59. In 1959, he was the Chief of the Operations Section at the Operations Directorate of the General Staff, and in 1966-1969 he was the Chief of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff.

in the detailed objective that maybe on Day D-2 or D-3, the advance should go up to Ingolstadt, and in 7 days it's already somewhere in Francie, Dijon, and in 9 days even in Lyon.

General Šádek: Besançon [smiling].

Q: Yes.

General Šádek: Besançon, Lake Constance etc. [Amused.] I'm looking at it... it's an old business, this here. [Šádek, 4-5]

[ . . . ]

Q: One of my associates put the data from this plan from 1964 into the map. On the ground of what's in the plan, where the advance over Bavaria is anticipated, there is the line of 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies and it's assumed to reach France in 9 days.

General Šádek: Oh yes, that's right.

Q: It's obvious that this direction was probably retained – because there isn't really any other – maybe even until the end of the Cold War, the eighties. Most probably.

General Šádek: Yes, yes.

Q: Yet there is that interesting question of the pace of the advance, and the width and depth of the area covered. Would you recall how successful was the advance presumed to be, according to your anticipations?

General Šádek: The senior commanders have always played the beginnings with us. So yes, in the beginning of course, in the particular directions... it wasn't always like this, in a single line, it was different ... somewhere more into the enemy's defense lines, somewhere else the other way, the enemy again, you see? The enemy again.

Q: ... The scale here is of course too small.

General Šádek: This is [studying the map with the plotted operation] the 4<sup>th</sup> Army. ... It's a pity that we didn't capture it back then. All the way to the Channel and the problems would have been solved. [Laughing, ironic.]

Q: And the plans counted on this, on an advance up to Brittany and beyond?

General Šádek: Oh yes, that was anticipated. That if we had been successful, we would have advanced all along the Lake Constance, down to Besançon and to Paris. This way. [Showing.] But what they anticipated, we don't know.

Q: Of course, it depends a lot on what the Soviet plans were. Because this was a secondary advance line.

General Šádek: Yes, secondary. Berlin was primary, here [showing], and on to the Benelux countries and then downwards. Of course.

Q: There is one question, which comes up – what was the situation of Austria.

General Šádek: Nobody ever dealt with Austria, in any connection. It was more of a neutral country.

Q: There was no risk of Austria joining [them] in case of war... ?

General Šádek: Because they never had any army, not a regular one.

Q: So it was always about the Prague – Saarland direction. Nobody thought about the Alpine line of advance?

General Šádek: No, no. [Šádek, 7 – 8]

### **Was It Feasible?**

Q: Could you evaluate the feasibility of such plan? [ . . . ]

General Pícek: I could. Look, at that time I just graduated the General Staff Academy in Soviet Union. There was simply... the warfare and strategy virtually corresponded to what is stated here in the Operations Plan. I mean those fast advance paces, I don't know, 80 or 120 kilometers ...

Q: Daily ...

General Pícek: ... daily, yes, and now the areas, the utilization of mass destruction weapons... I admit that since the very start I had always felt a little uneasy about this.

Because when I saw at the exercises the amount of nuclear weapons which were just “dumped” there... well in the map, it was so dense, with land explosions which leave irradiated areas that have to be passed through, also the obstacles resulting from the use of those mass destruction weapons... and also the moral and psychical condition of the soldiers of both sides, the population, so I just thought that this was completely unrealistic.

And I kept this opinion all time, and even when I became familiar with the plan, I said: “It is set, we can’t change it, such are the orders.” But it wasn’t realistic in my view. Let alone the fact that even the balance of powers, which was always calculated in such operations, was almost even, there was simply no superiority in anything. So in my opinion, such an operation could have ended only in a total fiasco for both sides. It simply couldn’t have led anywhere. But this was how the exercises were dealt with, you see.

Q: I’m particularly surprised that there was little on the impacts... there were some 130 strikes, which had been delivered by the red, yet the blue ones<sup>25</sup> would had also delivered some strikes...

General Picek: But of course. They counted on a surprise nuclear strike, you see. Yet [smiling] ... the other side was never asleep. One side would have had to attack all of a sudden... and it was obvious that if they had launched, I don’t know, some strategic weapons, these could have been detected in the air, you see, so there would have been still some time... That’s why it was necessary in alert preparations that troops were out of the barracks in 30 minutes – it was based on the time the missiles would have needed to get here from the U.S. So, if one side had succeeded in launching its missiles earlier, the other would have had some delay, but it would ultimately have gotten its missiles on target as well. [Picek, 9]

Q: Let’s get straight to the text of the Operations Plan from 1964. It is anticipated there to conduct war operations in 7 days...

General Pezl: ... as far as the Rhine.

Q: ... to the Dijon line. And to Lyon in 9 days. That is an amazing pace.

General Pezl: Well... it is indeed an amazing pace, which assumed a pre-emptive nuclear strike. And some heavy nuclear strikes in the course of the operation. How far it was realistic... it’s hard to imagine even now. The terrain was not exactly suitable for such a fast pace. But there is that high number of nuclear strikes, and the tank forces, which even at the cost of heavy losses [ . . . ] would have had a crushing effect on the battlefield. You can really understand the fears of the NATO, which are still recalled even now.

The Czechoslovak Front – that was I don’t know how many, some 4.800 tanks, just on this piece of land here [shows a section of the Czechoslovak-German borderline on the map] and here above, the 22 divisions, two thirds of which were tanks. And the Soviet Group of Forces in East Germany, that was a group which was always equipped with the latest equipment – everything that the Soviet industry was able to turn out was first put there [ . . . ]. So I’d say it was... crushing and under certain conditions it could have resulted in a fast pace. Because the [NATO’s] main strategic reserve stocks for the European war theater were pre-positioned at the boundary of France and Germany and implied an aerial and naval transfer of forces from the USA for equipment. That’s why the pace was supposed to be so fast, so that there was an advance before these forces would have got here.

Q: So one could say that those 9 days were just part of the effort to keep it under 10 days, which the American forces would have needed to get here.

General Pezl: [Nods.]

Q: The main problem was probably the border encounter in the area of Šumava and Český les. There, on the first day, the D1, a 60 km advance is assumed.

General Pezl: A distance like that, if I’m not mistaken.

Q: Were they not afraid that the difficult area of the border encounter could have been somehow rendered impassable by the enemy – by using nuclear mines or other means?

<sup>25</sup> In the operational planning of military exercises, the NATO forces were “blue” and the Warsaw Pact forces were “red”.

General Pezl: Well, I don't know, these nuclear mines... not that they weren't factored into the operation calculations, but... it would have been difficult in reality. First, the efficiency was not so high... it couldn't be in the whole area, there couldn't be hundreds of nuclear mines, so that there could still be space for bypasses or certain maneuvers. Of course, the border area was difficult, it was one of the most difficult phases of the operation.

There was a peculiar situation here, as a result of the course of the East German border [shows on the map], which in fact put the Soviet Group of Forces some 200 kilometers ahead of the forefront of the Czechoslovak Front and thus formed some kind of a threat into the flank of any group which could have been formed here. There were certain preconditions present for an enveloping operation even in the first stages. [Pezl, 5 – 6]

General Slimák: [ . . . ] As regards the scale, it represents paces of some 70, 80 kilometers a day. That is completely unrealistic, and if it was to be realistic, then only if nuclear weapons were used. It means that this Operations Plan, in my view, was built solely on the assumption of the use of nuclear weapons as the only warfare option. Because a theory that nuclear weapons might not be used from the very start, appeared – as far as I remember – for the first time at the end of the sixties. Then there were debates to the effect that nuclear weapons might not be used from the very start, but rather in the course of the operation, depending on how it would evolve. And there is another interesting thing – these fast advances were planned at the times when the level of motorization and mechanization of the troops was not as high as, say, at the end of the eighties. What was the equipment back then? The T-34 tanks; the first “fifty-fours” only started to make their way in the inventory of the army. And we only had old troop carriers.

[ . . . ]

Q: Would you say that the plan and the calculation were unrealistic even in 1964, from the viewpoint of logistics?

General Slimák: I don't know if it was realistic. I only want to say – the paces were too fast. It's odd that with the subsequent modernization of the forces, the operation pace was becoming more realistic, and slower. Just take this – here the objective for the first day of the operation is to do 50 or 60 kilometers in a mountainous terrain. Not even in peace times would the troops make it, let alone when using... It could be said that it was presumed that there were conditions provided for by opening the war using nuclear weapons. [Slimák, 2]

Q: Here it talks about the estimate of 9 days to get to Lyon.

General Franko: That is possible.

Q: And in 7-9 days to Dijon.

General Franko: It was simply divided into an immediate, first phase front objective and then a subsequent front objective. But then, after that subsequent objective had been accomplished, it wouldn't have meant mean the war would have been over. Because then it was time for those reserves, which were in the second line of advance, behind the Czechoslovak Front, some 300 to 500 kilometers behind. And the meaning of it was that our army had to launch and accomplish this lightning fast attack and not stay behind the forces, which were here [points on the map], in the area of Germany. In terms of geography, the war theater there is much more convenient than this one, which is a part of the area to be taken by the Czechoslovak Front. There is no Šumava, no Český les, no rivers or narrow passes, it's just a plain there in Germany. So if they hadn't co-coordinated the advance with us, i. e. if the Czechoslovak Front hadn't co-coordinated the advance with its right-flank neighbor, it could have had catastrophic consequences, for a sufficient number of mobilized divisions, or divisions brought from the USA or even from France could have started through here, and the whole war could have ended somewhere on the Rhine.

Q: Exactly on this ground, the validity of the Czechoslovak plan from 1964 has been questioned recently by some of the critics of its interpretation. Most recently<sup>26</sup>, it was General Deim,<sup>27</sup> one of the operators of the Eastern German army, who said that the plans he had at hand had involved first an interception of the enemy offensive, and only then an advance of some kind, allowing for a counter-offensive in no less than four days. That is why, he says, it doesn't make sense to count on being able to be in Lyon in 9 days, because the right flank of the Czechoslovak Front would not have been covered. Could you comment on this?

General Franko: Well, the right flank of our front, of the Czechoslovak Front, was covered at all times, because the primary strike within the group of fronts – there were maybe four such fronts – the primary strike would have been launched from the territory of East Germany, here above [points on the map]. Not from Czechoslovakia or from down here. In view of the entire European plan, we were on a secondary direction, if you follow me. And the secondary strike was ensuring the primary one, there, where there were so many tanks “crammed” that they could just shoot into each other at will. Mutually, by the way.

If you take a larger scale, Europe, if you think of the other forces, which must take Denmark and islands and peninsulas on the way to Sweden and Norway. Not that they would have gone to Norway, but it just needed to be covered. Another force would turn around and go here – for example to Hamburg, which would be its final destination. And the second line forces continue in the direction of the primary strike. And to provide enough of these forces, the whole Carpathian Military District, i. e. from Lvov, the mobilized divisions in Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia, the Polish second line forces, they all would have been transported by existing routes and transport means. The soldiers would have had to build those themselves, the rails or river crossings etc., so that they could soon have become part of the Czechoslovak Front's order of battle, as reserves of the main command. That's why the German [Deim] was talking from the standpoint of a German, i. e. speaking for a force stationed here on the right flank. But he should have seen this from the perspective of the whole of Europe.

Just as we couldn't think that the French troops wouldn't have been there – they would have, because they were NATO members, and played their role in the war, although in the peace times they were not subordinated to the NATO Supreme Command. That's what de Gaulle had arranged back then.

What else did I want to mention – that's why it was so important to get to, I don't know, Genoa, to get to Marseilles, because those were strong points, bases where forces from all over the world could arrive. It took say 20 days – or let's say 10 days, 10 days until the second line forces for the NATO got here from the USA. So that you should have gotten there in those 10 days. [Franko, 32 – 33]

General Franko: Those field forces, they were intended as a front. And they had everything what was needed for its operation, to accomplish its objective, in the course of 7, 8 or 12 days. The imminent objective was to be accomplished in 4 days, the subsequent one – e. g. get to France etc. – that was in 8 or 12 days.

But sometimes the exercise was about accomplishing the objective in 12 days. It depended on whether mass destruction weapons were used or not. A nuclear and a non-nuclear option. The nuclear option, that was the 8 days, and the non-nuclear one, 12 days.

But the front didn't need anybody. Once it set off, it was only to move west. It didn't need to care what's behind. And its forces were positioned deep – I should say – some 50 or 80 kilometers, and if anybody was farther from the border, he was brought out to the front formation in time, so that he could be used for an offensive. Or if the enemy had succeeded to wedge in, for example, as far as Plzeň, then the front would have changed its deployment

<sup>26</sup> Peter Veleff, Hans Werner Deim, “The Operational Plan of the Czechoslovak People's Army for the War Phase of 1964 – Was It a Real Operational Plan?” on the PHP website, [http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php/documents/collection\\_1/texts/veleff\\_deim.htm](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php/documents/collection_1/texts/veleff_deim.htm).

<sup>27</sup> Major General (NVA) Hans Werner Deim – Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff of the 11th Motorized Armored Division (1973-1976); Deputy of Deputy Chief of Main Staff Operations and Head of Operations Directorate (1976-1978); Deputy Chief of Staff Operations (1979-1982); Head of Combat Readiness and Operational Training Directorate / Head of Planning Staff (1982-1990).

so that it would have been able to surround and destroy the enemy in the Plzeň or Klatovy region on its own. Nobody counted on any Russians from East Germany or elsewhere to come to help.

The Central Group of Forces, or the Carpathian Front, PrikVO, it was earmarked as another front, which would be formed to accomplish objectives after the Czechoslovak Front and the tank units had accomplished all their tasks. For the first line, i. e. those 50, 100 kilometers deep from the borders on both our territory and on that of East Germany, was so packed that there would have had to be a miracle if it hadn't worked against the Germans, the Americans and the French.

A balance of powers was always calculated, i. e. what everybody was supposed to be able to have at some place. The Americans or French or English would have had to bring in materiel, equipment and God knows what at least two weeks in advance by ships and airplanes, which were to be loaded as soon as the alert was out, the orange, red and other alerts. And once it was calculated, i. e. what was there or what could be mobilized on the European territory, in the West, it was also taken into consideration. And what was in the East was also taken into consideration. And yet they arranged it, to secure it at 100 percent, so that the superiority in tanks would have been something like 1 to 3, in artillery 1 to 10, in air force God knows how much, it doesn't matter, just that it was enough to secure a military success. [Franko, 24 – 25]

[ . . . ]

And then, in the Operations Plan, there were always options – for a non-nuclear war and a nuclear war. In the former case, it would of course have been just like it used to be in World War Two, and the deadline for the advance couldn't have been 10 or 12 days. A front operation or a front group operation can take as long as two months. And it was just a question of how long the non-nuclear option would actually last, if two days, or three, four. And if the enemy – on one or the other side – realized that the first line divisions had just blown up, e.g. the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies, and he had hundreds of nuclear weapons at his disposal, then he would just start using them. All that mattered then, who would do so first? [ . . . ]

Therefore it is important to know that such options were exercised every year – there was an increasing number of command post and staff exercises, i. e. without troops, but outside, on the field. In the beginning, there were even three of them every year. That was something, you know, it was a terrible strain. That's how it was when there was something special to exercise. And there was another thing, the *uprezhdayushchiy udar*, a pre-emptive nuclear strike, for example half an hour in advance. Because he who had a half-hour advantage certainly did best in the field, too. Eventually it came down to a stage – in the year we're talking about – that's 1961, 1962, 1963, it was decided to re-organize in a way which would ensure that the West and the East didn't have deadlines of hours or days for anything, for to deploy the entire system is an enormous process, but rather that the first-line units were positioned in order to simply run over the state borders, on both sides. [ . . . ]

Q: You've suggested before that you saw the plan – as regards the other objectives – that you saw it worked out beyond Lyon. Where to? To the Pyrenees, to the Bay of Biscay?

General Franko: In the form of arrows – our objective didn't reach all the way down there, that was for the second echelon, the secondary fronts. Having accomplished a subsequent objective – for example on the Rhine – how many, do you think, how many of them, fighting-fit and equipped would have been left there after 10 or 12 days of combat?

Q: The documents sometimes mention 50 percent as an estimate on casualties.

General Franko: Casualties are just hard to replace, that's why new unit were to be formed there. I only know that an army group and a front group had a destination marked by the arrows, somewhere in Spain, in the Bay of Biscay. And the others were down in France. And there were other indications – that was not an issue of the Czechoslovak Front, but of Russia – there were plans for an invasion to England. After some time, you know. [Franko, 33 – 34]

## The Missing Second Echelon

Q: The operational plan [from 1964] counts on 7 days to Dijon and 9 days to Lyon. Did you think this was realistic, when you were Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army?

General Procházka: I always supposed that our objective would be limited. It would be limited, even though on the maps you could plot an objective which was vast, a great swing ... of course we did plot the swing in the maps, that is understandable. But nobody asked us whether we were strong enough for that. They always said: "You are a front line army, the first echelon, *v pervom eshelone*, and behind you, the front of some three armies will come, you see." You'll form some kind of a bridgehead.

What were you trying to accomplish, when you had a front line army of 120,000 men? And you had an objective to go "as far as here"? Yes, it was correct to give ambitious orders to the subordinates, but also with a link to the strategic plan, you see. Did any of us know the strategic plan? Maybe somebody at the General Staff. We just received some limited objectives. And we worked out the particular tasks, we wrote them up, drew them. Our operators did. We knew the neighbor's situation - approximately - what directions he could take, but to actually know the structure of his forces... That was already a question of strategy. But we were convinced that no sooner than in three days - no sooner - a second echelon would be deployed to exploit the operations. And on this ground we had to accomplish the immediate objective, then the next task. Of the operation.

Q: The implementation, the plan - did it change at all during that time? For example, was the pace, say, accelerated, or again slowed down... ?

General Procházka: No. The pace was clearly set. Whether the one who had set it, whether he believed in it, that is another question.

[ . . . ]

We had only one advantage, as we were in the first echelon, that maybe we wouldn't have been hit by the nuclear weapons so much. They would have been aimed at the rear, on the second echelon, the reserves etc., the strategic reserves, more likely than on us.

[ . . . ]

Q: Which part of the plan did you think was most difficult? The beginning, the border encounter in Šumava, or...

General Procházka: The most difficult part is always to prepare the conditions for the front line units, so that they could get over the mine fields and start accomplishing the nearest objective, as soon as possible. And for this, it is necessary to utilize the artillery and missiles and rockets. Of course, in a way so as to not contaminate our terrain by the nuclear weapons. Naturally, even in such terrain, you fight using the... We often wondered why it was so little expected to utilize the gas. [Procházka, 9 - 10]

General Vinkler: The task of our army would be virtually over in this area. [Shows the plotted line for the advance on D1 and D2 .]

Definitely here. During the command and staff exercises then, we attacked with divisions which were really only at 10 percent of strength at this point here, and later were redeployed. So it was just to encourage the troops. [ . . . ]

Q: So do you think that the units would have been "spent" on D1 already, during the border encounter?

General Vinkler: You know, the people at Operations Directorate, they weren't with the troops, so they just planned. I recall that a tank or two can hinder the advance of a whole division. And this is not open land, there are roads, woods, towns etc., so that it's enough when somewhere around here... Nuremberg. [Showing on the map.] The way I felt about this - although it was not really my problem, we only perceived this from the standpoint of intelligence. But from the viewpoint of intelligence, it was more important for us to take this place, for example, than that area, therefore my view on this is that... it was not realistic, the way it was planned. [ . . . ] In my opinion it would have been a success if the divisions had got there without any fighting.

Q: [Smile.]



General Vinkler: But really, you see. Because this is about experience with the troops, it's not just... Of course, the people in the Soviet General Staff also drew from experience dating back to World War Two, but back then – as they spoke about those Stalin strikes in 1944 – back then it was about an enormous mass of soldiers against a completely broken-down enemy. And it wasn't always like that, too, it was in leaps. Well, that is known.

You see I'm not viewing this as if this was the area where the whole story of our army was to be played [showing the D1 and D2], and not any further. Of course, the operators would have different views. [ . . . ]

But can you imagine the Operations Directorate seeing it in a different way? Of course not. It was simply some objectives here, here and then some further development or exploitation of the operation, using second echelon forces. At that time the Ukrainian Front would have...

We exercised with them, too, and with that air force – where was it from? Somewhere from Lithuania, from the Baltic region. They used to come here for operation exercises. [ . . . ]

Q: In view of the Carpathian Military District – because if they were the second echelon and yet relatively far away, then how would they have been deployed?

General Vinkler: That's the same problem, you see. Of course, when we analyzed operational exercises of NATO armies, or that 7<sup>th</sup> Army, then you could see the enormous power of nuclear strikes right away. And they would have used them immediately against the Ukrainian echelon, against those divisions. The divisions, all the operators and we too were used to what the US exercises were like. You could always see that the Carpathian area was totally destroyed by their nuclear strikes. They tried to inhibit... you can imagine that to move an army from one place to another, you need roads and railways. Then it would have been virtually impassable, because they would have created a zone of radioactive contamination, and it would have been an exceptional success to get through that. But as I say, you must plan, you cannot get by without a plan. [Vinkler, 8 – 10]

General Slimák: The Czechoslovak Front, it was probably because there was no need, it was just a secondary direction, right? It was not a primary strike, it was intended to secure. To cover the left flank of a strategic operation.

[ . . . ] You know, I believe that some of the data is missing there, about the second strategic echelon. If it was part of PrikVO, the Carpathian Military District... But that was an issue of operations echelon, it would have depended on how the operational situation would have evolved. This problem was resolved in the situation which arose after 1968.

Q: The operators point out during the interviews that their biggest doubts were related to how the second echelon from PrikVO would get here and that it was really solved only with the Central Group.

General Slimák: I know that PrikVO exercised this, the transfers. On the command and staff level, they would simply have got into their cars and driven for three days to get to Germany, East Germany. I heard this during one meeting, when I was visiting the Ukraine with the former Chief of the General Staff, General Vacek, this very District.

Q: Did you know anticipated movement routes of the second echelon? Because there are not that many suitable routes through Slovakia.

General Slimák: Well that was it. I believe that the troops would have had to go through Poland. Because that was the natural route. A map view is distorted because of the Earth's curvature, but the main route was through Poland. In Slovakia, there was one route in the North and one route in the South, nothing more.

Although the Soviets were a little generous, they just ignored the details in operation plans. [ . . . ]

Q: It is certainly strange, in view of the border clash in Šumava.

General Slimák: But I tell you, under a normal combat situation, the troops would never have accomplished the mission, because the roads would have been clogged. [Slimák, 3 – 4]

## Planning on False Assumptions

Q: We talked about the Operations Plan from 1964, you have given us your comments. Could you tell us [ . . . ] your main concerns about this that you noted yourself back then?  
 General Zachariáš: I'll try. So first, I studied it with great interest, looked up the respective objectives set on the map, measured the widths and depths. And then I started with the conclusions of the evaluation of the opponent. Some things seemed misinterpreted to me. First of all, it was not possible to conclude, on the basis of the evaluation, exactly under what circumstances it would have come to such an operation. Was there anything before, some time for preparations, or not? There is not a single mention here that both sides along the Western border at that time were preparing for defense, including entrenchments, obstacles, entanglements, roadblocks, minefields. At that time, even nuclear and chemical *fugasy* [mines] were anticipated on the opponent's side. If that was the reality at that time – and it probably was, then there is no mention about it here and in view of this the objectives are not set realistically.

Another issue, which doesn't seem very realistic to me, is the evaluation – our evaluation, of course – of the opponent's utilization of operational airmobile forces, mentioning the areas of the Krkonoše and Jeseníky Mts. and the Moravian Gate. The Krkonoše and Jeseníky Mts. Were, in my view, out of question, because operational tactical airmobile forces are usually deployed along the lines of primary and secondary strikes, but nobody would mount a strike through the Krkonoše and Jeseníky Mts., not even a secondary one. The Moravian Gate was more realistic, but there were possibly other valid areas along the border between Bohemia and Moravia and also in Moravia, allowing for taking some important centers, for example communication centers.

[ . . . ]

I believe that even in terms of the balance of forces, some of the conclusions were incorrect, here it says 1.1:1.0 or 1:1, but that is just a quantitative relation, not taking into account the quality of forces. And back then – as far as I remember – a German or US division was better equipped in terms of quality, than we were, in tanks and armored personnel carriers in particular. We didn't really have any APCs at that time, the infantry used trucks or was on foot, and the fielding of armored personnel carriers had only just begun then. And a balance of 1.1:1 in air assets doesn't speak of quality. With a balance like that we wouldn't have had any chance in an offensive operation. A superiority of 1:3 or 1:4 was required.

And to have such a superiority, you'd have to concentrate the troops in a narrow area, but that was not possible along our borders – there were just passes in the form of roads or dirt roads, but only few of them, so that virtually only columns of platoons, companies, battalions could get through, nothing more. Indeed they say that if a battalion gets through, so does a regiment and a division, but they cannot fight, they can just proceed in a column. And if you have obstacles, entanglements, roadblocks there... It was simply impossible to gain a superiority that would permit accomplishing an objective set like this in the plan, i. e. including the widths and depths. Here the widths are around 100 kilometers per army and more, and the depth for Day One is 100 kilometers – including the border region with those limited areas for maneuvering. Besides, the entire front was in a single echelon, because there was no second one, no second echelon army, just single divisions – and, moreover, just mobilized ones. So, with the objective set like this, and the widths and depths, it seemed almost impossible, impossible to accomplish. [Zachariáš, 1 – 2]

Q: You've said that for an offensive operation to be feasible, to be able to conduct an offensive operation in general, a superiority of 1:3 or 1:4 was necessary.

General Zachariáš: If a successful offensive operation is to be undertaken somewhere, then you need at least 1:3 or 1:4 in places where you want to break through. Either you need enough forces, or you must use weak covering forces somewhere else, and create such superiority [locally]. But the situation back then didn't allow for something like that. I mean the plan from 1964. It didn't because there was nowhere to achieve such a concentration of forces to gain threefold or fourfold superiority. The character of the country simply didn't

allow for this, there were no routes, not enough room for assembly areas, no place to deploy them. It just wasn't feasible, it was impossible. And to do it somewhere in the enemy territory? In any case, you'd still have to get through the border areas, which would have been destroyed, razed to the ground. Well, I consider this almost impossible. It could be feasible some 100 kilometers deep from the borders, maybe, but you'd have to get there first. And we wouldn't have had that many forces left at that time. [Zachariáš, 6 – 7]

Q: I understand naturally that in the sixties, you didn't have access to the plans at the topmost level, but still, just based on your experience, could you evaluate, ... how was it possible that the plan was built like this? [ . . . ] Could you estimate the motives of this [ . . . ]? General Zachariáš: It is quite difficult to explain, but we were always a secondary direction. And we never presumed that a primary strategic strike could be launched from our territory or through our territory. And the objective which was set, it probably expected us to cross the state border and engage as many enemy forces as possible, i. e. , the German II Corps, the US VII Corps, and any arriving French reserves, so as to facilitate the accomplishment of the objective set for the primary direction, which went through the German Democratic Republic and the western part of Germany, directly to France. And the objective was clearly set – whatever objective you are given, you have to accomplish it. If our mission was to get somewhere on Day One, and somewhere else on Day Two, and to reach the territory of France by the end of the operation, then the plan had to be worked out in detail; and I believe that even experienced operators who were working on this, must have come to a conclusion that the objective was impossible to accomplish. But it was set and had to be planned for. [Zachariáš, 1 – 2]

General Slimák: An Operations Plan – to put it short – prepares an army for a certain way of its use, a specific way of conducting combat activities, but on the other hand, it also sets requirements regarding its future development, so that all this is provided for. To give a significant example, it is stated there – and you've pondered over it, too – the balance of forces. It means that if there was to be a ratio of 1.1:1 in tanks, a ratio of 1.1:1 in self-propelled guns, then of course with the expansion or transformation of motorized rifle divisions into tank divisions, or with re-equipping them with infantry fighting vehicles instead of OT-64s, then of course the potentials change considerably.

You know, every operations plan is an estimate of potentials. A distinct feature of the Czechoslovak Front, maybe well since the sixties and then until the nineties, was the stationing of the US VII Corps. And there was a simple reason for that. Because there, in the Southern region of the Federal Republic of Germany, just facing the former Czechoslovakia, units of the German II Corps were positioned. These units, 4<sup>th</sup> Motor Rifle Division, the 10<sup>th</sup> Motor Rifle Division, the 12<sup>th</sup> Tank Division, also underwent a transformation. The 10<sup>th</sup> Motor Rifle turned into the 10<sup>th</sup> Tank Division. The 1<sup>st</sup> Mountain Division even included a tank brigade in the course of time. When the 10<sup>th</sup> Tank Division was formed, the 12<sup>th</sup> Tank Division was subordinated to the German III Corps. And deep there, there were French troops.

The bottom here [shows the war theater of Southern Germany], this was really the entire II Corps. And here [shows] the VII Corps was stationed, and is still stationed, even now. Originally, they also had only two divisions, in the Operations Plan, but in the course of time, they grew to three. And the VII Corps could be deployed in the Czechoslovak Front area, but also against the neighboring front. If they had been deployed against our front, the ratio would have been 1:1 in divisions and 1.1:1 in tanks, but if deployed elsewhere, the ratio would have been considerably different.

I mean to say, we worked with this in different ways during exercises. For example, the balance of powers in the war theater was definitely in favor of the Warsaw Pact, at least with respect to ground forces. The primary direction was not in the [Czechoslovak] Front region, that was an auxiliary direction. The primary direction was that of the neighboring front. So, when a defensive operation was exercised, the VII Corps were attacking the neighboring front, and if an offensive operation was exercised, they went elsewhere. So the problem here

was that there were no operation reserves, they were just the front echelon, the VII Corps, but due to the fact that our country bordered with East Germany, they could be used, because they were stationed right on the boundary. They could be used in our area, as well as in the area of our northern neighbor. [Slimák, 3]

### 3. Nuclear Imponderables

#### Early Years

Q: Did you at that time, in the second half of the fifties, did you have any idea of how the conduct of warfare would have changed, considering the nuclear weapons had already been available?

General Kvapil: We knew about nuclear weapons, but it was all just in the beginnings [ . . . ]. Although we considered their use as well, in combat, we considered having some low-yield nuclear weapons that we could use in conventional combat; but of course, nothing particular was ever said openly, because everything was just super secret. [Kvapil, 16]

General Franko: Those nuclear weapons... well, you wouldn't believe some of the nonsense I saw in my life and yet had to keep my mouth shut. Because everybody was thinking that a single nuclear bomb was equal to a round fired by a single artillery unit. Well, they simply drew a conclusion after an exercise, those old generals of the First Republic: "How many nuclear bombs were there? Ten." They were tossing it about like potatoes. "So let's cross out ten units of artillery." They could eliminate the entire army artillery by the end of an exercise like this, you know. [Franko, 8]

Q: Do you believe the Czechoslovak or Soviet tactics changed as a result of the fielding of nuclear weapons?

General Raichl: [ . . . ] I have a feeling that in the beginnings and even in those years, the approach toward the use of nuclear weapons – during the exercises of course – the use of mass destruction weapons... was, well, not careless, but the weapons were used more often at the exercises than they would have been in reality. And their impact was not evaluated as dangerous as it would have been in reality. Let me give you an example: It is necessary to put it on the map somehow, the area hit by the bombs. There were charts for this, e. g., how the wind was blowing, and it was charted like that. But – the wind blows differently on ground level and in a thousand meters – so it is all much more complicated. Maybe today, with the computer technology, which does this in real time, it could be done much faster and more precisely than we did it back then. But we were looking for ways to adapt tactics and operations to the use of weapons of mass destruction. Something was being done – and we believed that what we were doing was based on some substance. [Raichl, 8]

General Šmoldas: [ . . . ] I often asked myself, what would have happened if a nuclear bomb had hit Dresden and there had been a northwestern wind blowing. The atomic cloud would have proceeded from Dresden to Prague, Brno, Bratislava... What then? The theory said "wash with water". Great – but where to get this water and what to do with it afterwards? [Šmoldas, 8 – 9]

Q: It is said sometimes that even in the fifties, in the operations planning process, the effects of mass destruction weapons were more or less underestimated, that nuclear weapons efficiency was marginalized, even in regard of the war experience, that the real consequences of the use nuclear weapons were not known. Can you comment on this?

General Franko: Well, I can just say that ... you said "sometimes", [ . . . ] I'm convinced that it was underestimated in every way. Because even if somebody was aware that, say, there was an explosion somewhere of ten atomic bombs at once – and just some small ones, not

the 10 kiloton ones, but smaller, there were even plans involving 500 kiloton or 1 megaton bombs – then the effects were evaluated absolutely correctly. Correctly. I mean – there were charts, and the things like the pressure wave, penetrating radiation, radioactive contamination, half-life, the time for which the blast area would have remained impassable, the time needed for removing the debris – anybody can calculate this.

But then there was a sudden operation leap and it was as if all those things had not happened. So [showing] there it was bad and we were here, heavy casualties or some entanglements, and to get to this point, just advance from D2 to D3 or D4. Nobody ever followed up the issues of eliminating the impacts and what would have followed. [Franko, 12]

### Estimating Effects

General Franko: [ . . . ] There were three effects. There was the pressure wave, i. e. the “dynamite” effect or something like that. Then there was the penetrating radiation which worked through armor, through water, through half-value layers etc. And there was the radioactive contamination, the long-term effect.

It was necessary to make use of these things in the framework of warfare conduct and strategy. When defense-related tasks were exercised, the terrain was contaminated by an explosion – an airburst, i. e. the bomb was assumed to have exploded just above the ground level, not 300 or 400 meters in the air. Or an underground explosion. And the area became impassable. And for a long time.

Therefore it was established, to give the commanders peace of mind, that “the penetrating radiation” wouldn’t have caused destructive effects above those of a one year long exposure to natural atmospheric radiation.” [Franko, 50]

Q: Here, in 1964, they expect 130 nuclear strikes, in the form of both missiles and aerial bombs. Could you comment on the amount? Was it a lot, or little?

General Slimák: I think it fitted the potentials at that time. Those were figures which were probably just assigned... well, not assigned, but it was a matter of orders from the Commander in Chief. [Slimák, 50]

Q: This plan involves utilizing 130 nuclear warheads and bombs in those 7 or 8 days of the operation. That is a relatively high number...

General Pezl: Yes.

Q: ... was it still possible to conduct operations in this stage?? Because the effects of radioactive radiation were immense.

General Pezl: Well, I believe I already mentioned this, that the concept is beyond the human grasp even now. Of course... most of those weapons were just small nuclear bombs used by the air force, to be used against arriving reserves, as an anticipatory strike. Once the border area had been traversed, the operation was expected to become more dynamic and fluid, so that it wouldn’t have had to come to clearly delineated fronts any more and that the main attention could have been paid to the arriving reserves.

The air force, there was a lot of it here, too. Provided that the Soviet air force had made use of these, I don’t know how many, some 12 operation airfields. We also had a strong air force, about 750 fighters.

Q: Those aerial nuclear strikes – they were to be conducted only by the Soviet air force? Or by our forces, too?

General Pezl: Yeah. The Su-7BM. They were specially designed for this. They were even trained for it – for those strikes – for lob tossing, they had to dive in, then climb, break off up there and then do a [showing] turn back like this. There were exercises for this, for the launch of these bombs. Of course, they didn’t exercise with the real bombs. [Pezl, 6]

General Vinkler: Now that I'm looking at this – it's history by now – and see how many bomb strikes they planned etc... that would have been the end of it. Once, we were standing together with Vitanovský at one of these exercises and watched – it was a command post and staff exercise here at the Ministry, that's where they played these things – and the respective staff reported that – that was day two of the operation – there were already two millions of dead in the country. You know, we said to each other with Vitanovský: "We're not part of this any more."

Of course it continued to be exercised, especially later on. It was generally the time of... you see, when you look today at those objectives we set back then... It's like this, you see, every war that is started, it always begins with the last experience there was. And then the atomic weapons joined in – and surprisingly, our army was still alive, all the way to the end. We'd already had divisions at the Neckar at 10 percent of their strengths, yet they were still receiving objectives and tasks as if they were at full strength. It was a little... those operation plans, it's hard to say. Well if the other side, if they had been asleep, doing nothing – yeah, then it could have been done. So, unrealistic like this. [Vinkler, 3]

Q: I have one question, regarding the operation preparations, relating to the weapons of mass destruction – so you did know the plans for the nuclear strike, which were to be done by our side, i. e. not only by the opponent? Were you informed of where would they be used? General Franko: Yes, yes. I'll show you here – so this is the republic [showing] and the high command sets this deep – I'll give an example of 100 kilometers – a line of what's where, what's to go where and how etc., the Unified Command sees to this, because it has the means which will fly or shoot up there. They just told us that in this space we can utilize the effects of mass destruction weapons used by the high command. "And to this depth from the border" – let's give an example of 100 kilometers – "you can do whatever you like. We won't help you there. Just in case of need we'll have to communicate, of course." And within those 100 kilometers, there were army rockets, the division rockets R-70 as it was called back then, also the R-120s and then R-200s or 300s, differing in their effective range. [Franko, 31]

Q: Did you presume that if those 300 bombs of various capacity had exploded here, that there would still have been something worth defending?

General Franko: No. I could just repeat that a hundred times and achieve nothing. My opinion was not taken into account. It was a wishful thinking kind of thing. Because the entire West, the capitalism, and the East against the West, they all had budgets which corresponded to their potentials. But I believe that neither Bohemia, nor Slovakia would have been a primary target. It was a target, but of some 3-4 strikes, which would end it anyway. They were not stupid. It could have been Bratislava, or Brno or Prague. And it would have taken just some five one-megaton strikes and the republic would come down. Including the transportation infrastructure, of course.

What you're talking about, those 300 [strikes], that was a so-called territorial exercise, with no regard to what was happening around, where a strike could have been expected, where we could have drawn some resources from. It was in a complete contradiction with probability figures. Take Slovakia, for example – four strikes would have been enough, a 250 [kiloton] and two one-megaton ones, one on Bratislava and one on Martin, where the tanks were manufactured, and it would have been over. There would have been no movements, no railways, no gas pipelines, nothing. [Franko, 52]

### **Were There Soviet Nuclear Depots?**

Q: Did you know that since 1965, there had been [nuclear] depots built in Czechoslovakia?

General Kvapil: [ . . . ] Those nuclear weapons, they were always kept secret. We knew that it had to be somewhere there, because we were supposed to get them, I don't know, on the second or third day... But frankly speaking, we got used to not caring about things we were

supposed not to care about, you know. Because at that time, you could get to jail without having done anything. [Kvapil, 18 ]

General Šádek: There were no nuclear weapons here. [ . . . ] [Šádek, 3]

Q: An agreement from December 1965, signed by Lomský and Grechko, has been declassified, where both sides bound themselves to build three depots for nuclear weapons. It should have been the depots in Bíliny, Míšeň-Borovno and Bělá pod Bezdězem.

General Šádek: I swear to you I knew nothing about any nuclear weapons to be stored here. [Šádek, 7]

General Franko: I know that something was being built here, but... I know that it was never used by Czechoslovak field forces. Because, you see, those warheads – not nuclear, just the combat ones – they also need special storage procedures, particularly with long-term storage. [ . . . ]

But I've never heard that there were nuclear warheads in the territory of Bohemia and Moravia. [Franko, 38]

General Vinkler: There was not even confidence at the Operations Directorate [ . . . ]; an officer from the Operations Directorate was in charge of the storage and supervision, he had a special clearance for this, married a Russian [ . . . ]. Then there were talks about it up there, whether it was just one depot of atomic weapons here, as far as I know, it was in the north of Bohemia. I'm not sure, it has been so long... [Vinkler, 10 – 11]

Q: The rockets were here since the beginning of the sixties. The warheads are a different question, of course. According to your knowledge – how was this planned? What time limit was needed to transport the warheads, to assemble them?

General Pícek: Well... the time limit... I cannot tell exactly. I know for certain that the warheads were here, they were supposed to be here, even the relevant documents stated so, that there were such places, it's not a secret any more. And from there, the warheads were supposed to be transported by technical assets of the depots to certain places, where they were... I don't recall any more how these units were called, they were some technical brigades. These brigades were in charge of assembling the warheads and the carriers, and from there they were transported to the combat rocket units, where they were supposed to be launched. [Pícek, 7]

Q: The agreement [on construction of nuclear depots] was signed in 1965, their construction started, but it's still not clear when exactly they were finished. There is a possibility that... there were indications that the construction was somehow hindered on the Czechoslovak side.

General Pezl: I don't know about that. ... I don't know, that would have had to be a special initiative, politically, nobody would probably... never have given such an instruction. [Pezl, 6 – 7]

General Pícek: I first found out about these depots when I started working for the Operations Directorate [ . . . ] in 1967. [ . . . ] And therefore I know that there they were approved for use in 1969, I was there, and by the side of these depots, residential buildings were being built for the crews, for their families. And I know that only in 1969, the depot in Červený Újezd or what was the name was approved for use, it was somewhere near Chomutov, somewhere over there... So I know about this depot being finished. I don't know about the others. I don't remember whether they were already finished or not.

[ . . . ] Whether the weapons were really here or not, I don't know either. Because – as I said – they were being finished in 1969 and I left in 1970, in May. So I don't know what followed. I know that there was... there was one assigned to... a working group of Soviet rocket forces and artillery, a Colonel, I don't remember his name any more, they were supervising the construction site, supervising it from the professional point of view. From time to time, a

Colonel came here from the Command of the Artillery and Rocket Forces of the Soviet Army . [ . . . ] So they were supervising the technical aspects with a view of the depots' use for their true purposes.

Q: And these Soviets, they had been here even before the August [1968]? Those Soviets, whom you've just mentioned. [ . . . ]

General Picek: ... they had been here even before the August. All the time, since the construction started, I think. It started I think in 1965.

Q: Did you know then that since there were Soviets here, since there was the Central Group here, did you know what the Soviet had here and whether Soviet nuclear munitions were stored here too?

General Picek: [ . . . ] We knew the organizational structure of that army, how many divisions it had, where they were stationed [ . . . ] But whether they had nuclear munitions, nobody knew that.

[Picek, 7 – 8]

Q: At that time [in the eighties], the Czechoslovak Army already had some more modern rockets on the tactical and operational-tactical level in its inventory, in addition to the existing Frog and Luna rockets. [ . . . ]

General Zachariáš: [ . . . ] Except there was a single big BUT – all those weapons were stored without nuclear warheads. They were at our disposal, they were ready to be used, but without those nuclear warheads, which were stored separately and only issued on a special order, and only after that the assembly could have started.

Q: I know something about this, about those technical brigades which were in charge of this. This technology was just terribly expensive, especially during the exercises, and if a single one was fired, it meant enormous costs. So it could be expected that if the war had really started, then the rockets would have been equipped with nuclear warheads, because it didn't make sense to launch them as conventional weapons.

General Zachariáš: Exactly.

Q: So, how was the issue solved, the issue of providing the nuclear munitions, those warheads in case war broke out?

General Zachariáš: In case of war, that would have been too late, it would have had to be done before the war broke out. Because you wouldn't have had the time to do it. Considering that even back then, it was possible to find out everything exactly by satellites. Of course they didn't know exactly, even we did not know the places exactly, the places where the nuclear weapons depots were located. But you had had to do it in time, because the rocket forces, the units would have had to get hold of the rockets. Drills were conducted, special exercises, where the units were going to selected places to pick up the warheads, from the depots to the point of encounter, there they would take the heads and go after units or brigades which would have been ready to assemble the rockets. Then it was a matter of a couple of minutes, to assemble, it was nothing difficult.

[ . . . ]

Q: Yet in view of how long it would have taken before you received the warheads, once you were supposed to get it – for objective reasons – you had to be able to have an idea of the time it would take to get it, so you could have guessed whether the warhead was already somewhere nearby, or whether it was on its way by air from somewhere, say, Ukraine.

General Zachariáš: There were special troops for this and it was a matter of a couple of hours before the warheads were ready at the launching sites. That's why the depots were built in the directions of the axes of advance of the respective armies, where the rocket equipment was expected to be deployed, so somewhere near, not far, so that it could have been a matter of a few hours. [Zachariáš, 8 – 9]

Q: And what about depots in the Czechoslovak territory? [ . . . ]

General Slimák: [ . . . ] Those were the places which were checked when the Soviet troops were leaving. [ . . . ] I know that the reports from radiation and chemical investigation concluded that the radiation levels didn't exceed normal levels.



Q: Does it really mean that the warheads couldn't have been there? After all – a warhead is not an intensive source of radiation.

General Slimák: [Indicating he doesn't know.]

Q: There is always an official standpoint, which says how to present the question in public and abroad. So, is it possible to say what was the official standpoint as to whether the nuclear warheads were here or not?

General Slimák: As far as I remember, the conclusion back then was that they weren't here. [Slimák, 12]

## 4. 1968: The Fraternal Invasion

### Dispute about Doctrine

General Vitanovský: I have never heard – and I attended Warsaw Pact meetings quite frequently – I have never heard anyone formulate a Warsaw Pact doctrine as such. But I know from practice it was based on two essential principles; first, a principle of limited sovereignty of individual members of the Warsaw Pact, this is basically Brezhnev's doctrine of limited sovereignty, second, it was an offensive organization, of an aggressive nature, but let us not say aggressive, of an offensive nature.

[ . . . ] Marshal Malinovsky once prepared a brief document, "The Military Doctrine of the Soviet Union". Just a few pages characterizing the initial period of the war, global military and political situation, and the chief principle sticking out of it was that if the enemy, that is NATO, used nuclear weapons, then the Soviet Union would respond by a strike using all means available. That was, I would say, the chief idea of the Soviet doctrine, which outlined the global military and political situation and explained and stipulated how the Soviet Union would react.

[ . . . ] And now we get to a problem, an approach, how we were expected to formulate, how we should have formulated, our military doctrine in the framework of the doctrine of Joint Forces of the Warsaw Pact, which I did not know. This is one of the most important questions. We were not allowed to formulate any military doctrine of our own at that time. I had been working on a Czechoslovak military doctrine of sorts since 1961, but that was basically my private initiative, because I enjoyed doing it, within limited sovereignty barriers, of course, but I still kept saying to myself we had to have one, why, we are a sovereign country, and every country must formulate its military doctrine [Vitanovský, 2 – 3]

General Vitanovský: None of the military officials of those times ever showed any initiative regarding the doctrine, not even one. On the contrary – even General Kushchev, then Lomský's [Minister of Defense] advisor, an excellent, honest guy with a heart of gold [ . . . ], he liked me very much, that Kushchev, he kept telling me: "Václav Antonovich, don't do it, else you'll burn." I tell him: "Goddammit, it needs to be done, Comrade General, it's not possible not to do it, as we are an independent country, the Minister has ordered it, General] Rytíř has ordered the model." He insisted: "Don't do it, find an excuse, tell them you're ill and you cannot do it." He knew how that was going to end. The reason why I am saying this is that there was no initiative whatsoever – on the contrary, everyone kept talking me out of it; why, Janko<sup>28</sup> repeatedly told me: "Why are you so obsessed with that doctrine, we have the Soviet one." And I said: "OK, so tell me what it is, formulate it for me." Of course, he could not do that. [Vitanovský, 11]

<sup>28</sup> Colonel General Vladimír Janko, Commander of Armored Troops between 1950 and 1956 and the First Deputy Minister of Defense from 1958 to 1968. In 1968, following the revelation of the so-called Generals' Coup and the defection of General Jan Šejna, he committed suicide.

General Mencl: At that time [in 1968] we also prepared what was known as the Memorandum<sup>29</sup>, basically our reaction to what had transpired at the Plenary Session in May, this means ...

Q: The Action Program.<sup>30</sup>

General Mencl: ... Action Program. We were trying to make use of – at that time, we had advanced quite a bit with doctrinal work, we had been working on it for at least three or four years. We were trying to put together an evolution of the idea and a structure of the military doctrine. And then we got together with Vitanovský and researchers at the General Staff; he was in a difficult position there and was very happy when we gave him an opportunity to prepare a number of sub-studies. Well, and the conclusion was that any war would have meant a total destruction of the republic. Especially a nuclear-missile kind of war. That all theories to the effect that an increased level of nuclear readiness could lead to a pre-emptive strike that would have prevented ... were a nonsense, that they were unfeasible. So, we outlined a military doctrine concept that would not have led to a war like this and basically to any war, but rather to a reduction of stocks of missiles and, if possible, to a reduction of their range. Through implementing a specific policy toward individual neighboring countries and the like – but I guess you have the concept somewhere.

Understandably, there was a lot of opposition because ... in their minds, all of them agreed, because the idea was clear enough even at the General Staff, and there had been many calculations and estimates as to what would have happened in each war opening scenario or in each phase of the war. And all of them predicted that, with the two opposing armies or blocs at each other's throats, the missile or nuclear war would inevitable have had to start as soon as the Soviet superiority in conventional weapons began to prevail, say after eighty or a hundred kilometers of penetration, and that it would have had to be waged in depth, including the second echelon, that is the whole territory of Czechoslovakia. For technical reasons, the whole country would have had to be destroyed by a fairly powerful strike, which the Americans were capable of delivering, as they had enough medium-range weapons and also various ... we also knew that from Vitanovský, different classes of bombs, which allowed for selective, but very systematic destruction.

So, we submitted it to Dzúr<sup>31</sup> and to all powers-that-be – I think we sent to Štrougal<sup>32</sup> as well. I am quite sure we sent it to Černík<sup>33</sup>. They accepted it, all of them, except for a part of political officers. Because it was unthinkable for them that they should defend a position leading to a de facto neutrality, to a neutralization of the whole region. On the one hand, their (and also the commanders') task was to train troops for the maximum possible level of combat preparedness and readiness, focusing primarily on PVOS, that is air defense of the country. On the other hand, they said it shouldn't be like this, which was of course an argumentation discrepancy. So, I am not surprised they were against it. But inwardly all of them were saying that it would have really solved the issue.

<sup>29</sup> In the spring of 1968, thirty staff members of the Military Political Academy and the Military Technical Academy submitted a draft memorandum calling for the "formulation and establishment of Czechoslovak national military interests". MPA Rector Vojtěch Mencl sent the Memorandum to the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party as a contribution to be used in the preparation of keynote documents for the XIVth Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. For an English translation of the Memorandum see Vojtech Mastny, "[We Are in a Bind': Polish and Czechoslovak Attempts at Reforming the Warsaw Pact, 1956-1969.](#)" *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 11 (1998), pp. 230 – 250.

<sup>30</sup> In June 1968, the attempted reform in Czechoslovakia resulted in a so-called Action Program, a keynote document summarizing the reform's objectives in different segments of political life. See the document No 36 in the documentary reader Antonín Benčík, Jaromír Navrátil, and Jan Paulík, eds: *Vojenské otázky československé reformy 1967 – 1970*, vol 1, *Vojenská varianta řešení čs. krize (1967 – 1968)* [Military Issues in the Czechoslovak Reform, 1967 – 1970: The Military Option in the Solution of the Czechoslovak Crisis, 1967 - 1968], pp.162 – 176.

<sup>31</sup> General of the Army Martin Dzúr, Chief of Logistics from 1958 to 1968 and Minister of Defense from 1968 to 1985.

<sup>32</sup> Lubomír Štrougal, Minister of Agriculture from 1959 to 1961, Minister of Interior from 1961 to 1965; Prime Minister of the Federal Government of Czechoslovakia from 1970 to 1988.

<sup>33</sup> Oldřich Černík, Minister of Fuels and Energy from 1960 to 1963, Chairman of the State Planning Commission from 1963 to 1968. Between 1968 and 1970, he was Prime Minister of the Czechoslovak (since 1969 Federal) Government.

As far as I know, the whistle was blown during that interview with Prchlík<sup>34</sup> – that was sometimes in July.

Q: You are referring to his press conference.

General Mencl: Yes, that press conference. Because it became sort of obvious there that after the Soviet intervention – I think that Grechko then wrote a letter to the Central Committee, demanding an explanation, his arguments were sort of oblique, but I think he simply wanted to accuse Prchlík of a disclosure of military secrets. But the gist of it was that Prchlík criticized – he let fly what we had only been hinting at – the fact that the command of the Warsaw Pact was in Soviet hands, and that only the Soviets could make decisions, without any regard to consequences for frontline countries in combat contact. So, they started looking where Prchlík had got it from, and it was found out that Prchlík had always had good relations with the academy and that he had read the Memorandum before we published it – which was true – so we ultimately found ourselves to be completely mistrusted by the Soviets, and the lack of trust later resulted in the academy being disbanded. I was a colonel at that time, I was then demoted and have had nothing in common with the army since then. [Mencl, 2 – 3]

### Advance Warnings

General Vinkler: [In 1968] the Soviets made up a ... were spinning yarns to the effect that we were really on the brink of war. Take, for example, our situation, the way we of the Intelligence Directorate saw it: Ours was the most closely watched organizational components, you know. We even had the very last Soviet advisor in the army – his name was General Zadvinskii. He was one of those whose main job was to collect and supply information on the situation in the army. I can still see him, sitting behind a desk and reading *Literárky*<sup>35</sup> and so on, he himself translated articles or had them translated, and everything was immediately dispatched to the Intelligence Directorate in Russia. I think he was one of the main sources of information that subsequently resulted in the Soviet decision [to intervene]. [Vinkler, 3]

General Vinkler: It was sometimes in June. The Chief of the General Staff called me: “Hey, the Ukraine is full of troops, find out what’s going on.” I said: “Comrade General, but I can’t do that.” If, for example, we had sent officers without uniforms there, the Soviets, being no fools, would have arrested them. So, there was some awareness of troops massing in the Ukraine, which later proved to be true, and the Chief of the General Staff learned about it. This was not good, of course. What to do about it? Well, for example ... the first rumor was in May, I think it was in May, when we got a message – but not through them, it was via Canada, that they were moving two Polish tank divisions overnight to us. So I was at the Chief of the General Staff, the Prime Minister was then calling immediately in that matter, because we had referred the matter to the Office [of the Government]: “Please, comrades, find out what’s really going on.” So we called all Chiefs of Staffs, Marshal Zacharov, then that Hoch,<sup>36</sup> that Polish Chief of the General Staff, and so on. *Nichego, nichego* ... they said it’s just a planned exercise. [Vinkler, 5]

General Procházka: Look, the question of the Šumava<sup>37</sup> Exercise, isn’t it? We, our staff and I personally were surprised to see such high planned numbers of troops. ‘Cause that was

<sup>34</sup> Lieutenant General Václav Prchlík, Chief of the Main Political Directorate of the Czechoslovak People’s Army from 1955 to 1968, Head of the 8<sup>th</sup> Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party from February to July 1968. Demoted and ousted in the autumn of 1968, sentenced two years later.

<sup>35</sup> *Literární listy*, a reform-minded Czech newspaper published at the end of 1960’s.

<sup>36</sup> General Bolesław Hoch was the Chief of the General Staff of the Polish army.

<sup>37</sup> In June 1968, Czechoslovakia’s territory hosted an initially unplanned exercise, code-named Šumava, in which troops from several other member states of the Warsaw Pact took part. Czechoslovak leaders received only meager information about its planning and purpose, and were seriously concerned about the fact that some Soviet units remained in the Czechoslovak territory even after the exercise had officially ended.

supposed to be a command post/staff exercise. So many communication assets. But it did not cross our mind that this was a preparation for a planned invasion. Although, look, various documents say that the invasion of troops was being planned as early as in May. It was that Iashkin's Division,<sup>38</sup> you know, it was that division which was to come from Cracow and proceed to the western border. This means there was a plan and the plan was not that easy to devise. This means there must have been considerations like this, but then the political situation between the Soviet Union and our Communist leadership improved, and the intervention was postponed [Procházka, 7]

General Pezl: I took part in the Šumava Exercise. Finally, I remained alone there, as everybody was leaving; I participated in the return phase of the exercise, which was lengthy and protracted etc. The exercise itself showed, indicated, confirmed quite clearly that it was not any operational exercise, any routine training affair. Especially if one had participated in a number of large-scale command post/staff exercises before, and thus knew how those had been approached and managed, while this one accentuated field reconnaissance and preparation of assembly areas and support arrangement for units, and so on. Obvious, from the very beginning. Even the manner in which the exercise made its way to the ... it had not been planned, discussions about it started only in March, and then it fell right down from the sky and ....

Q: Did top Czechoslovak commanders and party leaders know that this was underway, that there's that strange exercise underway, and that there's also a possibility of ... an invasion?

General Pezl: I am convinced that everything was pointing to such an unequivocal conclusion. But it was very difficult to prevent it. When the mobilization started in the Ukraine, when a strategic operational rear area was being built there, including prepositioned stocks and product pipelines, these steps could be indicative of something more than an occupation of Czechoslovakia. Personally, when I heard aircraft landing in the Ruzyně Airport – I live there – I told myself “war has broken out”. Because the mass of assembled troops was large enough to start a war. [Pezl, 9]

Q: OK, so you think that Czechoslovak leaders knew there was something in the air?

General Šádek: They did. In my opinion, they certainly did. They simply must have known. [Šádek, 17]

### **Was Deterrence Possible?**

Q: What would your answer be if someone asked you the following question: Could we defend ourselves against the threat of intervention or the intervention itself in 1968, and if so, under what conditions?

General Vítanovský: I will give you a military rather than political answer, because I am more familiar with military matters. Let us keep in mind that we were a part of the Unified Armed Forces for forty years, or for less than forty years since the establishment of the Warsaw Pact, and that our mission in the framework of the Warsaw Pact meant we were poised toward a single enemy, in a single direction, to the west, against the North Atlantic Alliance. All plans, all matters, were approached and approved with this in mind. This also means that, because of the facts listed above, we were facing the West, We never considered a possibility that someone else could have attacked us. [ . . . ]

And if we now ask a question when we learned about the possible intervention – I will now disregard the fact that there were some indications, but were not taken seriously – I would like to note once again that those who failed miserably in the first place were our

<sup>38</sup> In 1968, General Grigorii Petrovich Iashkin was the Commanding Officer of the 24<sup>th</sup> Samara-Ulianovsk Division (38<sup>th</sup> Army), which had made an attempt to enter Czechoslovakia as early as in May 1968 and occupied North Moravia during the August invasion.

representatives and officers in the Unified Armed Forces; we didn't receive from them even the tiniest clue that an intervention was being prepared. Here I would like to point out once again at the relation between the Unified Armed Forces and the General Staff of the Soviet Army, because it was the latter rather than the former, which prepared the intervention. [ . . . ] So, you can imagine it is not possible to simply make an about-face and have logistic support units on the frontline and combat units in the rear. That is unthinkable. This is one of the issues that ruled out the possibility of immediately assuming a defensive posture and fight, as regrouping and redeployment would have taken too long, by which time it would have been too late anyway. So, this is one reason. And the other reason is, in my opinion, is as follows: We faced a situation in which we were being attacked from basically all compass points at a time. From Hungary, Poland, German Democratic Republic, Soviet units comprised the main thrust from East Germany. So, no matter how we would have redeployed the army – again, this is not a question of just blowing the whistle and telling the troops “OK, now we are going to split and defend ourselves against individual groups” – it would have been impossible as well. If someone asks me whether we could fight, my answer would be yes, but we would not have succeeded in defending ourselves and, in my opinion, our resistance would have ended on the very first day. [ . . . ] So, this is my soldier's opinion, based on the ratio of forces, not to mention the fact that our army's non-mobilized peacetime strength was 150,000, and deploying it against 2 million or so of intervening troops wouldn't have made any sense. It's simply out of question and no sane commanding officer or general can issue an order for defense under such circumstances. Because our decisions must always be based on the existing and realistic ratio of forces.

Q: General, let us assume that our leaders and authorities had received some signals, some information, and the Czechoslovak Army command had begun preparations for defense. How long would it have taken for the Czechoslovak Army, in the light of the fact that it was deployed along the western border, to redeploy for defense and to assume a defensive posture capable of stopping the thrust of the enemy? Assuming, of course, that no one knows anything about it and no one is going to interfere.

General Vítanovský: The question is clear. Naturally, I cannot give you the number of days, because I would have to sit and calculate it, but this is what I can say: If we had learnt about the planned intervention, say, a week in advance, that week would have been spent on planning, because you have to do some planning and tasking before you start moving troops, and even if we had worked round the clock, I cannot imagine anyone who could have done it in less than a week. Second, you have to factor in another aspect – regrouping and redeploying troops must take into account railway and road capacities and so on. [In my opinion] moving all first-echelon divisions to blocking positions and deploying them against advancing invaders would have taken at least a fortnight. So, redeploying our forces for defense, and an improvised defense at that, could not have taken, in my opinion, less than two or three weeks. [Vítanovský, 6 – 7]

General Mencl: At that time, it seemed obvious that the armies were around us and that they had been assembled for some maneuvers, the reason of which no one had bothered to explain properly and which did not match, to our knowledge, established strategic means and ways to conduct operations. So, it was clear – because of an attack of Czechoslovakia. The only outstanding question was whether there's a way to prevent it. And what the army's role would be, if assigned such a task. The position of soldiers is invariably difficult in this respect, as they do not know what kind of decision political leaders will make. If our political leaders had decided so – and Dubček<sup>39</sup>, of course, was unable to make such a decision, and I think it was not possible, Czechoslovakia was undefendable from a strategic point of view – but if he had made the decision, the soldiers would have had to comply, and they would have had to rely on an assumption that . . . that the army would not develop an internal break, that it would be willing to do the job.

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<sup>39</sup> Alexander Dubček, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party from January 1968 to April 1969.

Prchlík had to take these things into account, but he was probably the only one, as otherwise ... Džúr – he was a good man, a patriot, Dubček’s supporter, everything – but he would have never stood against the Soviet Army. Also because he knew what the outcome would have been. Vitanovský, he kept his hands off, as he could see it was militarily unfeasible. Another reason why it was not feasible was that we still had that lamshchikov<sup>40</sup> sitting there and knowing everything about every company that had moved. It would have amounted to a total restationing and redeployment of the army, which would have taken half a year. It was simply beyond our capabilities. [Mencl, 6 – 7]

## 5. After 1968

### The New Balance of Forces

Q: Then, when the Central Group [of Soviet Forces] had moved in, [ . . . ] according to the agreement, it was not expected to have more than 75,000 troops. At that time, there was also a long-term reduction of troop levels of the Czechoslovak Army, by 20,000. Actually, it may not have been a reduction, if I consider the number of people who had to leave the army, just like you. As a matter of fact, some units may have been reinforced in a way. What was the reason that was given for having the 70,000 Soviets here in addition our own army, the combat capability of which had been retained, or maybe even improved? [ . . . ]

General Picek: Well, I think the reason was operational use, I would say. I know there were rumors, I do not know the details though, about Soviet ops plans, according to which an army was expected to move here from the Ukraine in about five days or so, which was expected to reinforce first-echelon armies in follow-through operations in the West. So, the 70,000 Soviets here could not mean a reduction of the total strength of the Czechoslovak Army or of Czechoslovak forces assigned to the Unified Command, to the Warsaw Pact. [Picek, 17]

General Franko: However, what mattered most was that Czechs and Slovaks were earmarked as first-echelon units: “OK, you can blame yourself for not having Soviet troops permanently stationed here since the war, so you have to take care yourself – you have to equip your army properly, you have to build the industry, arms industry, and you have to provide armored personnel carriers, tanks, guns and everything else that is needed, because you will be equal to first-echelon Soviet forces on your right flank.” Because the [East] Germans had just one tank division among first-echelon units there, the others being second-echelon units, to be deployed on the second, third or fourth day into the operation, or other similar auxiliary units. The whole group of forces in [East] Germany and the forces constituting the Czechoslovak Front were, from the viewpoint of the ratio of forces, so “crammed” that Czechoslovakia, being a small country, would have paid a high price. And the arrival of Soviet troops in 1968 improved the position of the Soviet Union. Before that, it had been difficult to imagine moving forces from Lvov to Warsaw or here, a thousand kilometers. It would have taken them at least five days to get here. And setting a foothold here meant the Soviets were a thousand kilometers closer. [ . . . ]

Q: Let’s go back to the Czechoslovak Front. I was a bit surprised to see that, even with the Central Group stationed here, plans still foresaw that the first-echelon Czechoslovak Front would consist exclusively of Czechoslovak units, while the Central Group was supposed to provide second-echelon forces.

General Franko: Yes. Simply as if they had been in Lvov, Belorussia or the Ukraine.

Q: Well, we did not gain much, did we?

General Franko: Well, we did not. They did.

[ . . . ]

<sup>40</sup> Lieutenant General A. M. lamshchikov, since 1968 the representative of the Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact in Czechoslovakia, i.e. the Chief Soviet Advisor in the Czechoslovak Army.

Before the Soviets established themselves here, those second-echelon units – I am referring to the Carpathian Front – would have needed at least for to six days to get here. By being stationed here since 1968, the Soviets gained an extra week of combat operations and saved enough equipment to be able to mount yet another front-sized operation. If they had to arrive in trucks, tanks, by rail and I don't what else from a thousand kilometers away, the tank simply stops and will not move on.

This was also the reason why Czechoslovak units, among others, practiced peacetime movements of tank divisions equipped with T-34 tanks, the “old ones”, [the task being] to move them from that Military Training Area off Topolčany, what's its name, Horemláz, under their own power to some distance. This was also why General Tesařík<sup>41</sup> was given an order – and he accomplished it – to move his tank division, which was stationed in and around Milovice, to Doupov in one day or overnight. At that time, he was the greatest *geroi* [hero] and lauded for his accomplishment. However, he lost almost fifty percent of his vehicles to mechanical failures along the way. Only fifty percent of the tanks got there. But get there they did. [Franko, 34 – 36]

Q: Could you describe circumstances relevant to second-echelon planning? Or what did you expect the second-echelon to consist of?

General Zachariáš: I came across this issue again in the 1980s, when I served first at the army and then at the district levels. Basically, our front consisted mainly of first-echelon units, the Eastern Military District comprised training divisions, the mobilization, use and deployment of which would have required some time. In other words, mobilizing, preparing and moving them, and this was relatively difficult. If there had been a surprise attack – and there were considerations like this at that time – we would not have had any readily usable second echelon. Neither for a defensive operation, nor for an offensive one. And this was one of the reasons – probably – why the Central Group had moved here.

And as the Central Group was under my command, because I was the District Commander and would have been the Front Commander [in wartime], I had much better conditions and prerequisites for planning and accomplishing tasks that were handed out to me. I had a readily available second echelon, a relatively strong one, capable of mounting defensive operations, counterstrikes and the like. And, in the event of an offensive operation, the first echelon would have consisted of our forces, and once they had crossed the border and found themselves in an area favorable for expanding the operation, we had at our disposal a well-trained and –armed second echelon. So, it was – from the military viewpoint – a tremendous reinforcement for our front.

[ . . . ]

General Zachariáš: The Soviets were in command there [in East Germany], and main forces were provided by the Soviet Army, and East Germans were subordinated to them. And, to my knowledge, the first echelon consisted of Soviet units only. And the East German Army comprised the second echelon and was subordinated to the Soviets. It was the other way round here. The Central Group was subordinated to our front, we had all the documentation, and they only had that part which was relevant for them, that is the one describing the use of the Central Group and their second-echelon divisions. We were in charge of command and control. [Zachariáš, 6]

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<sup>41</sup> Major General Richard Tesařík fought in the Czechoslovak Army Corps, was wounded twice and decorated with the Hero of the Soviet Union medal. Since 1954, he commanded the 13<sup>th</sup> Division in Mladá; between 1956 and 1958, he was Deputy Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Military District, and Deputy Commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army from 1958 to 1959. In April 1960, he was ousted from the Communist party, demoted and released from the army.

## The Neutron Weapon

General Franko: You know what neutron weapons are?

Q: Yes.

General Franko: At least the name. They are simply nuclear weapons, but their principal effect is a flow of neutrons, which does not destroy equipment ...

Q: ... but personnel.

General Franko: ... but personnel. I had first learned about them from the Military Information Service, then I took care to monitor the situation on my own initiative, I got to some reports. [ . . . ] I even laid my hands on some US military regulations, which stipulated the percentage of neutron rounds in the basic load of an artillery piece. It was supposed to be 25 percent. Given that the basic load was twelve or sixty, then one could get an idea. And I also put together a map with the 20<sup>th</sup> (Karlovy Vary) Division, 19<sup>th</sup> (Plzen) Division, and so on, standing on the opposite side, along some 200 kilometers, simply a map showing our forces and those of the opponent, all of which were known, every schoolboy knew that, as assessments of enemy forces were routinely prepared.

So, if every artillery piece, mortar or Honest John<sup>42</sup> and God knows what, simply any weapon capable of delivering nuclear rounds, had fired just two shots – and every weapon like this can loose off two rounds in thirty seconds – from their gun emplacements in the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany to a distance matching or consistent with its effective range – of course, a gun cannot be positioned on the border, it doesn't make sense, does it, it must be in the rear, just like missiles, Pershing,<sup>43</sup> twenty kilometers, there must be sixty, eighty kilometers – simply a distance consistent with its range. Mathematically, it is the area of the circle, quite a simple equation, and all the forces in the area, except personnel hidden in deep trenches or large and deep shelters, to give you an example, from Aš to České Budějovice, can be disposed of by 150 to 250 shots.

And this was how I handed it over to Valo,<sup>44</sup> to have a look at it. And he, pretending it was his idea, went and showed it to the Minister, and he in turn showed it to Soviet advisors. Two days later, Valo tells me: "I have been tasked to submit a draft document on the theory of neutron weapons to the Advisory Board of the Minister. It should be prepared in a way allowing it to be disseminated down to and including the regimental level. And he also asks for two copies in Russian." And the Soviets suddenly wanted yet another copy and sent it to Milovice<sup>45</sup>, to the Central Group, in Russian, and they also organized a training course there. And people started thinking about it and looking for some protection. And I always laughed that the best protection against neutron weapons was simple: "As soon as you see an explosion, jump into a barrel full of water, so that you're underwater. [laughter] Or drop into a hole. But how do you want to attack, if you are in the hole? You either are in a hole, or you attack." [Franko, 12 – 13]

General Franko: Neutron weapons – it's about high radiation. They wanted to destroy personnel and retain tanks unscathed. Then there were some developments, new types of nuclear weapons, small, man-portable or transportable in some small trailers or carriages. They pre-positioned – and so did we - nuclear ... nuclear "depositories" in the battlefield along every route that could have been used, for example, by forces advancing from Czechoslovakia, via Rozvadov or other border crossing points. And if any of the opponents had been losing the border fight, they would have let them explode and thus render the area impassable. And there was a problem of civilian population living in the area. And,

<sup>42</sup> The unguided tactical missile MGR-1A (1B) Honest John was put into operational service with US armed forces in 1955.

<sup>43</sup> The operational tactical missile MGM-31A Pershing was put into service with US armed forces in Europe and the Bundeswehr in 1964. In 1967, the production of an upgraded version, Pershing 1A, started. In the 1980s, the US forces in Europe received the Pershing 2 missile, with a substantially extended range and a smaller Circular Error Probable.

<sup>44</sup> Colonel General Vasil Valo, Commander of the Central Military District from 1967 to 1969, First Deputy Minister of Defense from 1971 to 1979.

<sup>45</sup> Milovice was the seat of the Central Group Headquarters since the early 1970s.



unfortunately, the bad thing for the East was that winds always blow from the west to the east. [Franko, 50]

### **Toward a Conventional Option**

Q: This plan [dating back to 1964] basically assumes – if I am reading it right – that nuclear weapons will be used from the very beginning, which means that any war conflict would immediately turned nuclear. Could you compare it to the 1980s, what was the situation then? What was the position of the conventional option and its nuclearization sometimes during the conflict ...?

General Zachariáš: The comparison is purely theoretical and very complex, but if nuclear weapons are used, the principal objective of each of the opponents is to destroy nuclear weapons of the other side. This is the task number one. Next come assets that are crucial for mounting and conducting operations – command posts, aviation, guidance facilities etc. ... And troops basically come last. However, no account is generally taken of the tremendous difficulties caused by explosions, contamination and destruction of areas that would be rendered absolutely impassable. And if this had happened early into the war, troops probably could not have attacked at all. There wouldn't have been any way. There wouldn't have been any place to attack. [ . . . ] Our whole territory would have become a contaminated zone. Bohemia, Moravia, then on to Poland and Slovakia, depending on prevailing winds. And the beginning could also have meant the end of the operation. [Zachariáš, 4]

Q: The things you said indicate that, in the event of a war conflict, operations in the European theater would have dispensed with the use of nuclear weapons. At least, this was the intention of the Warsaw Pact, wasn't it?

General Štorek: Yes, yes.

Q: This is a serious statement.

General Štorek: Based on all experience at our disposal, information from nuclear tests etc., it was becoming obvious that the use of nuclear weapons by any side, which would ultimately have resulted in both sides using them, would have brought about the extinction of mankind, or tremendous problems, there simply wouldn't have been any winners in the nuclear war. I think this is the leading idea of subsequent developments, of the withdrawal from the concept of waging war with nuclear weapons. [...]

Q: This here [the 1964 War Plan] says that, in the event of a conflict, the 57<sup>th</sup> Air Army would have been deployed in the Czechoslovak territory or at least made subordinate to the Czechoslovak Front command. I gather the 57<sup>th</sup> Air Army was a Soviet formation.

General Štorek: I cannot comment on that period of time, I don't know, probably yes in the event of a war conflict, if this was provided for in ops plans. Before 1968, there had been no Soviet troops in our territory, and I can hardly imagine something like this happening in peacetime. But it was probably provided for in ops plans.

Q: And later, in the 1980s, which is of course another story, 20 years later, i.e. quite a gap, is there also a Soviet Air Army operating as a part of the Order of Battle of the Czechoslovak Front in the event of a "hot" conflict?

General Štorek: No, as Soviet air forces were expected to operate in the second, i.e. main thrust, echelon. We were earmarked for the beginning of the war, our basic mission was to provide defense. The exercises we were conducting then – simply holding the borderline using all forces available. And then a second echelon would have come from the east to further exploit the outcome of the operation. I cannot image any other way. Although, as I said, we simply did not have any ops plans at this level; any exercise we conducted at that time was designed to match reality to the maximum extent possible. We only knew that there would have been a "D" day of sorts, let's say D+15 or D+30, when reinforcements from the east would arrive to exploit the initial phase of the operation. [Štorek, 6 – 7]

## Slowing Down Advance

Q: You told me that you had never had the entire Ops Plan, but that you had only known the part pertaining to your duties and responsibilities attached to your post. However, as the Commander of the Western Military District, you were basically earmarked as the Commander of the Czechoslovak Front.

General Zachariáš: Yes. When I took part in the planning – I think it was once – we used more realistic ratios of forces; in any case, it was not just the quantity, but also the quality, which were taken into account. Tasks were also set more realistically in terms of depth and direction of advance. Even at the time when we had much better equipment, more efficient equipment, much more assets, our mission did not require us to advance to such a depth. And the key planning assumption – I am referring to the instance I took part in – was that we would first conduct a defensive operation when attacked, that we would succeed in destroying or substantially weakening enemy forces in a battle along the border, and only then mount an offensive operation. I did not work on a purely offensive operation, which is one of the reasons why I believe the plans at that time were more realistic, based on a much more realistic situation.

Q: Could you make a comparison – we are now talking about the purely defensive option and the offensive operation – could you make a comparison of the rates of advance in the 1980s and those stipulated in the 1964 War Plan? How many kilometers per day?

General Zachariáš: I don't remember exactly, but in any case, our depths of advance were much lower than in the plan I have seen. To my knowledge, the plan was to advance about thirty kilometers on the first day, the rest of the operation was to take some eight to ten days – this was the maximum, which roughly corresponds to the depth of the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany. This speaks for itself – the rates of advance were lower, and the tasks assigned to us were thus more realistic, although we had better, more powerful equipment. Not to speak of the fact that we had much better river-crossing assets that they had had [in 1964], equipment capable of bridging a stream or a river in a few minutes, allowing non-amphibious vehicles to cross it. Also, we had much better supply and logistic support systems for all types of weapons and other equipment. [Zachariáš, 3 – 4]

General Slimák: [ . . . ] In that Ops Plan [ . . . ], I participated in its preparation, which took place in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s, our advance was supposed to stop [showing on the map] on the French border. For the Czechoslovak Front.

Q: And did you think, or perceive the plan as suggesting, that the front would no longer be combat-capable, or be replaced by another formation?

General Slimák: The reasons may have been political. Look – another subsequent front-size operation was assumed. The first frontal operation was planned to the depth of the southern part of the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany. The ops planning process did not deal with the next step. But this was the plan of the front.

Q: Could you indicate the rates of advance considered in the 1980s?

General Slimák: Well, for what is planned here as the front's mission, I guess it was expected take twice as long.

Q: OK, so ...

General Slimák: Thirty, forty [kilometers per day] close to border, and naturally fifty to sixty as the operation unfolded, exploiting the initial success. But thirty to forty early into the operation, that was at the army level and for objectives situated closer [to our border]. My job was a bit different, but I know that exercises were basically the same. Thirty, forty kilometers per day for closer objectives at the army level. More than fifty – it was in the unfolding and exploitation phase of the operation. [Slimák, 7]

## NATO's Growing Edge

Q: In the 1960s, internal analyses prepared in Czechoslovakia or the Soviet Union tend to emphasize weaknesses of the NATO Alliance. Perhaps this is the reason why the envisaged rates of advance were so high. On the other hand, Warsaw Pact analyses and assessments dating to the 1970s tend to emphasize NATO's growing strength. Do you think there were any political reasons for it, or do you think the analyses were a true reflection of the real situation?

General Zachariáš: I would rather think that the analyses were more realistic. And probably better work of the intelligence service, which had to provide information for familiarization with their equipment, for making comparisons with ours. And a more realistic assessment of the opponent's equipment leads to a more realistic overall assessment in other respects as well. A more realistic assessment. I don't think it had anything in common with politics.

Q: In the reports I have, there often appears information to the effect that armies of the Warsaw Pact respond to some innovations, introduction of new military technologies and equipment in the NATO Alliance. During the 1970s and 1980s, what do you think played the key role in the strengthening of NATO? [ . . . ]

General Zachariáš: Hard to say. But I think it was the use of space, intelligence-gathering satellites which had a great impact on the development of technologies and opinions on operational arts. Because the satellites could see and determine the deployment, types of equipment, movements, everything, including communications, to the tiniest detail. And there were times we knew – we have a satellite overhead, no movements. So, special weapons, such as missiles, were allocated windows during which they were allowed to move from one place to another. Also, the development of new weapons played a role; if the enemy fields a new piece of equipment, e.g. a new tank, you immediately start looking for a counter-weapon, a new anti-tank weapon, for example. And when I commanded a division and later on, at the army command, we knew we could not attack at night. Because at that time we did not stand a chance – they had much better night vision and night fire control equipment. And in that case, we would have attacked blind, and they could have seen us long before we could see them, we would not have stood a chance. [ . . . ]

The ranges of [Western and Eastern] weapons, such as anti-tank guided missiles or surface-to-air missiles, differed. They launched their helicopter-borne ATGMs from six to eight kilometers away, we launched ours from, for example, three kilometers away. And you have to take this into account in simply everything, tactics, command, control, use of combat assets, simply look for ways and means to succeed. [....]

You mentioned the air force; I don't know whether General Štorek admitted that NATO airplanes had been able to launch their air-to-air guided missiles from a distance which was twice to three times that of the range of our missiles. If they had flown against each other, both could have seen each other on the radar, but Štorek ['s boys] wouldn't have been able to launch, while the American could have launched from a distance of, say, 140 kilometers and been gone before our pilot could get within range.

So, it was the quality of equipment and weapons that was crucial. This is what I have been talking about, no qualitative ratios of forces were prepared, and this was the reason why tasks were far from realistic. [Zachariáš, 7 – 8]

## Problematic Intelligence

General Slimák: When I became the Chief of the Intelligence Directorate, I was facing many problems. I wanted to change everything.

Q: What specifically did you want to change?

General Slimák: Well, the focus of intelligence activities in the first place. Basically, there was no concept, everything was routine. Ironically enough, when we had at last worked our way

toward something tangible, I submitted the resulting document as a medium-term plan to the Chief of the General Staff on November 20, 1989.

[ . . . ]

Q: Were there – and I don't want you to mention specific cases – any results that were talked about, given as examples, cases when you really came across something important?

General Slimák: Not in my time. Not even at the time when I was the Deputy Chief of the Intelligence Directorate, there wasn't any essential, breakthrough information. It was more or less about exploiting various informers, and coming across something of interest was chancy. [ . . . ]

Q: Can you estimate how many people the Intelligence Directorate had at that time?

General Slimák: [ . . . ] It had several hundreds of people.

Q: Was there any specific area or specialty assigned to the Czechoslovak military intelligence service in the framework of coordination within the Warsaw Pact? For example, a specific region or segment of West Germany or France?

General Slimák: Shortly before my arrival, we were tasked with France and Spain. But nothing was done about it prior to my appointment.

Q: Was this a decision of a meeting of intelligence chiefs?

General Slimák: Yes. There were annual conferences of chiefs of intelligence directorates. Their agendas were approved during the conference. Attending these conferences were the Chief of the Intelligence Directorate and the Chief of the Information Section. I have to admit that our Information Section, namely its analytical segment, was at least able to exploit, process and "sell" what little information it was able to lay its hands on. [Slimák, 17 – 18]

Q: Do you think that military intelligence reports reduced the nuclear war threat? Or any war threat, not just nuclear?

General Slimák: I think they put things into a proper realistic perspective. [ . . . ] The information that we were submitting and that was available was focused on issues related to the development of armed forces, improving their quality, modernization and upgrading. In short, information focused more on technological advancements and achievements rather than on arms rattling, or threats. [ . . . ]

I think the Intelligence Directorate worked well in that it was providing enough intelligence and some focus. I believe it also made a significant contribution to the introduction or implementation of new technologies and innovations, from the viewpoint of taking necessary measures, imports of materials and some technologies. But all in all, quantity prevailed – and I will not mention why it was so - as it was simpler. You know, Soviets were secretive even to each other. For them, everything was classified and they did not divulge anything even to each other. When studying at the General Staff Academy, I talked to many people and I know that, for example, there were enterprises and factories developing something that the army had already developed.

[ . . . ]

Q: To what extent was the intelligence cooperation with the Soviets one-sided? For example, did you have access to specific Soviet information in exchange for our information? For example, satellite imagery or something else?

General Slimák: Not specific documents [or raw intelligence]. Just outputs. For example, on the composition and nature of armed forces. Whenever we had accurate information on armed forces of the United States, United Kingdom, Spain, it was only from their sources. We were taking it over from them automatically. Secondly, there were assessments of, say, qualitative parameters. We were not very advanced in this respect, we were just taking this over. [ . . . ] At that time, our research institute was lagging behind very much. [Slimák, 20 – 21]

## 6. The End and the Beginning

### From Offensive to Defensive

Q: When was the Ops Plan reworked from the scratch, as a whole?

General Zachariáš: When at the Ops Staff, I did not hold positions involved in putting together the Ops Plan, but I believe that the Ops Plan was reworked from the scratch at about the time I was participating in developing on of its parts, i.e. in the 1980s, at the latest, because the emphasis then was on what I had always been saying – to start preparations for a defensive operation in the first place and then, if it has been successful, to exploit it by launching an offensive. But this requires a complete set of documentation, basically for two operations, first a defensive one, then an offensive one. [Zachariáš, 5]

General Slimák: I do not know until when the [1964] War Plan had been valid, but when I worked at the Western Military District, I know that work on a new Ops Plan started sometimes in the autumn of 1985. In connection with the declaration of a new military doctrine. Perhaps it was declared in 1987 or so, but defensive issues had been worked on much earlier. We started working on it – before us, it had been the General Staff – in 1985 and the planning took until about May 1986. The Ops Plan was prepared by the Front Command. And there were two plans, one for an offensive operation, the other for a defensive one. And these were executed in four copies, one for ShOVS (*Shtab obshchikh vooruzhennykh sil* - Staff of Unified Armed Forces), one for the Czechoslovak General Staff, one for the Soviet General Staff and the last one for the Front Command. And – it was a specialty then – the plans were also prepared by subordinate levels, i.e. also at the army level. [Slimák, 6]

### Doctrine Without an Enemy

Q: Regarding the end of your career, when you were in the Unified Command, what was the atmosphere there at the time of those political changes in Central and Eastern European countries?

General Zachariáš: The atmosphere was – how to say it? [ . . . ] - funeral. The first to go were Germans. All national representatives had offices on the same corridor. And I had very good relations with the German and Polish representatives. Both spoke very good Russian, we used to go to lunch together, we were in touch. When Germany was reunified, the atmosphere was indeed sad and glum. I know we first said goodbye to the German, then the rest said goodbye to me, and it was clear that the days of the Warsaw Pact were over. They were even interested in what we were doing, because we had already started working on our doctrine at that time, and by 1990 we already had some ideas. So they wanted me to tell them something about it. I had to get some supporting information in Prague and I delivered a presentation on how our doctrine would look like to all of them. I didn't say much, but the twenty minutes about our doctrine was my last presentation there. Once in a month, there was a meeting where each national representative delivered a presentation. My last presentation's title was "The Probable Future Doctrine of Czechoslovakia".

Q: At that time, no one probably knew what ...

General Zachariáš: Everything was somewhat fuzzy – what can you say about it? Actually, there is not much new you can come up with. The army does not change ... the enemy has changed. And the worst thing – can you formulate a doctrine if you don't have any enemy? [...]

However, even the rudimentary doctrine mentioned what is a very topical issue today – terrorism. The doctrine mentioned even then that there might be fanatics, zealots, terrorist attacks, they were the enemy. But, on the other hand, what can a regular army do about them. ...

Q: We were playing .... It is likely, if not certain, that the Warsaw Pact would have disintegrated anyway, if not because of our initiatives, then by a force of circumstances, because of Poland, Germany, it would have disintegrated anyway. However, at the time of its disintegration, we played a prominent role in the pressure aimed at its dissolution.  
General Zachariáš: We had been regarded the strongest link of all. And, all of the sudden, the strongest link broke. Try to pull a chain, if its strongest link is broken. [Zachariáš, 13]

### The Old Track

General Slimák: Some time at the beginning of 1990, he [the last Chief of Staff of the Unified Armed Forces]<sup>46</sup> paid me a visit and got briefed on the changes going on here. In the end of the meeting, he said we “posed a serious threat to readiness”, “exposed the left flank of the Warsaw Pact”. I tried to explain what it was about, he did not understand. The representative of the [Warsaw Pact] Staff at the Ministry of National Defense was also present, and he had to guide the Chief of Staff so that he understood what I was saying. It was in the spring of 1990, they did not understand the situation and were simply putting the blame for everything on us. [ . . . ]

Iazov<sup>47</sup> accused me, he was indignant at me, which also showed during the 1990 Warsaw Pact meeting, on the occasion of its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary. There was a conference in Moscow, which was a part of the meeting. As we were announcing there that we’re expecting some changes, and the like, in everything, Lushev<sup>48</sup> asked me whether we had considered it, those circumstances... The part attended by experts dealt with a plan for the next five years. Our position was that we could not guarantee it and that we proposed, as the first year of the plan was 1991, a postponement. And the Germans were in a similar situation, I recall the meeting was attended by the German Chief of Staff, there was to be the “Shield” exercise in the German territory in 1992, and he said he could not guarantee it, because of the developments ... They were on the old track. I think they entirely failed to understand what the changes were about. [Slimák, 13 – 14]

### The Last Operational Plan

Q: General Vacek writes in his memoirs<sup>49</sup> that he submitted the Ops Plan to Havel<sup>50</sup> in 1990, and the latter initialed it. You have already mentioned that. So, basically, Havel initialed the plan containing both the defensive and the offensive options, didn't he?

General Slimák: Yes. The comprehensive name was “The Plan of Use of the Army”, but the operations were dealt with separately, there was separate planning for the offensive operation and for the defensive operation. The first to be prepared was the defensive operation, because it was deemed crucial at that time, while the offensive operation was regarded as something forced by the situation. [ . . . ]

Q: You then became the Chief of the General Staff – can you tell us when this Ops Plan ceased to be valid and what was it replaced by?

General Slimák: In 1990, there was nothing being done about operational planning [ . . . ] because of the situation developing ... in the political sphere, I am referring to prospects of the Warsaw Pact.

When all those negotiations began, I have one recollection dating back to the turn of 1991 – it was in autumn, under Dobrovský<sup>51</sup> – we informed [Chief of the Soviet General Staff and

<sup>46</sup> At that time, the Chief of Staff of the Unified Armed Forces was General of the Army Vladimir Lobov.

<sup>47</sup> Marshal Dmitrii Timofeevich Iazov, Soviet Minister of National Defense from 1987 to 1991.

<sup>48</sup> General of the Army Petr Georgievich Lushev was the last Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact.

<sup>49</sup> Miroslav Vacek, *Proč bych měl mlčet* [Why Should I Keep Silent] (Prague: Nadas, 1991), pp. 49 – 50.

<sup>50</sup> Václav Havel, one of prominent Czechoslovak dissidents in the 1970s and 1980s, Czechoslovak President from 1990 to 1993, Czech President from 1993 to 2003.

First Deputy Minister of Defense] Moiseev that the Ops Plan had lost its relevance; because of this, the Czechoslovak Army was preparing its own Operational Plan, and we were done [with the Warsaw Pact]. The answer was that they, that is the General Staff, did not have any objections, but that they regarded our action premature. This is how it ended, without any pressure, any resistance. You will ask why we informed Moiseev. I believe that when I was sending it to Moiseev, who was the Chief of the Soviet General Staff .. because ShOVS (*Shtab obshchikh vooruzhennykh sil* - Staff of Unified Armed Forces) ... the situation was not very clear there. [ . . . ]

So, when it became clear that the Warsaw Pact is just a question of time, when the negotiations started, we viewed the plan as useless. It was necessary to re-orient it.

Q: And it was then based on ...?

General Slimák: Well, this is what I said in the beginning. We withdrew from the plan, and now the question was what to do. It was obvious that the Ops Plan was not what mattered most. What mattered most was a vision, a future look. Not just with respect to the Ops Plan, but also as regards a sort of a clear concept. [ . . . ]

Q: So, the idea of territorial defense was revived?

General Slimák: I have not finished yet – we staged a test command post/staff exercise, me and the Ops Directorate Chief at the General Staff, and then with the Military District Command in Tábor. We tried to sort things out, looked for solutions. There were some conclusions: there is no threat from any direction, the army must be versatile, the existing stationing remains valid, there can be any organizational structure – division- or brigade-based, it doesn't matter. This was actually one of the points criticized by the National Defense Council, that we were not adopting the brigade-based system quickly enough. This must be seen in a certain setup of circumstances; we lacked a forward-looking vision of the army's role. The conclusions were roughly as follows: mobility, maneuverability, capabilities. Because there were two threats: a dangerous situation in the east – and there was also the Western Group in Germany. Consequently, the gist of the Ops Plan was being able to deploy a task force capable of fulfilling a mission arising from a potential scenario. It was not something set in stone, not something like "this is the way to do it and that's it". It was an elaboration of specific scenarios of the use of the army, naturally with general capabilities. We had to respond to a political order, because the year was 1992, after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. [Slimák, 9 – 10]

## On the Way To NATO

Q: What do you believe to be the crucial moments in the transformation of the Czechoslovak Army in the early 1990s? [ . . . ]

General Pezl: [ . . . ] Well, what I consider most important ... there were actually several phases. The first one was to clean the army, to remove that ... rotten core. Those were problems related to the liquidation of political ..... reduction of weight – it was not a full-fledged liquidation, but that is not possible in a revolution like ours – of political and cadre apparatchiks, military counterintelligence, breaking up of principal, mutually intertwined commanders' corps, a purge of many people, removal of the top personnel who had had direct relations to the political apparatus. However, all this was done with a view to retaining a certain level of combat readiness of the army, because at that time we had an almost 100,000 strong army, there was the Warsaw Pact, 22 Soviet divisions up in the north, so there had to be some efforts aimed at maintaining a certain level of self-defense. At the same time, we had to deal with Slovakia, it was "stripped" of assets, there was nothing in Slovakia. So, this was the first reorganization, which moved some of the forces to Slovakia, to even the balance a bit. It was good to have at least something in Slovakia at the time of the events in Moscow.

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<sup>51</sup> Lubomír Dobrovský, Czechoslovak Minister of Defense between 1990 and 1992.

So much for the first phase. The second phase consisted in looking for a new place of Czechoslovakia and its armed forces in Europe, opening up to the North Atlantic Alliance, to make ourselves more transparent and palatable for them so that they could get to know us better. A very important phase was the splitting of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic, also a very interesting operation, which proved that what had been done in and with the army until then was good and prevented a Balkan-like situation in our country. All this had to be accomplished in the context of the Vienna Protocol on the reduction of conventional armed forces in Europe, i.e. in the context of a permanent reorganization. Basically, the army has been fluid since the early 1990s until now, no department has undergone such changes having such a shaking impact on personnel, human resources, structures, everything.

Well, and then came the phase of approaching NATO, peaking in the accession. It was a period of a sort of internal transformation and looking for avenues of approach. The latter were represented, from the very beginning, our participation in the Gulf War, peace-keeping missions in the Balkans and so on – simply efforts to show the army in a bit different light. Based on the activities listed above and relations to the NATO Command in Europe, I believe the army made a significant political contribution resulting in our accession, albeit with a narrow margin. It didn't have much other support. [Pezl, 10 – 11]

*[Translated by Jiří Mareš, Prague]*