

## 7. The Case of Vladimír Krajina

During the war there was an interesting incident involving Professor Vladimír Krajina. He was a member of the ÚVOD<sup>1</sup> resistance group while I was a member of National Defense. ÚVOD was a large organization. We knew of each other, but we never met in person because there was a principle that one group should not be in direct contact with the other one. This was done so that in case one person got captured, they wouldn't be able to beat out of him who the members of the other group were. When it was necessary to meet with them, general Bílý, lieutenant colonel Balabán or Mašín or Morávek would meet up with them. One man would meet one man. They were never three.

I was following Krajina's case with great interest because he kept eluding the Gestapo. They locked up Mrs. Krajinová<sup>2</sup> in a concentration camp in Ravensbrück maybe as early as the end of 1941. I'm not sure about the dates but I knew she was there. Suddenly we learned that they moved her to a smaller prison somewhere near Mladá Boleslav. We thought they wanted to use her as bait to get to Krajina.

The director of the Municipal House was Mr. Vimperský. He was a German who had been working there since around 1926. He was an honest man who didn't meddle in politics. He came to see me around Christmas in the year 1942 and asked me if the name Krajina sounded familiar to me. I didn't want to admit I knew anything about Krajina. He told me: "It's a man called Krajina but now they are looking for him under the name Jan or Jeníček. They are looking for lots of people at the moment."

I must add that that the French restaurant at the Municipal House was regularly visited by a group of German officers. They were either from Gestapo or even *Sicherheitsdienst*. Director Vimperský listened to their conversations and when he thought it might be of interest to me, he told me. He wasn't aware of my involvement with the Resistance but he must have suspected it and I have to say that he liked me. He was married to the sister of the former leaseholder of the Municipal House, Mr. Jilemnický. She didn't know a word of German. They spoke Czech at home, although his Czech wasn't very good. He spoke French and English as well as German.

He was an excellent director. When I took over the establishment, I asked him: "Director, what is your salary?" He told me: "I earn 1,200 but I know that things tend to be difficult at the beginning, so I'd be willing to work for 900." I asked him: "And director, you're talking about your weekly salary?"

"No, that's what I make each month." I told him: "I pay my director at the other restaurant 5,000 crowns, but I will give you 4,000 for being such a fool and working for 1,200."

This was a major advancement for him – he was willing to work for 900 and I gave him 4,000 and soon I gave him the 5,000 that my other directors were earning at Václavské náměstí. He

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<sup>1</sup> ÚVOD or *Ústřední vedení odboje domácího*, the Central Leadership of Domestic Resistance.

<sup>2</sup> Marie Krajinová-Závodská (1906-1991), wife of Professor Vladimír Krajina.

was an excellent director and an honest man. I never saw him raise his arm for the Hitler salute, despite him being German. In case some of the Germans were to hold it against him, I had decided to say: “That’s not allowed. A citizen of the Protectorate can’t raise his arm – this salute belongs to the Reich.”

So Vimperský came to see me and asked me about Krajina. Because it was Christmas, we left for Černošice, our villa in the suburbs. When we came back, he searched me out immediately: “Do you remember that man called Krajina?”

I noted that I had heard that such a man existed and I asked him what the matter was. He told me that the German officers didn’t talk of anything else. They were sitting in the booth right by the entrance. They came in three or four times a week and he listened to what they were talking about. I asked him: “So tell me, what’s going on?”

“They are searching for this Krajina really intensively now. The Gestapo chief, Leimer<sup>3</sup>, is in charge of the operation. He is said to be close to catching Krajina.”

Every week he told me that once again, Krajina was the main subject of conversation. And then, later on, it must have been the end of January or the beginning of February 1943, he came to me looking surprised and said: “They are celebrating. They’ve got Krajina – they found him in Jičín.” Later on, it turned out they had actually caught him in Turnov. I had known that Krajina was hiding in the area called Český ráj (Czech Paradise). Vimperský added that the officers were talking about a teacher they had arrested and also about a parachutist who came from England. They mentioned the name Čurda. This was the man who sold out to the Germans for a million crowns.

The teacher’s name was Hlaváček<sup>4</sup>. He was from Český ráj and during an interrogation he said that Krajina was in the area. Krajina found out by accident that his cover had been blown and that he had to leave Jičín and so he went to Turnov. And that’s where they ended up catching him.

Krajina had some poison on him, he thought it was cyanide, a strong poison but it turned out that the poison had lost all of its strength over the years he was wearing it in his waistcoat, so effectively it wasn’t poisonous at all. Vimperský told me that Krajina had bitten into the glass capsule but that his captors managed to get it out of his mouth. However, they were still worried he might have swallowed some of the poison, so they pumped out his stomach twice – once before taking him to hospital and once in the hospital.

A few days after that, Viimperský came to me with the news that Krajina was in Prague. He had been transferred there and according to what the Gestapo men were saying, he was being

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<sup>3</sup> Willi Leimer (1912-?), officer of the Prague Gestapo anti-trooper section, handed over to the Soviet Union after the war.

<sup>4</sup> Karel Hlaváček (1902-?), head teacher in the town of Veselá in Český ráj (Bohemia), member of Krajina’s group.

questioned by Karl Hermann Frank<sup>5</sup>, who used to be a bookseller from Karlovy Vary but became the leader of the Sudeten Germans. He had played an important role in the separation of the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia and he was secretary of state at the office of the *Reichsprotektor*. In short, he was a Hitler man. Vimperský told me that they had also brought in Mrs. Krajínová and another lady, I believe her name was Vlčková, and also the teacher.

Karl Hermann Frank told Krajina that he had an interpreter so he could speak Czech. Krajina replied: “No, I don’t need an interpreter, I will speak in German. Just in case there is an expression that I cannot remember, we can do as you say and use him.”

Frank then asked him: “You can speak German well?”

Krajina said: “I speak German tolerably well. My scientific papers were usually published in Germany first and then in Czechoslovakia.”

Frank wanted to know, “Tell me, why do you, as an intelligent person, hate everything German?”

“This isn’t true,” Krajina insisted. “I hate what’s going on today. And I hate individual people – you for example.”

Frank then apparently jumped up, but the *Reichsprotektor* Kurt Daluege<sup>6</sup> held him back and then they talked to each other for a long time. Frank said that he was puzzled why Krajina hated him.

Krajina answered: “Because I know that a part of your policy is to send the entire Czech intelligentsia to the Soviet Union.”

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If the Germans had won the war, they planned to ship the Czech intelligentsia to Siberia. Krajina resented Frank for closing the Czech universities in 1939 and for planning to close all schools. He said that he hated the Germans for having murdered the people of Lidice. He said: “This was on your orders.”

Frank jumped up again and shouted: “We’ve got you! You’re my personal prisoner.”

Frank wanted Krajina to name some people and to tell them how he came to be in the Resistance. Krajina paused to think and then he said: “Drtina<sup>7</sup>.” He was in London. In reality, he

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<sup>5</sup> Karl Hermann Frank (1898-1946) Sudeten German politician, Secretary of State of the Protectorate. Executed after the war.

<sup>6</sup> Kurt Daluege (1897-1946), Heydrich’s successor as *Reichsprotektor*.

<sup>7</sup> Prokop Drtina (1900-1980), an important member of the resistance, minister of justice in the postwar democratic Czechoslovak government before the Communist coup.

was pulled in by Doctor Jaroslav Drábek<sup>8</sup> but he couldn't name him because he was also being held by the Germans.

According to what the German officers in Repre said, Krajina had been questioned for around two hours. In the end, Frank asked him: "What do you think ought to happen so that the relationship between the Czech and German nations improves?"

Krajina answered: "First of all, you should send everyone you hold in prisons home."

Frank replied: "I can't do that now because it's winter and our army isn't advancing – but I could do many things once our army is on the move again in Russia." He also told him: "I offer you a role in the protectorate government. Any role, even the chairmanship."

Krajina replied: "I would never accept such a thing!"

Frank asked: "Why not?"

"Just now you asked me about minister Moravec. I told you that we consider him a traitor. I would become one instead of him if I were to accept."

"I repeat that you can be prime minister if you want."

But Krajina said: "*Niemals.* (Never)."

At the end of the interrogation, Frank told Krajina: "Professor, please sign this." Krajina signed with much reluctance. Frank took the note and gave it to an official along with some other documents signed by Krajina. Then Frank added: "Now I can do what I promised to that teacher." The Gestapo had beaten the teacher and then they told him that none of the people he would name would be executed. At first, Frank claimed he didn't know of this promise, but in the end he said he could fulfill the promise given to the teacher.

We were paying close attention to what was going to happen next. Krajina remained locked up at the Gestapo's headquarters in Pečkárna. Frank had summoned Mrs. Krajinová there and insisted that she promise him to keep an eye out on Krajina so that he wouldn't do something silly like with the poison in Turnov. They had stopped by where Mrs. Krajinová was held, when they were bringing Krajina from Turnov. It may have been Kartouzy<sup>9</sup> where she was held, I'm not sure.

The Gestapo told Krajina: "You will now see your wife."

Krajina answered: "I would like to know how."

"You will doubtless be happy."

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<sup>8</sup> Jaroslav Drábek (1901-1996), writer and journalist, member of resistance against Nazism and Communism, main prosecutor in the trials of war criminals.

<sup>9</sup> Valdická kartouza: an infamous high-security prison in Valdice.

“I doubt she will be too happy to see me because I’ve left her,” Krajina said.

When they arrested Mrs. Krajinová, she told them that Krajina hadn’t been at home for several weeks – that he had left her. She acted accordingly to that when they met. She only shook Krajina’s hand, but he could read from her eyes that she wasn’t angry with him anymore.

They put them both in a car with Leimer and another Gestapo man, I believe his name was Fischer. He was from Jičín. They put the teacher and Mrs. Vlčková in a second car. They took them to Prague. Once they arrived, they let them get a night’s sleep and gave them a decent breakfast the following day. As Krajina himself said later, he got a proper meal after a long time because he had been on the run before.

The entire family that was hiding Krajina at the time of his capture got very badly beaten up. But because Frank had promised the teacher that he wouldn’t kill him or the others, they were only put in prison and were able to survive the war.

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Around the middle of May 1943, Krajina and his wife were transferred to Terezín<sup>10</sup> where they were given a separate room. Frank ordered that Krajina wasn’t to be interrogated except in his presence. The Gestapo officers who were going to our restaurant were wondering how this was possible and were asking each other: “What do you think of Krajina?” One of them said “*Der verfluchte* (damned) Krajina, just another Czech swine.” The one who asked him said: “Which one of us would dare say to Frank what he said to him.” They told each other: “He thought he was going to get executed whatever happens so he spoke his mind freely.”

“But which of us would say something like that to Frank?” they asked each other again.

“No one! Because we’re afraid of being sent to the front. If someone were to tell him something like that, he wouldn’t kill him but he would have him die at the front.” And they added: “We don’t understand Frank, he does various things, but this is a big deal and we still don’t understand it.” They spent a lot of time discussing the whole affair but were none the wiser.

They were wondering if they might have a connection in Berlin so that they could send word of Frank’s behavior. But they all agreed that they wouldn’t be sending anything. In fact, they were afraid of Frank and treated Krajina with decency.

I had my contact in Terezín but I didn’t want to contact Krajina directly because I knew that we would do whatever in his power for the cause. He promised to Frank that he wouldn’t try to contact the local resistance nor London. But he did manage to let London know that all the messages they would be receiving are fake and that he’s in prison.

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<sup>10</sup> Theresienstadt

I think he behaved wonderfully because whoever I told what I overheard from the Gestapo, including captain Morávek, wondered at this. However, I was aware of all of it. I had an acquaintance at the Gestapo since July or August 1940 – doctor Adams whom I’ve mentioned previously. He came to see me and told me about Krajina’s interrogation in detail. He spoke perfect Czech. And as I said already, he was getting good coffee from us. He always paid five crowns to the girls at the shop instead of one fifty. But once the coffee girls came to see me in panic and told me: “The man who calls now and then and wants to speak to you – he’s from the Gestapo! He came in uniform.” I tried to calm them down: “I know who he is, but I had no idea he could come in uniform.”

“We’re coming to tell you to be careful when you speak with him,” Dr. Adams said.

I nodded and told him that I would be careful.

Maybe a month after Krajina’s interrogation I was visited by Karel Sušanka, whom I can mention only now, after November 1989, since he still lives in Prague. He told me the same story. He had heard it from other members of the Gestapo. I therefore had the information from several sources.

Krajina was an honest man. I knew him personally. When the war was coming to an end, Frank invited him along with a high official whose name was incidentally Heidrich<sup>11</sup> – similar to the assassinated acting *Reichsprotector* – except that this man had been a high ranking official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before the war. He was Beneš’s right-hand man.

Frank invited six such prominent people to his office and asked them to form a new Czech government that would negotiate with the Western Allies who were already in Pilsen. He wanted to form a new government, otherwise he threatened to destroy Prague. But they all said: “No! We’re not joining any government.” So, then Frank turned to Krajina and told him: “Is this how you repay me? You don’t want to join the new government?”

Krajina answered: “Not with you!”

Ever since 1940, when I knew that Krajina was a member of ÚVOD, I considered him a great man. For me he was a paragon of virtue. I don’t know how I would have acted if I had thought I was going to be executed. I wasn’t in such a situation, so I can’t judge him but as I say, for me he was a man of virtue. The communists said of him that he must have cooperated with the Gestapo since they gave him such good treatment and spared his life. But I know he didn’t, definitely not. I think I never told this to Krajina directly. But I think that now when we’re both old men I must tell him....

After February 1948, the communists sentenced Krajina to 25 years in prison, but he was already in Germany at the time. However, I know from Sušanka, who was at the Ministry of

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<sup>11</sup> Arnošt Heidrich (1889-1968), diplomat and politician, member of the resistance against Nazism and Communism.

Interior at the time, that the whole case was fabricated by some fanatical people inside the Communist party.

Sušanka said to me: "I am telling you this because I know you will meet him when you will get to Germany. Tell Krajina that the whole thing is fabricated, including the interrogation of the secretary. I am telling you this because the whole thing is rotten."