

CHAPTER XII

CZECHOSLOVAKIA. 1935-1945

A. GENERAL

1. In May 1935 the Sudeten Party of Konrad Henlein, an obscure Gymnastics Teacher from the Sudetenland, won the majority of the seats in the election. By his speeches and with the aid of the Nazis he fomented riots and ill feeling between the Czechs and the Germans of the Sudetenland. By 1938 Henlein, now openly a German agent, was making demands for autonomy. Members of his "Free Corps" and Elite Guard Death's Head battalions provided border incidents which might constitute a *casus belli* for Germany.

2. The crisis became worse and ended at the famous Munich pact on September 30, 1938, when it was agreed to hand over to Hitler the predominantly Sudeten German areas in Czechoslovakia with additional areas to be defined by an international four-power commission. The effect of this gift was such as to destroy the economic viability of the Czechoslovak Republic and to place into Hitler's hands all the Czech border fortifications. Within a week after the conference, German terror spread over Czechoslovakia and the government of Benes was ended (Benes fled to London where he formed the Czechoslovak Government in exile). Hacha, a reactionary fascist then became premier and soon began to ape Nazi racist and political ideas. Thus between Oct. 1-11 1938 some 2½ million subjects including some 100,000 Czechs automatically became German subjects.

3. In March 1939 the Nazis instigated an uprising in Slovakia; Germany stating that the Czech Government could not deal with this situation invaded Prague. The Nazis declared Czech territory a "protectorate" and Slovakia an "independent" state under German "tutelage". They handed most of the Ruthenians over to the Hungarians. Poland took Silesian Tesin together with a few other districts.

B. CZECHS

4. Once firmly in control of the country the Nazis kept up the fiction of a protectorate (Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia). Konrad Henlein was made head of the civil administration. A policy of denationalisation was put into effect by moving Czech workers to the Reich and sending their children to German schools; the property of Czechs and Jews who fled abroad was given to Germans. Germans from the Baltic states were resettled around Prague, breaking up compact Czech settlements. The Nazis declared the Czechs second-class citizens in their own country.

5. Many of the Czechs collaborated (some served in the SS) especially the wealthier element but the resistance was of such strength that the Nazis sent Heydrich, the most dreaded of the Gestapo terrorists to discipline the people. When he was assassinated the Nazis answered with the complete annihilation of the small town of Lidice. A leading

Nazi Daluge succeeded Heydrich as "Protector". Despite the executions of the Nazis the resistance movement continually grew stronger with the advance of the Allied Armies.

There existed in the Protectorate an association called Vlastka, a quisling organisation which was pro-Nazi and anti-semitic in character. It was used to persecute the Jews and on occasion denounced Czech patriots. It was used by the Germans to do the more onerous tasks within the Republic.

6. The Rodobraný and Szabadcsapatok. "Rodobran" was a Czech fascist organisation composed of fifth columnists who cooperated with the Nazis in their scheme to incorporate Czechoslovakia into the 3rd Reich. "Szabadcsapatok" was a similar organisation of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia. Both ceased to be active after the Nazi blitz in March 1939.

7. In addition to the above groups there was the Svatoplukova Garda which was the principal Czech Fascist Organisation, as well as the Sudetendeutsche Partei (SdP) Nazi party of Czech Sudetenland.

C. SLOVAKS

8. Slovakia wanted its independence from Hungary even before Czechoslovakia was made a Republic and once the Republic was formed the Slovaks carried on a continuous propaganda for autonomy. The leader of this movement was Father Hlinka who was head of the Slovak Populist Party. He died in 1938.

9. After Munich Father Tiso took over the leadership of the Slovak clericals who showed their preference for "Slovač" rather than Czechoslovak patriotism and for Hitler rather than Benes in March 1939. At first, Slovakia became a part of a federal union with the provinces of Bohemia, Moravia and Carpathian Ukraine but later under pressure from the Nazis the Slovakian parliament declared its independence on March 14th, 1939. A new constitution was adopted in July 1939 which described the country as a Christian National Republic and permitted the existence of only one party : Hlinka's former separatists.

10. This party had an armed force known as Hlinka's Guards (Hlinkava Garda) which was a fascist organisation corresponding to the German SS. Its members wore black uniform. It was originally nationalist and separatist but later became fascist in character.

11. Although Slovakia was not occupied by German troops until August 1944 (with the exception of German military Zones) Germany's artillery could easily shell Bratislava from Austria. In addition it should be remembered that this "new" country had an undeveloped industry and was economically dependent on the Germans. Aside from the quisling Tiso government few Slovaks collaborated with the Nazis with the exception of the German and Hungarian minorities. A few Slovaks volunteered for service in the 14th Galician Waffen SS Division and after Germany attacked Russia in June 1941 Hitler demanded Slovak troops for the Eastern front. These were raised by conscription but were considered untrustworthy because of sabotage and desertion. In 1944 the Slovaks revolted against the Germans under General Rudolf Viest (the revolting group was called the First Czechoslovak Army) although the attempt was put down after a two month struggle with seven German divisions. There was throughout the occupation an active resistance movement in Slovakia.

D. RUTHENIANS

12. Carpathian Ukraina separated from the Czechs by the independent Slovak state felt that it must also proclaim its independence. It did so on March 15, 1939. Barely 24 hours after this declaration, Hungarian troops invaded the province and on March 16, Premier Teleki announced the incorporation of Ruthenia in Hungary.
13. A Ruthenian resistance movement grew up but was largely ineffectual until later in the war. A few Ruthenians collaborated with the Hungarians and Germans but their numbers were diminutive. The Ruthenian underground came out as field force after Ruthenia's capital fell to the Russians on October 27, 1944.

E. ELIGIBILITY STATUS OF THE ABOVE GROUPS

14. Senior members of the quisling governments are *prima facie* outside the mandate of IRO. Minor civil servants who can show that their activities did not constitute voluntary assistance to the enemy forces may be considered as falling within the mandate although each case will be dealt with on its merits.
15. Members of the Association Vlachka are *prima facie* outside the mandate of IRO under the appropriate sub-section of paragraph 2 of Part II.
16. Members of the Rodobrany or Szabadcsapatok are *prima facie* outside the mandate of IRO under the relevant provisions of Part II of the Constitution.
17. Members of the Hlinka Guards are *prima facie* outside the mandate of IRO under the relevant sub-section of paragraph 2 of Part II of the Constitution.
18. Members of the Svatoplukova Garda are *prima facie* outside the mandate of IRO.
19. All members of German minorities will be outside the mandate if they are in Germany and in suspense (*i.e.* receive no assistance) if they are in countries other than Germany.
20. Members of Henleins "Free Corps" or Elite Guard Death's Head Battalions are excluded under the terms of paragraph 2 of Part II of the Definitions.
21. Members of the local Nazi Parties are *prima facie* outside the mandate.