



TEN21 PRESS | 4142 CASS AVENUE, SUITE 201 | DETROIT, MI 48201

BORDER CROSSINGS: COMING OF AGE IN THE CZECH RESISTANCE (1021 Press, Detroit), by Charles Novacek. Publication Date: October, 2012; hardcover, ISBN 978-0-9854151-0-5, \$28.00; paperback, ISBN 978-09854151-1-2, \$18.00; eBook also available.

BOOK EXCERPT

“The Long Rifle” – an excerpt from *Border Crossings: Coming of Age in the Czech Resistance* by Charles Novacek, 1021 Press, ©2012.

The Wehrmacht was retreating from the Soviets, but as they did, they were also placing explosives to destroy anything the Russians could use.

On April 18, I observed from my bunker how a German demolition squad placed explosives within the structure of the nearby railroad bridge. The rail line was the only link between the capital city of Brno and the southern district of the Moravian province. The soldiers had come in a locomotive to place the charges and stretched the cables to a safe distance. I concluded that whoever would detonate the explosives would have to get there the same way. I also knew that no one else was aware of the Germans’ activity. If the bridge were to be saved, it would be up to me.

The distance from my cave was about two hundred and fifty yards. None of my own weapons could reach that point accurately, and I knew I only had one shot. If I missed, the chance to save the bridge would be greatly diminished, and I myself would risk discovery.

I needed a long rifle to prevent anyone from reaching the end of the wires and completing the detonation. Only the Germans themselves had such rifles.

On the plain behind the cliff where my bunker lay were hundreds of tanks and trucks; they were the Sixth Panzer Division coming back from Stalingrad, and they had just arrived in our area. At my family’s house the local street narrowed and ended, and then changed into a field trail. Dozens of the trucks lined this street, and I noticed that one of the types of rifles I needed was strapped on the inside of the driver’s door of the last field truck. The truck with the rifle

was the closest to the foot of the hill near my bunker in the cliff, but it was also very close to our house.

To prevent discovery, the long rifle had to be stolen at the last possible moment, before the Germans departed. If they found out about the missing rifle, many would suffer for it. There was no room for mistakes. My cue to get the rifle would be the start-up commotion of all the tanks; the departure of this formidable force would be preceded by the considerable disorder of the soldiers and general turmoil. The land would tremble from the vibrating engines.

I slept with my eyes half open.

In my cave and at home at night, I thought of the devastating consequences to my nation if the bridge were destroyed. After all the conflicts, the impoverished state would not be able to rebuild a rail line for a long time, and without it, lack of communication and industrial exchange would mean more hunger in the large cities and no products or supplies in the south. That bridge was as essential for us as air.

On April 21, 1945, long before dawn, the commander of the retreating Panzer Division received word about Berlin being surrounded by the Soviets; I myself heard it on the news from London. There was no other way out for the Germans. They were afraid to surrender to the Russians because of the devastation they had left behind in the Soviet territory; the division had to leave quickly to reach the American Zone safely.

The roar of the tanks filled the night as they prepared to depart, and on the streets, the number of guards doubled.

I sneaked out into the dark and cautiously waited for the patrol to pass to the other end of the street. Then I climbed into the driver's seat of the empty field truck to untie the rifle. The straps were dry and hard, and it took me longer to free the rifle and the ammunition than I anticipated. By then, the two patrolmen were returning from the far end of the street.

The beating of my heart seemed louder than the roar of the tanks as the guards almost touched the door when they passed by me. At the foot of the ridge, about two hundred feet from the truck, they turned back. I held my breath once more, but I could not control my heartbeat; in the tight space between the seat and the pedals I almost choked from its pounding. My throat and mouth burned and my sweaty hands trembled with fright.

After a few moments, I peeked out to see the guards fading in the darkness. Quietly I unlocked the door and slid off the seat. At that moment, in the second floor window of the house where I lived, appeared the horrified face of my mother. I saw her silhouette there; her frightened form tight against the glass seemed to reflect a saintly image. She recognized me and saw what I did.

I had been hiding my activities from her for security reasons. Most of the time, however, she knew what was going on, and her strong convictions to fight for freedom silently reinforced our

family's ideals. It was really not necessary to shelter her; yet I felt a searing pang of guilt when I saw her terror. She was still my mother.

I shut the truck door silently and swiftly vanished toward the dark hill with the rifle and ammunition.

When I got to the cave I relaxed, prepared the weapon, and hoped for daybreak so I could see. I knew the locomotive would come; I just did not know when.

In the morning light, that image of my mother in the window faded slowly from my mind as I realized what I was facing. I swallowed many times to moisten my throat, which seemed to grow drier with each passing second. I started to hope the locomotive would not come, that perhaps they had changed their minds or even forgotten.

Then, suddenly it arrived. In a few seconds the steam brake stopped the locomotive. A soldier stepped down with a battery box in his hands and walked toward the cables.

He was going to blow up the bridge.

I had just one chance. I would not have another. After the first shot the soldier would be able to take cover and detonate the charges.

The long rifle was ready. I got the soldier in my sights as he was kneeling over the box. I squeezed the trigger slowly and took my shot.

When the engineer saw his partner fall down dead, he took off with the steam hissing and the wheels of the locomotive wildly spinning.

Shortly thereafter I heard several explosions from the city; I discovered later it was a clothing and shoe warehouse, the food supply warehouse, and the grain depository.

I remained still. In a few hours the whole territory became silent.

The era of German control had ended.

Then the Soviets took over for the next forty-five years.

MEDIA CONTACT: Sandra Novacek, 313.832.1148, 313.701.6708; novaceks@att.net, [www.charlesnovacek books.com](http://www.charlesnovacekbooks.com). Review copies available upon request.

###