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**BORDER CROSSINGS: COMING OF AGE IN THE CZECH RESISTANCE** (Ten21 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.

### **SYNOPSES – 1** (116 words)

*Border Crossings: Coming of Age in the Czech Resistance* is a memoir describing the impact of World War II and the Cold War on a Czechoslovakian boy. It is written from the perspective of Charles Novacek, born in Ozdany, Czechoslovakia (now Slovakia) in 1928, who actively participated with his family in the Czech Resistance against the Nazis and Communists from the age of eleven to twenty. After escaping his homeland in 1948, Novacek fled to Germany, then Venezuela and was finally able to immigrate with his wife and children to the United States in 1956 where he became an American citizen and established a successful professional engineering career in Detroit, Michigan. Novacek died in July 2007.

### **SYNOPSES – 2** (940 words)

When people consider the atrocities perpetrated in Europe during the 1940s, it is usually the Nazis who come to mind. In *Border Crossings: Coming of Age in the Czech Resistance*, Charles Novacek sheds light on another war crime; one which has largely been overlooked. When World

War II ended for us, Soviet troops rolled into Czech territory. The Czech people's supposed liberators, the Communists, became their new oppressors.

Many Americans are aware that at the end of World War II, the countries of Eastern Europe were divided and given over to Soviet rule. But few of us are aware of the toll the Communists exacted on the people of Czechoslovakia (and the other Eastern bloc countries of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia).

Charles Novacek, who prematurely had to enter adulthood at age eleven, spent his adolescence saving his neighbors, his family and his country: Czechoslovakia. As a child and young adult, Charles first served in the Czech resistance against the Nazis and then the Communists.

He had been a precocious child: ski jumping over moving trains, communing with a baby bear in the forest, insisting on learning the violin, taking up art, fencing, horsemanship, reading voraciously and showing a deep interest in all things mechanical. Even at the tender age of seven, he describes himself as restless, eager to learn the survival skills of a mountain man. It was this eagerness coupled with his aptitude that made him a good candidate to resist the Nazis. As the war grew closer, his parents instructed Charles and his older sister Vlasta on how to stay safe; they even had a trained intelligence expert come to the house weekly to hone their skills.

Charles' first assignment was to find and give safe haven to parachuting allies. As he pieced together how serious the situation was becoming, he sought out hiding places both near and far from his family's house. He stocked these caves with weapons, food and water. He did this on his own initiative. Still a youth, he delivered messages that required him to take leave of his

family for days at a time. He learned to speak Hungarian from his mother and Slovak and German in school, despite bombs falling nearby. Czech was his native tongue.

In his late teen years Charles was recruited to travel to Zanzibar in Tanzania to pick up gems earmarked to finance the new resistance. Later, posing as a student in Prague, he collected data about the movement of Communist agents. Despite being careful, it was here that he was arrested and the first of his many nightmares began. Since the police didn't have anything on him, and he wasn't giving up any information, he was sent to the vilest prison in the region ... a prison known for taking in those like Charles. Here they were left to die while being tortured and kept in the most contemptible conditions.

After several months languishing there, he and others were rescued by an underground resistance team. By this time Charles was but a shadow of his former self. Once he recovered in safe haven in the mountains and was trained to regain his strength, he changed his looks, including the contours of his face, so once he rejoined the resistance activities on the outside, authorities would not recognize him. In an attempt to strengthen the resistance coalition, Charles' task was to make contact with the Slovak-Hungarian underground. He not only knew the man with crucial Slovak underground connections but also had a link to the Hungarians. He was an especially valuable member of the resistance since he could pass for a native in either country due to his fluency both languages.

At this point he was nearly captured but for his quick wits about him. Knowing now that his days in the open were over, he sought refuge from a childhood friend. Together they concocted a scheme that would at least give him a chance of getting out of the country. While on the lam, he remembered what his Uncle Josef had told him: "If ever you are found out, change your nationality. Change your name. Change everything, and build a new life for yourself. Establish a

new family in a land that will give you freedom.” Although Charles hated the thought of giving up and of leaving his beloved Czechoslovakia, he knew it was time to heed Uncle Josef’s advice.

In an attempt to cross the border, Charles and another refugee plodded up mountains, through narrow, dangerous canyons, down slippery slopes and did everything they could to avoid the enemy and their German Shepherds. At long last they crossed the border near Vimperk and presented themselves to the Germans as refugees.

Charles’ troubles seemed to be over, but the displaced persons camp turned out to be plagued with food shortages, graft and insect infestations. Slowly, by his own wit and his extraordinary will to live by any means possible, Charles crawled out of the abyss that began in his early adolescence.

Eventually he married and had four children, and by way of Venezuela, came to his newly adopted (and beloved) country, America. He settled in Detroit where, despite the resistance having left him physically tattered and mentally traumatized, he became a renowned engineer of many of Detroit’s current structures.

Charles’ memoir of his role in a resistance largely forgotten is an important part of World War II’s history and a testament to the courageous people who stood up to their oppressors. It took forty-five years to rid the Czech Republic of Communist rule. One can only imagine how many other stories are buried in that time period.

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