

Vladimir Kazan-Komarek NYTimes 12/12/72

Before getting into the strange omissions in the writing of this story and its tardy appearance, a recollection of a man mentioned in it, William W. Oatis, AP Prague Bureau Chief of the same period.

My last job as a soldier in OSS (I returned as a civilian) was to write the secret history of its intelligence training. There were to have been but 12 copies of the finished work, to have been done as a picture story. In the shop in which I was there were many "Hollywood types, including a number of script writers who had there a haven from military activity. I was for a while the only man in the shop who had had basic training. (I had been overseas and returned, from Africa.)

I decided that I should make a personal inspection of a group in training, talk to those who did the training, see the place, etc. To this end I was assigned a car and a chauffeur (A nice 1st Lt., I was then a buck private!) and a civilian photographer. I selected an "area" part of the Quantico complex. It had a very GI Army commanding officer who pulled rank on me, didn't keep appointments, had me eat in the enlisted-men's mess rather than with those whose knowledge I needed, the officers, and in general made it impossible for me to do what I had to do.

I knew enough about OSS to know that this stuff didn't go, so I didn't fight the bastard. That was quite contrary to the whole philosophy. Typical was a buck private being the boss of a first lt. and a civilian, for rank meant nothing. I pulled out the next morning, turned in a report, and in 48 hours the C.O. was on a ship. And I was made corporal and put in civilian clothes.

But, having been forced into the enlisted-men's mess, I saw enlisted men. I knew something about the business by then, and of all in that training group there was but one who stood out, because of a flagrant violation of all the cliches. He had one conspicuous feature, his eyeglasses. I am certain this is Oatis. Or, I should say that at the time of his arrest, I was then certain.

One of the more glaring wrong things in this story is the Spanish police finding the corpse of an American citizen, with identification, and not informing American authority. Another is the long disinterest of US officialdom.

Now in the general period referred to in the story, again from recollection, there was dangerously serious US intelligence interest in Czechoslovakia. I recall an incident in which we sent a whole procession of jeeps into the country on an intelligence raid, returning with copious files. It was, of course, an act of war. This was the cold war peak period.

What Finney fails to point out is that the period of alleged operation of a network inside CS exactly coincides with his flight from there and his Paris period, and this with his post-release admission that he "had been working for 'French intelligence'" (inside quotes Finney's). The charge inside C-S was changed from US to "French" intelligence when the pressure was applied by the U.S.

I do recall the incident of the landing of the Soviet plane. It seems clear enough that this was not an accidental developing of "mechanical" trouble.

During the time he acquired US citizenship there was a law that I think 100 a year could become citizens on the request of intelligence, for services rendered. This glosses over how he became a citizen. I don't know the quota situation.

He just goes to Cambridge and becomes "president of the Harvard Travel Service"? With no previous experience? And then, after release, just "severed his relationship with the Harvard Travel Service"? An inexperienced man does not become president like that. He may have started it, and severing then would mean selling it.

The Spanish police had a real autopsy without teeth? And a decomposed body at that? He just dropped dead of "natural causes" "in a gully"? How convenient and considerate! With "the cause of death as well as identity" said to have been "difficult to establish", and with his papers on the spot, what better reason to not inform US authorities or have a dental check?

If there is more, this should be enough to show that the whole business is phoney. And one is left to wonder why, in a case more than a year old, the Times suddenly finds more than 35 column inches of interest?

Going back to my OSS days, it is no trick to murder without leaving a trace.

Body Found in Spain Thought to Be American

Once Jailed by Prague

By JOHN W. FINNEY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 11—A badly decomposed body was discovered in September in a gully on the eastern Spanish coast, and thus apparently bringing to an end the life story of a Cambridge, Mass., travel agent once accused of espionage by Czechoslovakia.

The body was identified by Spanish police as that of Vladimir Kazan-Komarek, a Czech-born American agent who was seized by the Czechoslovak secret police in October 1966, when a Soviet airliner made an unscheduled stop in Prague.

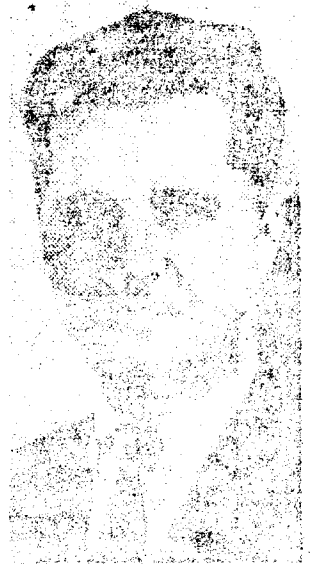
He was charged with high treason and espionage, but then, after considerable diplomatic pressure by the United States, he was convicted by a Czechoslovak court of a lesser charge of subversive activities against Czechoslovakia and was expelled from the country.

Political Murder Suspect

The details of Mr. Kazan-Komarek's death are still trickling into the State Department from its consulate in Seville. From all the information obtained thus far, however, it does not appear to department officials—or to the Spanish police—that the dead man had been the victim of a classic and-dagger murder.

The judgment of the Spanish police, supported by a forensic pathologist, was that the death of a Spanish agent in Madrid last month was due to "a natural death due to myocardial infarction." The police report on the body showed "no signs of violence."

The body of the badly decomposed man, identified by Spanish police as that of a travel agent, was found in a gully near the body, bearing the name of



Associated Press
Vladimir Kazan-Komarek

Vladimir Kazan-Komarek and a key listing his apartment door.

The body was discovered on Sept. 7 in a roadside gully on a farm near Estepona, a small Spanish town on the Mediterranean coast where Mr. Kazan-Komarek had been living since November, 1971. The cadaver was found by a Spanish police officer who had the body buried after a preliminary autopsy in a cemetery in Estepona, where the death had occurred two months earlier.

Some major details of the death at the age of 48, however, remain as obscure as his background. It is a mystery whether he had been an anti-Communist underground operative in the United States and whether he had been involved in the hijacking of planes across the Atlantic and the Pacific.

A witness of the Nazis during World War II, Mr. Kazan-Komarek worked briefly for the German Foreign Office in Germany in 1945 and in 1946 and 1947 before returning to the United States in 1948. He was working for "French intelligence."

A flat on Spanish coast was acquired in the town of Estepona, on the Mediterranean coast, and identified in November, 1971, where he had a flat and a garage. He was working for "French intelligence" and was working on a book about

now sponsored by Intourist, the Soviet Government tourist agency, the Soviet airliner on which he was traveling — supposedly on a nonstop flight to Paris — made an unscheduled stop in Prague — for "mechanical reasons."

Mr. Kazan-Komarek was taken off the plane and charged by Czechoslovak authorities with setting up and operating an underground espionage and terrorist network in Czechoslovakia from 1948 to 1950 that was responsible for the death of a policeman.

Earlier Czechoslovak press reports, dating from 1951, had characterized Mr. Kazan-Komarek as an agent of United States Army Counterintelligence and had linked him to the Prague bureau of the Associated Press, which the Czechoslovak Government had charged was a center for espionage. William R. Oatis, the chief of the news service's bureau, was jailed for two years in Prague on espionage charges in the early 1950s.

Earlier Charge Dropped

During Mr. Kazan-Komarek's trial early in 1967, the earlier charge that he had been an American intelligence agent was quietly dropped by the Czechoslovak authorities, and instead it was suggested that he had been linked to a French intelligence organization that was never identified.

After his release, brought about largely through the intervention of Czechoslovak authorities by Senator Edward Brooke, Mr. Kazan-Komarek said that the charges against him had been partly dropped when Czechoslovak officials learned that he had been working for "French intelligence."

In the last few years, he says, his relationship with the Harvard Travel Service, and in October, 1971, he went to France leaving his wife and five children at their home in Cambridge, Mass.

A Flat on Spanish Coast

He acquired in the town of Estepona, on the Mediterranean coast, and identified in November, 1971, where he had a flat and a garage. He was working for "French intelligence" and was working on a book about

pilot safety and occasionally ferrying small planes to new owners.

On June 5, the United States consulate in Seville was informed by Samuel Berman, an American living in Estepona, that Mr. Kazan-Komarek had been missing since May 11. About that time, Mr. Kazan-Komarek had been scheduled to make a trip to the United States with Mr. and Mrs. R. A. Duncan, a Canadian couple living in Estepona.

The consulate discounted the missing-persons report filed by Mr. Berman after it was informed by the Spanish police that Mr. Kazan-Komarek had been seen during the first week of June.

Body's Discovery Not Reported

For reasons that the State Department cannot explain, the consulate also did not report the discovery of the body by the Spanish police in September. It was only after the Duncans wrote to Mrs. Kazan-Komarek at the end of October that the State Department learned of the death.

In interviews with State Department representatives, the Duncans expressed some doubt that the body was that of Mr. Kazan-Komarek. One of the questions they raised—which the State Department thus far has not been able to answer—was whether the teeth had been removed from the body for positive identification. State Department officials said that Mrs. Kazan-Komarek's permission would be required to examine the body to determine if the teeth were still there.

The Duncans also discounted any theory of suicide, reporting that Mr. Kazan-Komarek, before his disappearance, had been cheerful and had showed no signs of despondency.

Found near his body was a small empty bottle of aspirin.

State Department officials said there was no indication that Mr. Kazan-Komarek might still have been involved in intelligence work, and they insisted he had not been employed by any United States intelligence agency.

Mrs. Kazan-Komarek, in a telephone interview, declined to discuss her husband's death. But on one point she was emphatic. When asked whether Mr. Kazan-Komarek might have been involved in intelligence work, she replied: "Oh Lord, no!"