

Operation Barium

Summary: Operation Barium was a significant Czechoslovak resistance mission during World War II, organized by the Czechoslovak government-in-exile in cooperation with British intelligence. It involved three paratroopers Captain Josef Andera, Lieutenant Josef Fialka, and Lieutenant Tomáš Bělek who were parachuted into occupied Bohemia in April 1944 to establish a clandestine network within Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia to collect military and economic intelligence and support the local resistance. Then tra...

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Background

Following the 1939 Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, based in London, coordinated with Allied forces to carry out covert operations within the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. These missions were part of a broader effort to resist Nazi control and prepare for liberation.

Deployment and objectives

On the night of April 3/4, 1944, a two-man paratrooper team First Lieutenant Josef Andera and Staff Sergeant Josef Fialka was dropped into the Czech lands near the village of Vac ková, although they landed off-course near the Brdy mountains. Their mission, codenamed Barium, was to establish radio contact with London, gather intelligence on German military and economic activities, and connect with local resistance groups.

Resistance network and activities

Despite the difficult terrain and heightened Nazi surveillance, Andera and Fialka successfully integrated with the domestic resistance. With the help of local contacts, including the Froh family in Lázně who provided shelter and support, the operatives created a robust intelligence network. At its peak, the Barium network included over 380 individuals across multiple regions. Intelligence gathered was transmitted via radio to London and included data on military movements, armaments production along with details on the production and transportation of V-2 rocket components from Czech factories like Junkers in Prague-Vyšehrad and Semily and log

istical activities.

Collapse and arrests

The Gestapo infiltrated the network in October 1944, arresting over 100 members. Despite this, key figures like Štěpánka and Jiříka evaded capture for some time, continuing operations under the cover name "Marta". On January 16, 1945, the Gestapo raided a safehouse in the village of Hostivice near Zlín, where the Barium group was hiding. The network was dismantled, and many of its members were captured. The Froh family, who had assisted the operatives, were among those arrested and later executed.

Jiříka surrendered to prevent reprisals against locals but tragically took his own life in prison. Štěpánka succumbed to injuries on March 9, 1945, after attempting suicide during a Gestapo raid. Only Bělek survived the war, later emigrating to Great Britain. The mission's collapse dealt a serious blow to the local resistance but highlighted the bravery and sacrifice of those involved.

Legacy

Operation Barium is remembered as one of the most successful and expansive Czech-led resistance operations during the Second World War. Several memorials and plaques in the Czech Republic commemorate the mission, the fallen operatives, and the civilians who supported them. The operation remains a symbol of courage and defiance against Nazi oppression.

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