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The emergency security measures and “Operation Student” An overview of the activities of SNB units and troops of the Ministry of the Interior on November 17, 1989¹

The intervention of the security forces on November 17, 1989 that took place as part of the emergency security operation (Mimořádná bezpečnostní akce, MBA) and accompanying security measures (Bezpečnostní opatření, BO) codenamed “Student” and the deployment of Public Security (Veřejná bezpečnost, VB), State Security (Státní bezpečnost, StB) and Special Purposes Section (Odbor zvláštního určení, OZU) officers on Národní Street in Prague remains one of the least well-mapped events of this key period in our modern history.² Yet this final brutal action by the Czechoslovak security services, the culmination of the suppression of opposition demonstrations between 1987 and 1989, triggered the collapse of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia (Československá socialistická republika, ČSSR), a process of fundamental political change that became known as the Velvet Revolution (Sametová revoluce). Despite its major role in the dramatic climax of the student demonstration, both the complex organisation and management of the entire operation and also – surprisingly – the identification of the specific units deployed has so far been somewhat neglected by researchers.

In the first half of the 1980s, the Federal Ministry of the Interior (Federální ministerstvo vnitra, FMV) created a seven-tiered system of emergency security measures (Mimořádné bezpečnostní opatření, MBO) and security operations (Bezpečnostní akce, BA) to perform tasks that the National Security Corps (Sbor národní bezpečnos-

1 A shorter Czech version of this text was published in ŽÁČEK, Pavel: *Jakešovo gestapo. Komunistické mocenské orgány a listopad 1989* (Jakeš's Gestapo. Communist Law and Order Bodies and November 1989). Svět křidel, Cheb 2019, pp. 279–310.

2 Cf. ŽÁČEK, Pavel: *Vypovídat pravdu a nic nezamlčet. Protokoly parlamentní vyšetřovací komise pro objasnění události 17. listopadu 1989* (Telling the Truth and Keeping Nothing Secret. Records of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry to Clarify the Events of November 17, 1989), Part 2. CEVRO LKA, Prague 2013; Idem: Operativní průzkum centrály Státní bezpečnosti. Neznámá kapitola z demonstrace 17. listopadu 1989 (An Operational Survey of State Security Headquarters. An Unknown Chapter from the November 17, 1989 Demonstration). *Paměť a dějiny*, 2014, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 70–81; also mentioned in MUZIKANTOVÁ, Marie: Pohotovostní pluk VB ČSR (1969) 1970–1990. Nástin organizačního vývoje. (The Emergency Regiment of Czechoslovakia's Public Security corps /1969/ 1970–1990. An Outline of its Organisational Development). In: *Sborník Archivu Ministerstva vnitra*, No. 2. OABS MV ČR, Prague 2004, pp. 92–93; VÁVRA, Josef: Demonstrace v roce 1989 z pohledu Veřejné bezpečnosti a polská inspirace Pohotovostního pluku VB ČSR (The Demonstrations of 1989 from the Perspective of Public Security and the Polish Inspiration for the Emergency Regiment of Czechoslovakia's Public Security corps). In: *Sborník archivu bezpečnostních složek*, No. 9. ABS, Prague 2011, pp. 203–214; HRADIL, Radomil: *17. listopad '89 – co se stalo na Národní* (November 17, 1989 – What Happened On Národní Street). Franesa, Lelekovice 2019, pp. 138–147.

ti, SNB) was unable to carry out by itself. It was divided into tiers corresponding to the gravity of the security situation in the territory concerned; higher MBO tiers even counted on the deployment of the Communist Party's praetorian guard, the People's Militia (Lidové milice, LM), as well as regular Czechoslovak People's Army (Československá lidová armáda, ČSLA)³ troops. To counter what were perceived as extraordinary threats to peace and public order, in the Czech Socialist Republic (Česká socialistická republika, ČSR), Public Security riot units were deployed to suppress demonstrations – or “mass anti-social manifestations” to use the official terminology of the time – which were established at either district or regional level, as well as riot units of the Public Security Emergency Regiment (Pohotovostní pluk VB, PP VB).⁴

Pursuant to Decree No. 7/1982 issued by the ČSR Minister of the Interior, the Chiefs of the SNB's Regional Directorates – including the Chief of the SNB Prague and Central Bohemia Directorate – set up Trainee Emergency Brigades (Školní pohotovostní oddíl, ŠPO) to act as emergency reserves to be deployed under a single commander for situations which could be not be handled by regular forces and ordinary measures.

The Emergency Regiment – which consisted of 1,200 trainees and 400 permanent members⁵, one of whose three battalions (each numbering about 350 officers)⁶ remained on permanent standby for immediate deployment – was considered to be a decisive force. The Emergency unit had at their disposal special equipment, which was, however, in some cases obsolete (wheeled armoured vehicles) or in short supply (water cannon, teargas grenade launchers, efficient lighting equipment etc.)⁷

Until mid-1988, the Emergency Regiment performed three basic tasks:

- (a) establishing permanent readiness of officers and technical equipment to deal with emergencies, demonstrations and public order violations by large groups of people;
- (b) strengthening the performance of the VB's security forces in big cities with large concentrations of populations;
- (c) acting as a vocational school for officers deployed with the PP VB.⁸

Trainees with secondary school education admitted to the Emergency Regiment were released after 19 months' training and those with elementary education after 23 months. The course of service counted towards their basic military service. In its early years, the regiment fulfilled the role of elementary school for the National Secu-

3 ŽÁČEK, Pavel (ed.): Organizace a řízení represe v ČSSR. Operační štáby generála Lorence 1988–1989 (The Organisation and Management of Repression in the ČSSR. General Lorenc's Operational Staffs 1988–1989). *Securitas Imperii*, 1998, No. 4/I, p. 263. For extraordinary security measures cf. Idem: General Lorenc's Operational Staffs from 1988 to 1989. FMV Crisis Management in Action. *Ibid.*, pp. 7–29.

4 *Ibid.*, No. 4/II, p. 455, note 1.

5 Emergency Units (Pohotovostní útvary, PÚ) of the VB (PP VB ČSR, PÚ VB SSR) were established by Government Decree No. 180/1969; the Emergency Unit of the VB in the Slovak Socialist Republic (SSR) was located in Bratislava and had 565 trainees and 190 permanently attached officers. *Ibid.*, p. 56, note 48. As of March 1, 1984, 393 officers, 1,158 trainees and 101 civilian staff were permanently assigned to the Emergency Regiment of the VB ČSR. MUZIKANTOVÁ, Marie: *Pohotovostní pluk VB ČSR (1969) 1970–1990*, p. 90.

6 ŽÁČEK, Pavel (ed.): Organizace a řízení represe v ČSSR. Operační štáby generála Lorence 1988–1989. *Securitas Imperii*, 1998, No. 4/II, p. 456, note 1.

7 *Ibid.*, No. 4/I, p. 263.

8 MUZIKANTOVÁ, Marie: *Pohotovostní pluk VB ČSR (1969) 1970–1990*, p. 91.

rity Corps. From 1974, it also acted as a secondary vocational school with a school-leaving examination at the end of it. In total, over 13,000 officers were trained for practical deployment, more than 6,000 of whom received a full secondary education.⁹

Developments in late 1980s Czechoslovakia, especially in the capital Prague, forced the Communist regime to beef up security measures, on one hand by increasing the operability of the Emergency Regiment – whose organisational units (platoons, companies and battalions) practiced intervening against demonstrators – and on the other, using members of the Trainee Emergency Brigades or day students of various departmental schools (as reserves of the Federal Minister of the Interior) as well as members of the riot units of territorial formations (district and municipal directorates of the SNB).¹⁰

March 1989 saw regular half-year training exercises for the First and Second Battalions of the Emergency Regiment, in April both battalions exercised together as a whole, and in early August all three battalions repeated their training. Various types of intervention were practiced: with the help of water cannon and armoured vehicles, without such equipment, combinations of the two. From a tactical point of view, the units practised classic crowd control techniques, then variants known as “RUKÁV” (Sleeve) (encircling and pushing demonstrators into adjacent spaces) and “VAJÍČKO” (Egg) (encircling demonstrators on the spot and gradually taking them away for arrest).¹¹

Senior officials in charge of the Czech Socialist Republic’s Ministry of the Interior and Environment (Ministerstvo vnitra a životního prostředí, MVŽP) announced *that the units are ready to perform operations under a single command using technical equipment, i.e. water cannon and armoured vehicles as well as without it, using only members of the riot units and milder methods of coercion*.¹² As well as transport, all battalions were supplied with the appropriate means of suppressing demonstrations (OT-64 armoured vehicles, water cannon).

Leaders of Prague’s Public Security Municipal Directorate (Městská správa VB, MS VB) and the Emergency Regiment discussed and prepared scenarios for intervention at selected locations where they anticipated disturbances of the peace and public order offences. These were mainly the city centre (Wenceslas Square, Old Town Square and Náměstí Míru square), as well as Letná, Stromovka and Kampa. In addition to the practised scenarios, the riot units were also expected to be ready to respond as necessary at any other location.

The riot units practiced three different procedural plans of action. When the time and place of the anticipated disturbance of the peace and public order were known, the area would be closed off, or the crowd would be forced out of the area concerned by riot police themselves, with the assumption that People’s Militia units would be

9 Ibid., pp. 91–92.

10 ŽÁČEK, Pavel (ed.): Organizace a řízení represe v ČSSR. Operační štáby generála Lorence 1988–1989. *Securitas Imperii*, 1998, No. 4/I, pp. 262–263.

11 MUZIKANTOVÁ, Marie: *Pohotovostní pluk VB ČSR (1969) 1970–1990*, p. 92.

12 Such “mild methods” included, among other things, the use of batons. ŽÁČEK, Pavel (ed.): Organizace a řízení represe v ČSSR. Operační štáby generála Lorence 1988–1989. *Securitas Imperii*, 1998, No. 4/II, p. 456, note 1.

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called upon for assistance. Under this first procedure, those demonstrators who refused to obey orders to disperse as well as the demonstration organisers etc. were to be detained.

The second variant was based on the assumption of aggressive behaviour of individuals or groups, physical attacks against law enforcement, destruction of property and so on. In this case, in addition to deploying SNB and LM officers, technical equipment – especially water cannon, tear gas and police dogs – was to be used. This second option counted on deploying reserve troops from the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

In the third option, in the event of serious violence and rampant destruction, in addition to direct intervention, the security forces envisaged the deployment of armoured vehicles to “protect the riot units”, destroy barricades or detain “leaders of aggressive groups”. This would envisage the use of troops and resources from the FMV, and possibly the army as well.

Continuous attention was paid to the security situation with the aim of ensuring or restoring the peace and maintaining public order. Public Security officers were primed politically to carry out the tasks assigned to them, acquainted with the nationwide situation and informed about the activities of independent initiatives or the standpoints of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Ústřední výbor Komunistické strany Československa, ÚV KSČ).¹³

The emergency security operation

On November 14, 1989, the Secretariat of the Communist Party Municipal Committee (Městský výbor KSČ, MěV KSČ) approved “political and organisational measures for securing the gathering of Prague university students” on International Student Day, which included an instruction to the Chief of the MěV state administration department, Antonín Kašpar, and the Chief of the National Security Corps Directorate for Prague and the Central Bohemian Region (SNB Prague Directorate), Colonel Dr Antonín Chmelíček: *Prepare measures to prevent possible provocations by groups of students who would like the march to follow a different route (Opletalova st[reet]).*¹⁴

In the week before the demonstration, the absent Chief of Directorate was represented by his First Deputy, the Chief of the State Security (StB) Prague Directorate Colonel Dr Jiří Bytčánek, who, either on November 15 or 16, 1989, approached the leadership of the Federal Ministry of the Interior. *Based on evidence we've obtained that*

13 Ibid.

14 *Vojenský ústřední archiv – Správní archiv Ministerstva obrany ČR* (hereafter referred to as Central Military Archives – Administrative Archive of the Czech Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic) (VÚA-SA MOČR), Fund (f.) Vyšší vojenský soud České Budějovice, pobočka Tábor (Higher Military Court in České Budějovice, Tábor branch) (VVS Tábor), sp. zn. (File No.) T 10/91, sv. (Vol.) XXVII, Informace k MBA 17. 11. 1989 (podklady). K bodu: Politicko-organizační zabezpečení shromáždění pražských vysokoškoláků dne 17. 11. 1989. Materiál sekretariátu předkládal tajemník MěV KSČ pro oblast vysokých škol a kultury Ing. Viktor Pázler (Information on the MBA November 17, 1989 /documentation/. To the point: Political and organizational organization of meeting of Prague's students on November 17, 1989.

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*the event organised by the SSM to commemorate the death of Jan Opletal is to be abused by anti-social elements – correction – abused for anti-social manifestations and disturbing the peace and order in Prague, I have consulted the matter with the ČSSR Minister of the Interior and his First Deputy, and security measures are to be drawn up in order to ensure peace and order.*¹⁵

On the morning of November 16, 1989, Major Antonín Hrbotický, Chief of the Operational Department of the Public Security Emergency Regiment, was invited to attend a briefing with instructions on “eventual deployment”, a meeting which began at 1 p. m. at the SNB Directorate building in Prague. At the same time, he was also told that two Emergency Regiment battalions would be earmarked for the upcoming security measures.

The meeting, with the Chief of the Operational Department Major Jaroslav Knížka, was also attended by his superior, the Chief of the Organisational and Operational Department of the SNB Prague Directorate Major Zdeněk Vaníček, the Chief of the Prague Public Security Municipal Directorate Lt. Colonel Michal Danišovič, the battalion commanders of the Emergency Regiment, the commander of the riot unit of the Public Security Central Bohemia Directorate (Správa VB, S VB) Major Bedřich Houbal, the Chief of the SNB Prague 1 District Directorate (Obvodní správa, OS) Lt. Colonel Dr Jaroslav Šejvl, the Chief of the SNB Prague 2 District Directorate Lt. Colonel Dr Zdeněk Kaše and the deputy Chief of the SNB Prague 4 District Directorate.¹⁶ It included a tour of the area of the anticipated deployment and also a selection of stations where riot units were to be deployed. The meeting’s participants were informed that the students had been permitted to gather at Albertov for a maximum of 30 minutes and a subsequent march was to be allowed only along Na Slupi Street to Vyšehrad. *An independent initiative, however, is planning to get students gathered at Albertov to march towards Wenceslas Square and Opletalova [Street], and there are also signs of a planned unauthorised gathering on Wenceslas Square at 5 p. m.*

To deal with the eventuality of the gathering taking an unauthorised turn, three possible routes of the march (and “possible interventions” to stop it) were examined: Albertov – Ke Karlovu, Albertov – Viničná and Albertov – Na Slupi towards Vyšehradská Street. Officials counted on the deployment of the SNB Prague Directorate’s emergency unit, while the Emergency Regiment units deployed at Bartolomějská Street, Charles Square and Friedrich Engels Embankment (now Rašín Embankment) were to serve only as backup. *We were informed that a request had been made by the SNB Directorate to declare an MBO.* The aim of the operation was formulated in the order: *Not to allow a march through Prague.*¹⁷ The conclusion of the meeting was captured

15 Ibid., Vol. I, Protokol o výslechu svědka Jiřího Bytčánka (Record of questioning of witness J. Bytčánek), 2. 12. 1989, p. 318. Bytčánek later specified that he had dealt with the First Deputy Minister of the Interior, Lt. Gen. Alojz Lorenc, Deputy Chief of the SNB Second Directorate Lt. Colonel Miroslav Chovanec and apparently with the Chief of the SNB Second Directorate Colonel Karel Vykypěl. Ibid., Record of questioning of witness J. Bytčánek, 12. 1. 1990, p. 324.

16 Cf. Ibid., Record of questioning of J. Bytčánek, 12. 1. 1990, p. 325.

17 ŽÁČEK, Pavel: *Z Albertova na Národní třídu. 17. listopad 1989 v Praze 2 pohledem komunistických bezpečnostních složek* (From Albertov to Národní street. November 17, 1989 in Prague 2 from the Perspective of the Communist Security Forces). Vladimír Vyskočil publishers – KORŠACH, Prague 2019, pp. 28–29.

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in the logbook of Lt. Colonel Danišovič: *The opinion of the MěV KSČ and FMV is that a march through Prague must not be permitted.*¹⁸

In the evening of November 16, 1989, the acting Chief of the SNB Prague Directorate Colonel Bytčánek declared, with the intention of *securing peace and public order during celebrations of the 50th anniversary of International Student Day and the memorial event for Jan Opletal*, a 24-hour emergency security operation starting at dawn on November 17, 1989 and, from 2 p. m., accompanying security measures codenamed “Student”.¹⁹

According to the directive, the emergency security operation represented a *body of extensive security measures aimed at carrying out serious security tasks, the fulfilment of which usually requires the deployment of a significant number of SNB officers and resources beyond the stipulated basic weekly period of service for a longer period of time, reinforced by SNB officers from units deployed in places other than where the unit deployed for the MBA is located, or units not subordinate to it, or reinforcement units*. The term “serious tasks” meant, in particular, the provision of official regime operations, if these events were attended by considerable numbers of people and if extensive transport measures were to be carried out.²⁰

The Chief of the SNB Regional Directorate was also empowered – to the extent required and for the necessary time – to declare an emergency security operation, but only with the prior approval of the relevant Minister of the Interior.²¹ The deployment of members of the National Security Corps from units of the Interior Ministries (MV) and the SNB as well as MV troops for use in planned operations, something that was decided by SNB unit Chiefs, had to be approved – depending on the type of operation concerned – either by the federal Czechoslovak Interior Minister or the Minister of the Interior and Environment of the Czech Socialist Republic.²²

The Chiefs of the SNB Prague Directorate had received information that the route of the student march would lead from the Hlava Institute of Pathology and Anatomy at Albertov straight to Vyšehrad, where it was to end with a memorial ceremony at the grave of the Czech romantic poet Karel Hynek Mácha (1810–1836). Because of differences of opinion between the student organisers, it was assumed that some participants would try to keep to the original route of the march through the Streets of Prague, from the Institute of Pathology through Charles Square, along Štěpánská Street to the Main Railway Station.

Orders were given for the creation of a team to oversee the “Student” security measures, led by the Chief of the Prague Public Security Municipal Directorate Lt. Colonel Danišovič, at least formally composed only of the Chief of the Organi-

18 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. XVI, Autentizovaný sešit (logbook) of accused Danišovič, p. 3962/128.

19 ŽÁČEK, Pavel: *Z Albertova na Národní třídu*, p. 30–31.

20 Idem (ed.): *Organizace a řízení represe v ČSSR. Operační štáby generála Lorence 1988–1989. Securitas Imperii*, 1998, No. 4/I, p. 14.

21 Ibid.

22 *Archív bezpečnostních složek* (Security Services Archive Prague) (ABS), f. RV – rozkazy, věstníky, služební pomůcky (orders, bulletins, service aids). Nařízení ministra vnitra ČSSR, o systému mimořádných bezpečnostních opatření a bezpečnostních akcí, čl. 50/2 (Decree of the Minister of the Interior of the ČSSR on the system of extraordinary security measures and security operations, Art. 50/2). In: *Věstník federálního ministerstva vnitra*, částka (No.) 9, 1. 7. 1982.

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sational and Analytical Department (Organizační a analytický odbor, OAO) Major Dr Josef Šulc, the analyst and senior special OAO operations officer Captain Zbyňek Žába, the senior OAO clerk Junior Warrant Officer Tařána Viktorová and two technicians from the Department of Forensic Equipment and Expertise Major Petr Binder (video) and Captain Dr Zdenek Vejvoda (photographs). It was based at the operations centre of the Prague SNB Directorate and the building of the Prague Public Security Municipal Directorate, located at No. 2 Kongresová Street, Prague 4.²³

Responsibility for "Operation Student" fell to Lt. Colonel Daniřovič, who was also charged with selecting the responsible officials for leading the individual units, producing an outline of security measures along the lines of the VB District Directorate to secure the march to Vyřehrad, providing five dog handlers for the riot unit and last but not least, choosing reserves from twelve officers from the Transport Section and three vehicles. In addition, both the Municipal Directorate Chief and the Public Security Directorate Chief were given the task of assigning members of the Trainee Emergency Brigade to make up the riot unit.

Major Zdeněk Vaříček, Chief of the SNB Directorate's Organisational and Operational Department (Organizační a operační odbor, OOO), in cooperation with officials from the SNB District Directorates, provided for the creation of two reserve squads of Public Security officers from Prague 3 to Prague 10, and two reserve squads from other departments of the SNB Prague Directorate (each made up of 2 + 40 deployed officers).

The following day, the Chief of the SNB Prague 1 District Directorate Lt. Colonel řejvl, the Chief of the SNB Prague 2 District Directorate Lt. Colonel Kaře and the Chief of the SNB Prague 4 District Directorate Lt. Colonel Dr Antonín Starka were to declare their own security measures (on Wenceslas Square in Prague 1 these measures were to be given the code name "Socha I" /Statue/) and ensure peace and public order *along the course of the officially-sanctioned meeting and march*, as well as the dispersal routes from Vyřehrad, the area around the Palace of Culture (now Prague Congress Centre) and Gottwaldov (now Vyřehrad) metro station, Old Town Square and the park in front of the Main Railway Station. Operations groups were to be created at the local Public Security departments at Bartolomějská, Benediktská, řkolská, Nové Město and Vinohrady.

The Chief of the State Security Prague Directorate Colonel Bytčánek assigned himself the task – together with the SNB Surveillance Directorate (SNB Fourth Directorate) – of preparing their own security measures²⁴, allocating 10 members of the Department for the Fight Against Internal Enemies (Second Department) dressed in uniform version 60 to work in synergy with the riot unit of the Trainee Emergency Brigade and three plainclothes officers to carry out operational reconnaissance. One specific task was to brief members of the MV Troop Directorate's (Správa vojsk MV, SV MV) Special Purposes Section at a meeting planned for 1 p. m. at the Bartolomějská offices.²⁵

23 Today the Czech Police – Regional Police Directorate of the City of Prague.

24 Cf. BENDA, Patrik – ŽÁČEK, Pavel (eds.): Denní situační zprávy StB z listopadu a prosince 1989 (Daily StB situational reports from November and December 1989). *Securitas Imperii*, 2000, No. 6/II, pp. 410–414.

25 ŽÁČEK, Pavel: *Z Albertova na Národní třídu*, pp. 30–34.

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As the commander of the Trainee Emergency Brigade’s riot unit, Major Houbal and his deputy, First Lieutenant Jaroslav Ledinský, were issued with plans for the “Operation Student” security action in an annex attached to the order. In total, the riot unit was to be composed of 72 ŠPO members, 10 State Security Prague Directorate officers, 30 officers from the MV Troop Directorate’s Special Purposes Section, five dog-handlers from the Motorised Emergency Unit (Pohotovostní motorizovaná jednotka, PMJ), 24 officers from the SNB Prague Directorate’s Economic Department in escort vehicles (3 buses containing 1 + 7 persons) and dog-handler’s vans (cars fitted with cages) for the dog-handlers. The Trainee Emergency Brigade was to report for duty at 3.30 p. m. at its gathering point at U nemocnice Street in Prague 2.

At 3 p. m., five operational reconnaissance vehicles occupied by drivers from the SNB Prague Directorate’s Economic Department, each accompanied by one officer from the State Security Prague Directorate, were deployed and ordered to operate at designated locations along the Streets Na Slupi – Albertov, Studničkova – Albertov, Studničkova behind the Forensic Medicine building, Apolinářská – Viničná and Ke Karlovu – Albertov.

By 2 p. m., four teams of reinforcements and two mobile radio transmitters had gathered in the car park of the Museum of the SNB and the Troops of the Ministry of the Interior at Karlov, in front of the local Public Security office in Vyšehradská Street and inside the cinema on the third floor of No. 7, Bartolomějská Street.

Reserve Unit No. 1 commanded by Captain Jiří Exner and his deputy First Lieutenant Jiří Šlajs from the Railway Department of the SNB Prague 2 District Department accompanied by 40 Public Security riot unit officers (ten each from the OS SNB in Prague 3, Prague 4, Prague 5 and Prague 6).

Reserve Unit No. 2 commanded by Captain Jiří Srdínko and his deputy Junior Warrant Officer Petr Jeřábek from the local Public Security unit of the SNB Prague 2 New Town District Department accompanied by 40 Public Security riot unit officers (ten each from the OS SNB in Prague 7, Prague 8, Prague 9 and Prague 10).

Reserve Unit No. 3 commanded by Lieutenant Ivan Chroustovský and his deputy Captain Jan Roh from the riot unit of the Public Security Prague Municipal Directorate accompanied by 40 SNB officers (10 from the MS VB Prague, 20 from the SNB Prague Directorate Political Commissar department and 10 security guard officers).

Reserve Unit No. 4 commanded by First Lieutenant Josef Hojka and his deputy Lieutenant Jan Badura from the riot unit of the Public Security Municipal Directorate accompanied by 40 SNB officers (20 from the MS VB Prague and 20 from the StB Prague Directorate).

The equipment and weapons for the first two reserve units were determined according to the regulations governing riot units and they were not carrying bags. The other two units were to be dressed in uniform version 60, armed with 70-type pistols and carrying two cartridges, handcuffs, pepper spray, batons and a sufficient number of official notepads to keep records of anyone detained.

Two buses (2 + 14 persons, occupied by Public Security Officers from the SNB Prague 5 and Prague 9 District Directorates) were deployed to act as escorts, which were to be ready for deployment from 3 p. m. in the car park of the Czechoslovak

Socialist Republic (Československá socialistická republika, ČSSR) Federal Assembly building in Vítězného února (now Wilsonova) Street along with a dog-handler's van of the Motorised Emergency Unit (1 + 3 persons).

The Third and Second Battalions of the most important riot unit – the Emergency Regiment of the ČSR Public Security (PP VB) – commanded by Lt. Colonel Dr Břetislav Zdráhala was designated as a reserve unit. The Third Battalion led by Major Miroslav Valčík commanding 407 SNB officers²⁶ was initially deployed in three companies at 3.30 p. m.: First Company and Second Company were sent to the area around Výtoň and Friedrich Engels Embankment and Third Company was deployed to No. 21 Charles Square. The reduced Second Battalion commanded by Major Dr Liboslav Jícha did deploy all three of its companies to its designated station at Bartolomějská No. 6, but the force only numbered 189 officers; the rest of the unit was ordered to stay at its base in Prague's Hrdlořezy district.²⁷

All members of the Emergency Regiment were dressed in official “OLIVE” uniforms with fur coats and white helmets, and armed with batons, cans of pepper spray, handcuffs, service pistols with 16 rounds of ammunition, and some of them carried riot shields.²⁸

The number of forces deployed for individual security measures was preliminarily approved as follows: “Vyšehrad” Security Operation (BO) – 61 Public Security (VB) officers and 25 State Security (StB) officers, “Socha I” BO – 147 VB officers and 17 StB officers, while the “Student” BO itself had six VB officers at staff command and another 931 VB officers along with 10 StB officers deployed on the Streets.²⁹

In the early hours of November 17, 1989, the Chief of the Internal and Organisational Directorate (Vnitřní a organizační správa, VOS) of the FMV, Lt. Colonel Miroslav Dostal, submitted to the Czechoslovak Minister of the Interior, Lieutenant General František Kincl, a proposal from the Chief of the SNB Prague Directorate for the declaration of an emergency security operation.³⁰ *A considerable number of officers from the SNB Prague and Central Bohemia Directorate, the Second Directorate [of the SNB] and Fourth Directorate [of the SNB] the PP-VB MV ČSR and SV MV. Given that these officers will carry out the required tasks continuously during the course of the measures and the granting of compensatory leave for hours worked beyond the stipulated period of service would create considerable complications in ensuring the normal performance of the service, I hereby request permission to declare an MBA...*³¹

26 While order No. 27/1989 issued by the Chief of the SNB's Prague and Central Bohemia Region Directorate stipulated that the Third Battalion of the PP VB would earmark 300 members, in the end 407 trainees and 25 commanders – 432 members in total – were deployed. This disparity was probably compensated by a smaller number of members deployed from the Second Battalion of the PP VB. Cf. ŽÁČEK, Pavel: *Z Albertova na Národní třídu*, p. 104.

27 Ibid., pp. 35–39.

28 Ibid., pp. 104–105.

29 Ibid., p. 39.

30 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. XXI, Protokol o výsledku svědka F. Kincla (Record of questioning of witness F. Kincl), 6. 9. 1991, p. 4895.

31 ŽÁČEK, Pavel (ed.): *Organizace a řízení represe v ČSSR. Operační štáby generála Lorence 1988–1989. Securitas Imperii*, 1998, No. 4/III, p. 710.

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At the same time, the Chief of the VOS FMV received a draft order from the main operations centre, expanding the declaration of an emergency security operation for units of the National Security Corps, Border Guards (Pohraniční stráž) and MV troops throughout the ČSSR until the early hours of November 20, 1989.³² During the subsequent investigation, Lt. Colonel Dostál was unable to explain this procedure other than it was an attempt to secure “special remuneration” for the deployed officers. *This was the usual procedure in previous cases too, because if an MBA wasn’t declared, SNB officers were only entitled to compensatory leave for time served beyond their fixed working hours.*³³

In the morning, there was an operational meeting of the Minister of the Interior of the ČSSR Lieutenant General František Kincl, at which he charged his First Deputy, Lieutenant General Alojz Lorenc with ensuring the necessary measures for November 17, 1989 during his absence (even though his deputy, Colonel Otto Sedlák, was to remain at his post in Prague until November 18, 1989). At the same time, he informed the meeting that an emergency security operation had been declared from Friday, lasting throughout the whole weekend.³⁴

Order No. 16/1989 of the Federal Minister of the Interior, signed on the occasion of International Student Day, was to run from 8 a. m. on November 17 to November 20, 1989. It declared an emergency security operation to ensure peace and public order throughout the federation, and following its signature by Lieutenant General Kincl of the Internal and Organisational Directorate of the FMV, was distributed to subordinates in the afternoon. The emergency security operation pertained to departments of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, departments subordinate to the FMV, departments of the security divisions of the individual Ministries of the Interior and the Environment of the Czech and Slovak Socialist Republics, the SNB Prague Directorate, the SNB Bratislava and Western Slovakia Regional Directorate, the SNB Regional Directorates, the SNB District Directorates and departments of the same level as them.

Taking into account the security situation in their territory, the Chiefs of these units were responsible for announcing their own emergency security operations and determining the required percentage of availability or readiness of their officers or in close cooperation with other units, ensuring the allocation of forces and resources to strengthen the security services. Last but not least, the order provided for the timely and smooth flow of information through the operations centres to the Minister to make him aware of any signs of disturbance of peace and public order.³⁵

Meanwhile, in the morning hours, the commander of the Emergency Regiment Lt. Colonel Zdráhala reported to the first deputy at the ČSR Ministry of the Interior and Environment, Major General Dr Karel Novák, that he would be attending an

32 Ibid., pp. 706–707.

33 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. VII, Protokol o výslechu svědka M. Dostála (Record of questioning of witness M. Dostál), 22. 12. 1989, p. 1970.

34 ŽÁČEK, Pavel (ed.): Organizace a řízení represe v ČSSR. Operační štáby generála Lorence 1988–1989. *Securitas Imperii*, 1998, No. 4/III, p. 713.

35 Ibid., pp. 707–708.

8 a. m. meeting with the acting Chief of the SNB Prague Directorate, Colonel Bytčánek. In his own words, Novák said he had no objections to this and gave his tentative permission for two battalions to be set aside for the operation.³⁶

At the meeting Lt. Colonel Zdráhala received confirmation that in connection with the declaration of the emergency security operation, his two battalions, plus six OT-64 armoured vehicles to be used as mobile barriers and three water cannon trucks had been earmarked for the operation. The commander of the Emergency Regiment noted that the object of the operation, i.e. to prevent any unauthorised demonstrations and to stop the crowd reaching Wenceslas Square or crossing any of the bridges towards Prague Castle, was formulated only orally and did not exist in writing. *On the orders of the Chief of the VB (sic) Municipal Directorate, which were given to me to read in the operations centre after 2 p. m. in the afternoon, I learned the whole aim of the operation.* Lt. Colonel Zdráhala had already asked the Chief of the Public Security Prague Municipal Directorate why they should *be setting up barriers when intervention was not permitted in the event of citizens refusing to disperse.* Lt. Colonel Danišovič answered: *that's the order that must be followed.*³⁷ According to information from Chief of Staff Lt. Colonel Václav Váňa, the Emergency Regiment did not receive the order from the ČSSR Minister of the Interior declaring a nationwide emergency security operation until 3 p. m.³⁸

Around 3 p. m., Order No. 16/1989 declaring an emergency security operation was also delivered by telex to the Minister of the Interior and the Environment Dr Václav Jireček, who verified that it also applied to security sections of his ministry. He in turn ordered his first deputy to draft his own order.³⁹ Major General Novák drafted Order No. 11/1989 on the ensuring of peace and public order in the Czech Socialist Republic for the minister to sign. For the duration of the emergency security operation, 30 % of the officers serving in units of the security section of the Czech Socialist Republic's Ministry of the Interior and the Environment were to be made available, and 50 % of their commanders.⁴⁰ *The two PP battalions earmarked for the operation were placed under the command of the Chief of the SNB Directorate [...]. The individual subordinate units of the security departments of the MVŽP were informed of the Minister's order.*⁴¹

For the purposes of the SNB Prague Directorate's "Operation Student", the issuing of the two orders made possible the deployment of both state (the ČSR VB's Emergency Regiment) and federal units of State Security, including the SNB's Chief Counter-Intelligence Directorate (the SNB Second Directorate), the SNB Surveil-

36 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. II, Protokol o výslechu svědka K. Nováka (Record of questioning of witness K. Novák), 3. 12. 1989, p. 473.

37 Ibid., Protokol o výslechu svědka B. Zdráhaly (Record of questioning of witness B. Zdráhala), 2. 12. 1989, p. 375.

38 Ibid.

39 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. V, Protokol o výslechu svědka V. Jirečka (Record of questioning of witness V. Jireček), 14. 12. 1989, p. 1431.

40 Ibid., sv. XXVIII, Rozkaz MVŽP ČSR č. 11 „Vyhlášení mimořádné bezpečnostní akce“ ze 17. 11. 1989 (MVŽP ČSR Order No. 11 “Declaring an Emergency Security Operation” from November 17, 1989). In: *Věstník Ministerstva vnitra a životního prostředí ČSR, částka (No.) 11*, from November 17, 1989. Cf. *Studentské listy*, 1990, No. 20, p. 1.

41 Ibid., sv. II, Protokol o výslechu svědka K. Nováka, 12. 12. 1989, p. 473.

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lance Directorate (the SNB Fourth Directorate) and in particular officers of the Special Purposes Section of the Ministry of the Interior Troop Directorate.

The riot unit commanded by Major Bedřich Houbal

The commander of the Trainee Emergency Brigade, Major Houbal, also attended a briefing on November 16, 1989 at Albertov itself, in connection with preparations for the upcoming “student commemoration”. The officers gathered there discussed potential tasks for the following day, on the assumption that the event could take on a different character to the one planned, and that marchers might try to head to the city centre. If the crowd showed signs of wanting to head towards Wenceslas Square, the Trainee Emergency Brigade was to take a starting position in U nemocnice Street, from where Na Slupi, Viničná and Ke Karlovu Streets could be closed off as required. The officer in charge of the briefing, Major Knížka, informed Major Houbal that he would be joined by a unit of the Special Purposes Section of the Ministry of the Interior Troop Directorate, which would be given the task of detaining and taking away initiators and aggressive demonstrators. *I might add that Comrade Knížka formulated the relationship of this unit to my unit literally with the words: “This unit will be attached to the riot unit”.* Knížka also asked Houbal to make sure the two commanders (of the ŠPO and OZU units) worked together, for example if it proved necessary to detain demonstrators, such requests were to be forwarded to the group of State Security and Special Purposes Section officers.

Major Houbal could therefore count on 72 members of the Trainee Emergency Brigade, of whom, however, only 55 were available for the operation itself (+ the commanders – author’s note); the remaining 13 officers were held in reserve. With the officers seconded to him from Prague State Security and the Special Purposes Section, his riot unit had grown by some 40 men, who were, however, *to carry out tasks of their own*. Last but not least, he was assigned five dog-handlers and officers in the escort vehicles.

At 2 p. m. on November 17, 1989, the Trainee Emergency Brigade gathered at the base at Roztylské Square in Prague 4. Its members arrived in four vehicles (probably Avia vans), followed by the dog-handlers who were told they would follow behind them.⁴² Major Houbal familiarised the team with the current situation; he focused the briefing on the expected deployment and laid out the internal organisation of the unit.⁴³ *At about 2.20 p. m., the [escort] bus [No. 3] arrived carrying a unit of 40 StB and OZU officers. [...] some of them were wearing red berets, they were the OZU officers, [some] wore camouflage, some windcheaters. The StB officers were in camouflage.* The deputy Chief of the MV Troop Directorate’s Special Purposes Section Major Petr Šesták, the commander of the earmarked unit and wearing a red beret, reported for duty. Major Houbal assigned the unit its place in the convoy between the dog-handlers, adding that

42 Ibid., sv. I, Protokol o výslechu obviněného B. Houbala (Record of questioning of accused B. Houbal), 3. 12. 1989, pp. 132–134.

43 ŽÁČEK, Pavel: *Z Albertova na Národní třídu*, p. 60.

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*until required to carry out their own intervention they were to remain in the third row behind us. I told him I would let them know if they were needed to intervene. That was the end of our conversation.*⁴⁴

At 3.07 p. m., the riot unit was instructed to move to the area around U nemocnice Street on Charles Square. Ten minutes later, one of the buses broke down on Bridge of Klement Gottwald (now Nusle Bridge), so Major Houbal arranged for substitute transport. The core of the unit, however, reached the designated location at 3.20 p. m., and just before 4 p. m. the remaining officers arrived by replacement bus. The commander ordered his officers not to leave their vehicles and remain in radio contact.

Only at 6.35 p. m. did the operations centre give Major Houbal further instructions to move to Národní Street.⁴⁵ *We stayed in position until 7.15 p. m., when I received an order by radio for my unit to move to Národní Street. I was told to go via Charles Square [- Palacký Bridge -] to Smíchov [- Újezd -] and back over May 1st Bridge (now Legion Bridge - author's note) to the National Theatre. I carried out the transfer and at about 7.35 p. m. we arrived at Národní Street. The column of vehicles stopped by the pavement on the right if you're coming from the River Vltava, the first of the vehicles was parked about as far up as the church [of St Ursula], which is behind the building of the [National Theatre] New Stage coming from the Vltava.*

Major Houbal reported in via radio to the operations centre and was immediately instructed to block Národní Street at the intersection with Karolíny Světlé Street.⁴⁶ He ordered the riot unit to leave their vehicles, and the platoon commanders set up their cordons according to plan (First Lieutenant Richard Pata's platoon created the first row and First Lieutenant Jaroslav Masák's platoon the second) at the intersection of Národní Street and Karolíny Světlé Street, 20 metres back towards Perštýn.⁴⁷ *The first cordon took up about 10–15 metres from the intersection back towards Můstek. Given that the initially determined number of 18 officers was insufficient for the width of Národní Street, I had to put approximately 35–40 of my officers in the first row, while the others were in the second row. I left [the remaining] 13 officers as backup in a vehicle parked by the National Theatre, and the dog-handlers were here as well. The third row consisted of those 40 OZU and StB officers. [...] I note that at this time I had no idea at all that the Emergency Regiment was facing us on the other side of the crowd.*⁴⁸

By 7.50 p. m. the riot unit had taken its place in the designated line-up 20 metres behind the intersection. The demonstrators sat down on the ground in response, shouting slogans and curses such as *Gestapo! Fascists! Down with the Communist Party! We want a new government! Stick Jakeš⁴⁹ in the bin! Death to the Communists!* etc. Major

44 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. I, Protokol o výslechu obviněného B. Houbala, 3. 12. 1989, p. 134.

45 Ibid., sv. XXVII, Úřední záznam (Official record), Capt. Žába, 24. 12. 1989, p. 90.

46 Ibid., sv. I, Protokol o výslechu obviněného B. Houbala, 3. 12. 1989, pp. 134–135.

47 Ibid., sv. XXVII, Pořádková jednotka S SNB hl. m. Prahy a Sčk., chronologický přehled (Riot unit of the SNB Prague and Central Bohemia Directorate, chronological overview), 17. 11. 1989.

48 Ibid., sv. I, Protokol o výslechu obviněného B. Houbala, 3. 12. 1989, p. 135.

49 Miloš Jakeš (born 1922), General Secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee 1987–1989, symbol of the decline of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia.

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Houbal asked the command centre to begin calling on the demonstrators to disperse from what was an unauthorised gathering.⁵⁰ *Of course, my officers were positioned on [both sides of the] pavement, but standing in a way that allowed people to pass between them, and they were really leaving the area in a constant stream. In this respect, I was also instructed via radio [...] to allow individuals to leave, but certainly not the whole crowd. People passed by us one by one or in small clusters and began to gather in groups behind us. That’s why I instructed my reinforcements to push these people towards the National Theatre.*⁵¹

With this in mind, the command centre of “Operation Student” gave the order to create a barricade of vehicles behind the third cordon to block off Národní Street.⁵² *It wasn’t very easy to get our vehicles in there, so I had [2 or] 3 of our Avia vans assemble on Národní Street side by side [...]. There was enough space for the [escort] buses to pass between them, even – later on – the armoured vehicles. It was a really complicated situation...*⁵³ At 8 p. m., when the “aggression” of the crowd was escalating and threatened to break through the cordon, Major Houbal closed the passage through the lines of riot police. Five minutes later, he asked the command centre to open Na Perštýně Street to permit those people who still wanted to leave the demonstration to do so.⁵⁴ *Because I honestly didn’t know the Emergency Regiment were stationed at Na Perštýně Street, I wanted people to head towards Na Perštýně, because I wanted to follow the order I had received not to let the crowd progress [any further] under any circumstances. It became quite difficult because there were really just a few of us against the crowd.*⁵⁵

At 8.05 p. m., acting on instructions of the command HQ, Major Houbal issued an order for his officers to begin detaining and taking away aggressive demonstrators, using restraining techniques and their service batons.⁵⁶ *I would like to say that my unit’s ordinary practice is that after the initiator or aggressive person has been identified, two or three officers from the first row move forward, detain the person, return with them to the first row, and hand them over to the second row, members of whom escort them to the vans [...]. The detaining officer is obliged to issue a card stating exactly what the person did and what offence they committed. I note that from that moment on, each officer bears full responsibility for his actions, that is to say, even [for using] mild means of coercion [...]. I passed on my orders, or the orders of my superiors, via the platoon commanders.*

Members of the Special Purposes Section moved from the third row to in front of the riot unit, facing the crowd. Major Houbal did not immediately have a clear view of them because he was in his Avia van at the junction of Národní and Karolíny Světlé streets.⁵⁷ *Once they began pulling people out of the crowd, it began backing away from them.*⁵⁸

50 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. XXVII, Pořádková jednotka S SNB hl. m. Prahy a Sčk., chronologický přehled, 17. 11. 1989.

51 Ibid., sv. I, Protokol o výsledku obviněného B. Houbala, 3. 12. 1989, pp. 135–136.

52 Ibid., sv. XXVII, Pořádková jednotka S SNB hl. m. Prahy a Sčk., chronologický přehled, 17. 11. 1989.

53 Ibid., sv. I, Protokol o výsledku obviněného B. Houbala, 3. 12. 1989, p. 136.

54 Ibid., sv. XXVII, Pořádková jednotka S SNB hl. m. Prahy a Sčk., chronologický přehled, 17. 11. 1989.

55 Ibid., sv. I, Protokol o výsledku obviněného B. Houbala, 3. 12. 1989, pp. 136–137.

56 Ibid., sv. XXVII, Pořádková jednotka S SNB hl. m. Prahy a Sčk., chronologický přehled, 17. 11. 1989.

57 Aware of the consequences of the intervention on Národní Street, Major Houbal reiterated that the StB and OZU units were not acting under his command and distanced himself from responsibility

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[...] *There weren't many people detained at this point. I can't give an estimate in terms of numbers, but it was truly just a few people. I can illustrate this by the fact that during the whole incident right until the very end of it, we didn't even fill the three escort buses I had available to me.*⁵⁹

After the protesters retreated, some people stayed standing on the pavement, and they quickly left. Objects were allegedly still being thrown at the officers from the crowd, and so Major Houbal decided – on his own initiative and without the approval of his superiors – that the riot squad should be brought into contact with the crowd. The first row of officers initially moved to a distance of about five metres from the corner of the intersection of Mikulandská and Národní streets. Then it proceeded as far as the Mikulandská Street intersection, which people were still leaving in a “normal” way. Special Purposes Section and State Security officers continued pulling people out of the crowd and detaining them. *We up took position at the corner of Mikulandská [Street] shortly after 8.15 p. m. [...]. The crowd's pressure on us began to grow. The situation was becoming critical, there was a danger of the crowd breaking through the cordon. This lasted until about 8.35 p. m., when I noticed a unit of about 20–25 officers coming from the direction of the National Theatre on the left, making their way along the wall. Members of Reserve Unit No. 2, commanded by Captain Srđínko were dressed in version 60 uniforms and were carrying black truncheons. At about the same time another group of about 30 officers appeared on the opposite side of the street, wearing white helmets and carrying white batons [...]. This unit closed off the left pavement. They formed a sort of independent cordon of their own; I had the impression no-one was commanding them. I didn't pay much attention to them, all I know is that people were passing through them. The unit on the right took up positions on the pavement approximately in the middle of our cordon; some of the officers merged with mine in front, some stayed behind us.*⁶⁰

On Národní Street there was confusion. Major Houbal, as the commander of the riot unit, stayed in his Avia command van, which was, however, blocked by other vehicles, so he did not have a clear view of what was happening. The backup unit on the right – probably made up of officers from the ranks of the First Regiment – was apparently commanded by First Lieutenant Šlajs. There was a brief conversation with

for the “conduct of this special unit”. Ibid., sv. I, Protokol o výsledku obviněného B. Houbala, 3. 12. 1989, p. 133.

58 In his report, the OZU unit commander writes: *At this time, mixed groups of OZU and S-StB officers separated active participants from regular participants and took them away to the escort buses. It was necessary to use, in some cases, mild means of coercion in accordance with the law. Gradually, the crowd was released, thinned out and pushed towards the National Theatre, where it was dispersed.* BAŠTA, Jiří: *Nasazení příslušníků Odboru zvláštního určení k potlačení protikomunistických demonstrací v roce 1989* (The Deployment of the Special Purposes Section to Suppress Anti-Communist Demonstrations in 1989), příloha č. 5. Věc: Vyhodnocení nasazení příslušníků OZU k zajištění klidu a veřejného pořádku na území hl. m. Prahy dne 17. 11. 1989, čj. OZU 0032/89 (Annex No. 5. Subject: An evaluation of the deployment of OZU officers to ensure peace and public order in the territory of Prague on November 17, 1989, Ref. No. OZU 0032/89), 20. 11. 1989 – see: <https://www.policie.cz/clanek/nasazeni-prislusniku-odboru-zvlastniho-urceni-k-potlacení-protikomunistických-demonstrací-v-roce-1989.aspx> (quoted version dated 29. 4. 2020).

59 Major Houbal later added that “approximately” 39, 18 and 26 persons respectively had been detained in the three buses. *VŮA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. I, Protokol o výsledku obviněného B. Houbala, 3. 12. 1989, p. 142.*

60 Ibid., pp. 137–139.

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the commander responsible for blocking the road; in the end he agreed the officers should stay there and returned to his vehicle.⁶¹

The dog-handlers also moved their canine transit vehicle with the escort buses to the intersection with Karolíny Světlé Street, where they assisted in detaining demonstrators. *The dog-handlers did not receive instructions to intervene in detaining demonstrators and neither did they do so as far as I was able to monitor the situation. As far as I know, all of them remained in the space between the escort buses and my riot squad.* After the arrival of the backup units, the commander of the Trainee Emergency Brigade no longer had a clear view of the situation and claimed he did not know *what the dog-handlers were doing.*⁶² Národní Street was suddenly full of National Security Corps officers. It seemed to Major Houbal as if half of Prague were there. *I can honestly say that the only unit that acted in an organised fashion was mine. [...] The other units were acting in a completely disorganised way.*⁶³

At 8.40 p. m., two OT-64 armoured vehicles equipped with road-blocking barriers⁶⁴ arrived from the National Theatre, passed between the escort buses and came to a halt behind Major Houbal's unit. *I jumped out of my vehicle and ran over to them, apparently spoke to the commander [of the second vehicle] and asked him what they were doing there.* Junior Warrant Officer Josef Pech replied that they were originally sent to block Mikulandská Street, but were unable to reach it, *so they were supposed to block Národní [Street] instead. I told him to do what he had been ordered to do [...] and got back to my command post in the van.*⁶⁵ Just behind the riot unit, about 20 meters from Mikulandská Street, the two OT-64s standing side-by-side unfolded their barriers. The armored vehicles only blocked the road; the pavements running alongside remained open, and the officers created pathways there through which people could pass.⁶⁶

At that point, members of the riot unit spontaneously advanced another 10 metres towards Na Perštýně Street, and it was from there that Major Houbal later ordered them to get back on the buses. The reason was apparently that the protesters had once again retreated and there was a need to maintain contact with the crowd, to stop them throwing objects at the unit and make it easier to detain individuals by shortening the distance to the buses.

61 Ibid., p. 139.

62 If I may be permitted to share my own personal memory of the event: the dog-handlers with their German Shepherds, standing in a row next to each other, stood along the left side (from the perspective of Major Houbal's unit) not far from the entrance to the Metro Palace, their dogs barking aggressively at the demonstrators and grimly complementing the dramatic atmosphere of the culmination of the intervention by the security forces. This emotional memory underlines the feeling that there were twice as many officers there than in reality.

63 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. I, Protokol o výslechu obviněného B. Houbala, 3. 12. 1989, p. 139.

64 Ibid., sv. XXVII, Pořádková jednotka S SNB hl. m. Prahy a Sčk., chronologický přehled, 17. 11. 1989.

65 Ibid., sv. I, Protokol o výslechu obviněného B. Houbala, 3. 12. 1989, p. 139.

66 Ibid., sv. XXVII, Pořádková jednotka S SNB hl. m. Prahy a Sčk., chronologický přehled, 17. 11. 1989.

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At the same time, another 20 officers arrived, in brand-new riot police gear without shields, and assumed their position on the right by the arcade of the Kaňka Palace, where the crowd of demonstrators had been at its most dense. *By this time, I was beginning to walk around the area in front of the armoured vehicles, and began pulling back my officers. It looked like the aftermath of a battle. I saw sticks, even a shoe, broken bottles, some pieces of ceramic, it seemed to me like a broken rubbish bin.*⁶⁷

At 9.05 p. m., the “crowd dispersed” and left Národní Street. At 9.30 p. m., Major Houbal issued an order to board the vehicles.⁶⁸ *Shortly afterwards we left Národní Street in the same formation of vehicles as we’d arrived in. The OZU officers made their own way after we crossed May 1st Bridge to the Smíchov side. We stopped there for a while, and then I was instructed to drive back to base.*

At the close of his questioning, Major Houbal stood up for his unit. He said he could not, obviously, swear to it 100 %, but he remained convinced that the members of his Trainee Emergency Brigade had not done anything wrong; the platoon commanders, he said, were experienced enough to direct their men. *As far as I’m concerned, of course members of my unit did use mild means of coercion – this is nothing unusual when detaining people in such a situation.* He refused to take responsibility for the actions of the backup officers who arrived in Národní Street during the intervention. And he posed the fundamental question: *It’s not clear to me why the crowd was not stopped on the embankment, why it was allowed to go so far up Národní Street, and why we were sent there to be punching bags. It’s not clear to me why there were 400 people on the other side but only about 65 of us. I want to say that my unit definitely did not take part in this operation with the intention of beating anyone up. I think responsibility for the whole thing lies with the person who lost control of the operation.*⁶⁹

67 Ibid., sv. I, Protokol o výslechu obviněného B. Houbala, 3. 12. 1989, p. 139–140.

68 Ibid., sv. XXVII, Pořádková jednotka S SNB hl. m. Prahy a Sěk., chronologický přehled, 17. 11. 1989.

69 Ibid., sv. I, Protokol o výslechu obviněného B. Houbala, 3. 12. 1989, pp. 140–141.

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Table 1 – Command structure of the SNB Prague and Central Bohemia Region Directorate on November 17, 1989

Function	Rank and name	At the time of the intervention
Chief of the SNB Prague and Central Bohemia Directorate	Colonel Antonín Chmelíček	Returning from the USSR
First Deputy Chief and Chief of the StB Prague Directorate	Colonel Jiří Bytčánek	Acting Chief of the SNB Directorate
Deputy Chief for Political-Educational Work	Colonel Jiří Bečvář	
Deputy Chief and Chief of the VB Municipal Directorate	Lt. Colonel Michal Danišovič	Chief of Staff of “Operation Student”
First Deputy Chief of the VB Municipal Directorate	Lt. Colonel Jaroslav Novák	At staff headquarters from around 8 p. m.
Deputy Chief of the VB Municipal Directorate	Major Vilém Knebort	At staff headquarters from around 8 p. m.
Deputy Chief of the VB Municipal Directorate	Lt. Colonel Stanislav Krejčí	
Chief of the VB ŠPO Central Bohemia Directorate	Major Bedřich Houbal	Commander of the ŠPO Riot Unit
Chief of the VB ŠPO Municipal Directorate	First Lieutenant Jaroslav Ledinský	Deputy Commander of the ŠPO Riot Unit
Chief of the SNB Prague 1 District Directorate	Lt. Colonel Jaroslav Šejvl	
Chief of the SNB Prague 2 District Directorate	Lt. Colonel Zdeněk Kaše	
Chief of the SNB Prague 4 District Directorate	Lt. Colonel Antonín Starka	

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At 3 p. m., according to schedule, the 3rd Company, commanded by First Lieutenant Vladimír Franěk from the Emergency Regiment's 3rd Battalion, reached its position near Charles Square, while the 2nd Battalion reached its position in Bartolomějská Street, where it was assigned to the command of the Chief of the SNB Prague 1 District Directorate. Half an hour later, the 1st Company led by Lieutenant Milan Němeček and the 2nd Company led by First Lieutenant Josef Ryant from the 3rd Battalion arrived at the riverbank near Friedrich Engels Embankment.

Above and beyond Order No. 27/1989 issued by the Chief of the SNB Prague Directorate, the commander of the Emergency Regiment, Lt. Colonel Zdráhala, earmarked the reserve 1st Battalion commanded by Major Otto Polák (24 officers + 350 trainees = 374 members in total), which took up positions at Olšanská Street at 3.45 p. m., reinforced by six OT-64 mobile barriers and three water cannon trucks. At 6.20 p. m., the battalion was sent to the base in Hrdlořezy so that the officers could have dinner and wait for further instructions.

Shortly before 5 p. m., the command staff of the 1st Company of the 3rd Battalion was moved from the riverbank to where Vyšehradská Street meets Charles Square.⁷⁰ At 6.20 p. m., Major Valčík contacted the command staff to ask what measures should be taken against the crowd of some 2,000 people who had left Vyšehrad and had advanced from Svobodova Street, passing through Vyšehradská Street to Charles Square. Since he was instructed to let the protesters pass freely, he ordered the departure of the 1st Company's vehicles to a greater distance so as not to attract undue attention.

At 6.25 p. m., when the head of the procession came into contact with the cordon of officers from Captain Srdínko's Reserve Unit No. 2, the staff command ordered the 120 officers of the 1st Company of the 3rd Battalion to reinforce the closure formed by officers of the Public Security Municipal Directorate.⁷¹ The blocking of Vyšehradská Street from Charles Square to the intersection of Benátská, Trojická and Na Slupi streets had one goal; to prevent the crowd from moving towards the city centre. The orders were: *Do not intervene. Do not allow yourself to be provoked.* The crowd was reportedly chanting: *Gestapo! Where's Štěpán?*⁷² *Come with us! Our hands our empty!*⁷³

Between 6.37 p. m. and 6.49 p. m., Major Valčík addressed the demonstrators three times: *On behalf of the law I call on you to disperse, this demonstration is not permitted. If you refuse to obey this call and leave the area, a riot unit will be deployed against you.* The

70 ŽÁČEK, Pavel: *Z Albertova na Národní třídu*, pp. 104, 106.

71 Ibid., p. 102.

72 Miroslav Štěpán (1945–2014), in 1989 Chief Secretary of the Communist Party Prague Municipal Committee. Originally a reform-oriented politician influenced by Soviet perestroika, but at the same time an advocate of taking a hard line against political opposition. He is credited with the decisions that led to the brutal suppression of anti-regime demonstrations in 1988 and 1989, including the intervention on Národní street in Prague. In December 1989, he was arrested and charged with abuse of office by ordering the use of water cannon and tear gas against demonstrators during the so-called "Palach Week" in January 1989. He was sentenced to four years in prison, later reduced to two and a half years. In October 1991, he was released on parole.

73 ŽÁČEK, Pavel: *Z Albertova na Národní třídu*, p. 106.

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second and third calls contained the same message, with the additional instruction: *Go back through Vyšehradská Street and disperse at the embankment*. Although the crowd could barely hear the calls, after the third appeal people turned around and walked back through Vyšehradská Street.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, the stream of protesters advancing along Engels Embankment began hurling objects at the vehicles of the 2nd Company of the 3rd Battalion, as the crowd shouted slogans such as: *Long live Charter 77!*⁷⁵ *You’re holed up like rats! Down with one-party rule! Down with the Communists!* At 6.41 p. m., an order was issued to relocate the unit from the embankment to Resslova Street with the task of blocking off the street and not letting the crowd reach Charles Square.⁷⁶

The 1st Company of the 3rd Battalion were joined at the Vyšehradská roadblock by a special vehicle – a mobile radio transmitter called “BOUŘE” (Storm), but it remained stuck behind the other vehicles. At 6.50 p. m., Major Valčík reported that the crowd was beginning to peel away from their lines and were heading back along Vyšehradská and Plavecká Streets to the embankment. He was immediately ordered to move the 1st Company of the 3rd Battalion back to where Vyšehradská Street spills out onto Charles Square and leave the Prague Public Security Municipal Directorate unit in place. Major Valčík lifted the roadblock, turned the column of vehicles around and ordered his officers to get back inside them.

At 6.55 p. m., the commander of the 2nd Company, First Lieutenant Ryant, reported that he had reached Resslova Street, where there were, however, hardly any people at all. The battalion commander Major Valčík ordered him, therefore: *Don’t close the street. Wait for further instructions*. Three minutes later, the staff command decided to move all three companies of the 3rd Battalion to Národní Street. A few minutes after 7 p. m., it was confirmed that the head of the demonstration was now about 150–200 metres from the intersection with Na Perštýně Street.⁷⁷ The staff command ordered the closure of Národní Street and to block the crowd from advancing towards Wenceslas Square. *Tactics – do not intervene, do not allow yourselves to be provoked. Use mild means of coercion only in the event of a physical attack.*⁷⁸

The vehicles of the individual companies moved from Spálená Street to Národní Street in the direction of Jungmann Square. Major Valčík ordered the company commanders to *quickly dismount from your vehicles and close off Národní* [Street].⁷⁹ By 7.15 p. m., the 3rd battalion had closed off Národní Street at the intersection with

74 Ibid., p. 86.

75 Charter 77 was an informal civic initiative that criticised the Communist authorities for failing to respect human and civil rights, to which the ČSSR had committed itself with its signature on the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in Helsinki in 1975. Charter 77 existed from 1977 to 1992 and was the main opposition force in Communist Czechoslovakia.

76 ŽÁČEK, Pavel: *Z Albertova na Národní třídu*, p. 107.

77 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. XXVIII, Úřední záznam, Major Miroslav Valčík, 25. 11. 1989.

78 Ibid., Přehled o činnosti jednotek PP VB ČSR dne 17. 11. 1989 (Overview of the activities of the units of the VB ČSR Emergency Regiment on November 17, 1989), 28. 11. 1989.

79 Ibid., Úřední záznam, Major Miroslav Valčík, 25. 11. 1989.

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Na Perštýně Street in the direction of the National Theatre, blocked Spálená Street in the direction of Na Perštýně Street towards Perštýn and the area heading towards Jungmann Square, where the number of onlookers began to increase significantly.⁸⁰

The head of the demonstration approached to a distance of about five to ten metres from the police roadblock. Major Valčík asked the staff command to request the sending of a representative of the Prague National Committee to call on the crowd to disperse. None, however, could be found, and neither, according to him, did anyone from the Socialist Union of Youth's (Socialistický svaz mládeže, SSM) organising committee – who had organised the original event at Albertov – attempt to speak to officers at the blockade.⁸¹ *The crowd gradually got thicker. Aggressive individuals made their way to the front. They started lighting candles and shouting slogans such as “Jakeš’s Gestapo!”, “Hang the Communists!”, “Death to Communism!”, “Rats, you’re going to hang for this – we don’t want Jakeš, we want Masaryk!”⁸², “Go Home!”, “What would your mothers think?”, “We want a new government!”, “Why doesn’t Štěpán crawl out from where he’s hiding?”*

In response to the developments, at 7.20 p. m., the staff command ordered the First Battalion to move into position at Hybernská Street and to make preparations for the eventual closure of the lower part of Wenceslas Square. Twenty minutes later, Major Polák announced his arrival at Hybernská Street.

Following the order to close Mikulandská and Voršilská streets, at 7.25 p. m. 15 trainee officers headed by the deputy commander of the 1st Platoon of the 1st Company of the 3rd Battalion, Junior Lieutenant Václav Draga, closed off Mikulandská Street as far as to where it opens out onto Ostrovní Street, due to the number of demonstrators. Just 15 minutes after the overcrowded Voršilská Street had been relieved, the same was achieved by Lieutenant Oldřich Weber with his 20 trainee officers of the 1st Company of the 3rd Battalion.

At 7.45 p. m., a detachment from the 3rd Company of the 2nd Battalion was sent to close off the end of Karolíny Světlé Street where it met Národní Street. Only when they got there, did the unidentified company commander realise that the street had already been closed off by members of Captain Exner's Reserve Unit No. 1 and Lieutenant Badura, deputy Commander of Reserve Unit No. 4, and so the unit returned to their vehicles in Bartolomějská Street.

The crowd responded to the *In the name of the law* call broadcast from the “BOUŘE” vehicle shortly after 8 p. m. with loud whistles, sitting down in the road, and chanting slogans. Demonstrators began to light the candles they had been holding in their hands, gradually placing them on the pavement and then at the feet of the Emergency Regiment officers, who had to temporarily retreat. Slowly the candles formed a continuous strip of light approximately one-metre-wide across the entire breadth of Národní Street.

80 Ibid., sv. XXVII, Informace k MBA 17. 11. 1989 (podklady). Věc: Přehled o činnosti jednotek PP VB ČSR dne 17. 11. 1989 – zaslání, čj. PP-0693/02-89, 23. 11. 1989 (Information on the MBA of November 17, 1989 /documentation/. Subject: Overview of the activities of the ČSR PP VB units on November 17, 1989), 23. 11. 1989.

81 Ibid., sv. XXVIII, Úřední záznam, Major Miroslav Valčík, 25. 11. 1989.

82 Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937), first President of Czechoslovakia (1918–1935), a symbol of freedom and democracy.

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Following instructions from the staff command, at 8 p. m. the 2nd Company of the 2nd Battalion strengthened the roadblock formed by the 3rd Battalion in Spálená Street and the blockage formed by the 1st Company of the 2nd Battalion on Národní Street from the direction of Jungmann Square, where the number of people who had not left but stayed where they were had increased. The lines of officers closing off the intersection of Národní and Spálená streets thus found themselves encircled, and once again demonstrators began their *provocations and insults aimed at both SNB officers and Party and state officials*. Given the reduced numbers of units deployed to the 2nd Battalion, the 3rd Company was split up and officers distributed evenly to reinforce the 1st and 2nd Companies.

By 8.30 p. m., the increased pressure of demonstrators in Mikulandská and Voršilská streets forced the command to reinforce the road closures by about 20 trainees of the 2nd Company of the 2nd Battalion. Five minutes later, Major Valčík reported that despite the reinforcements of the aforementioned lines of riot police by members of the 2nd Battalion, the situation was critical and he asked command to send mobile barriers.

After the approval of the request by the Chief of Staff, Lt. Colonel Danišovič, the commander of the 1st Battalion, Major Polák, received an order to deploy two OT-64 vehicles and move them via Jindřišská – Myslíkova – Gottwald Embankment – Ostrovní streets to Voršilská and Mikulandská streets, where they were to be used as stationary barriers. At the same time, the armoured vehicles were to receive orders from the commander of the 3rd Battalion, Major Valčík, who, however, failed to establish contact with them.⁸³

At about 8.45 p. m., the officers of the Emergency Regiment advanced their lines about 10 metres beyond the strip of burning candles. Their progress was extremely slow, apparently to allow demonstrators to leave via the newly-opened gaps in the barriers in Voršilská and Mikulandská streets. Allegedly it was only then that the deputy commander of the 3rd Battalion, Captain Václav Vízner, discovered that another Public Security riot unit, only about 70 metres away, was advancing from the National Theatre towards his own lines, thanks to which the crowd was being considerably squeezed.

Major Valčík was meant to have asked staff command to slow the advance of the Trainee Emergency Brigade, otherwise the closure formed by the Emergency Regiment risked being broken through. The departure of a portion of the protesters through both opened streets (access was not allowed, however, from Mikulandská in the direction of Ostrovní and Spálená streets – those trying to leave were fed via Opatovická, V Jirchářích and Ostrovní streets towards the embankment⁸⁴) partially cleared the area in front of the blockade, but the Trainee Emergency Brigade did not stop. During the “liberation” of two State Security officers who were intervening in the crowd against a foreign cameraman, *in an extremely tense atmosphere and amidst very*

83 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. XXVIII, Přehled o činnosti jednotek PP VB ČSR dne 17. 11. 1989, 28. 11. 1989.

84 Ibid., vol. XXVII, Přehled o činnosti jednotek PP VB ČSR dne 17. 11. 1989, 23. 11. 1989.

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loud noise, both the trainees and commanders believed that the command was made to advance. Despite being slowed by their commanders, members of the Emergency Regiment advanced about 10 metres.

At about 8.50 p. m., both OT-64s finally reported to Major Valčík that they were in position; they did not, however, say that they were actually on Národní Street.⁸⁵ Due to the impassability of Ostrovní Street, the vehicles commanders decided to reach their target via Národní Street, where Major Houbal instructed them to remain behind the intersection of Národní and Mikulandská streets and open up their barriers. *The OT on the right going forwards opened its barrier fully, while the OT on the left only partially.*

At the same time, the 1st Company of the 2nd Battalion began pushing out and dispersing the crowd from Národní Street towards Jungmann Square. Members detained about 50 people, released the calmer demonstrators, and ended their intervention after twenty minutes. At 8.55 p. m., the 1st Company of the 1st Battalion commanded by Captain Zdeněk Kropáč was ordered to block off the area around Jungmann Square – Perlova Street. The unit reached its intended target, did not find a great number of people there, and at around 9.40 p. m. was instructed to return to Hybernská Street.

By 9.05 p. m., the area at Národní Street in front of the 3rd Battalion was almost empty, and the Trainee Emergency Brigade arrived at their cordon. Immediately afterwards, the blockades on Národní Street were lifted, but a unit of the Emergency Regiment remained in place. *Small groups of people were returning to the area of interest, trying to gather and light candles. These attempts were eliminated by individual interventions of 3rd Battalion officers who did not need to use mild means of coercion.*⁸⁶ The 2nd Battalion returned to their base at Hrdlořezy from Na Perštýně Street by 10 p. m. and the 3rd Battalion arrived shortly afterwards.⁸⁷

85 Ibid., sv. XXVIII, Úřední záznam, mjr. Miroslav Valčík, 25. 11. 1989.

86 Ibid., sv. XXVII, Přehled o činnosti jednotek PP VB ČSR dne 17. 11. 1989, 23. 11. 1989.

87 Ibid., sv. XXVIII, Přehled o činnosti jednotek PP VB ČSR dne 17. 11. 1989, 28. 11. 1989; Ibid., Úřední záznam, mjr. Miroslav Valčík, 25. 11. 1989.

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Table 2 – Command structure of the ČSR Public Security Emergency Regiment as part of the Ministry of the Interior and Environment on November 17, 1989

Position	Rank and name	At the time of the intervention
ČSR Minister of the Interior and Environment	Dr Václav Jireček	
First Deputy Minister	Major General Karel Novák	On duty at the ministry
Chief of the ČSR MVŽP VB Main Directorate	Colonel Jaroslav Houba	In the staff command of “Operation Student”
Commander of the PP VB ČSR	Lt. Colonel Břetislav Zdráhala	In the staff command of “Operation Student”
First Deputy of the PP VB ČSR and Commander and Chief of Staff	Lt. Colonel Václav Váňa	
Deputy Commander of the PP VB ČSR	Lt. Colonel František Jüttner	
Deputy Commander of the PP VB ČSR	Major František Michalec	
Deputy Commander of the PP VB ČSR for Political-Educational Work	Lt. Colonel Stanislav Petr	
Chief of the Operations and Planning Department	Major Antonín Hrbotický	
MBA operations officer	Major Jaromír Soukup	In the staff command of “Operation Student”
Commander of the 1st Battalion of the PP VB ČSR	Major Otto Polák	
Deputy Commander	Major Miroslav Hejhal	
Deputy Commander	Major Josef Bartoš	
Deputy Commander	Captain Karel Gajdoš	
Commander of the 1st Company of the 1st Battalion	Captain Zdeněk Kropáč	
Commander of the 2nd Company of the 1st Battalion	Captain Ladislav Slepčan	Acting Company Commander
Commander of the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion	First Lieutenant Josef Petr	Acting Company Commander
Commander of the 2nd Battalion of the PP VB ČSR	Major Liboslav Jícha	HQ Bartolomějská
Commander of the 1st Company of the 2nd Battalion	First Lieutenant Jan Slezák	In charge of carrying out the function
Commander of the 2nd Company of the 2nd Battalion	?	

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Commander of the 3rd Company of the 2nd Battalion	?	
Commander of the 3rd Battalion of the PP VB ČSR	Major Miroslav Valčík	
Deputy Commander	Captain Václav Vizner	
Deputy Commander for PVP	Major Jan Florián	
Commander of the 1st Company of the 3rd Battalion	Lieutenant Milan Němeček	
Commander of the 2nd Company of the 3rd Battalion	First Lieutenant Josef Ryant	
Commander of the 3rd Company of the 3rd Battalion	First Lieutenant Vladimír Franěk	

Special Purposes Section

The Special Purposes Section of the Ministry of the Interior Troop Directorate – like its predecessor, the Special Purposes Unit of the Directorate of Counter-intelligence for Combatting Extraordinary and Special Forms of Crime (the SNB XIV Directorate) – was, amongst other things, charged with carrying out “special” tasks to liquidate mass anti-socialist manifestations, i.e. demonstrations.⁸⁸ In February 1986, a cohesion plan came into effect for the Special Purposes Section and the Directorate for Prague and the Central Bohemian Region, which, among other things, assigned the Chief of the SNB Directorate the power to propose to the ČSSR Minister of the Interior or an authorised deputy the deployment of the Special Purposes Section to *liquidate all forms of extraordinary criminal activity*. The department was put on alert with the password “ÚDER” (Hit) and either a unit within the Special Purposes Section called the Intervention Groups Department (Oddělení zásahových skupin, OZS) or other assigned means were deployed to intervene against persons carrying out “particularly dangerous criminal acts”.⁸⁹

What’s more, the Chief of the Ministry of the Interior Troop Directorate, Major General Dr Josef Šabata, had mentioned the principles of deploying the Special Purposes Section in specific security actions in support of the SNB Directorate for Prague and the Central Bohemian Region, as approved by the ČSSR Minister of the

88 Cf. ŽÁČEK, Pavel: *Prísne tajné. Státní bezpečnost za normalizace. Vybrané směrnice a metodické pokyny politické policie z let 1978–1989* (Top Secret. State Security During Normalisation. Selected Regulations and Methodological Guidelines of the Political Police from 1978–1989). Votobia, Prague 2001, pp. 238, 245.

89 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. XXVIII, Plán součinnosti mezi odborem zvláštního určení správy vojsk MV a Správou SNB hlavního města Prahy a Středočeského kraje, čj. OZU-001/86 (A plan of cooperation between the Ministry of the Interior Troop Directorate’s Special Purposes Section and the SNB Directorate for Prague and the Central Bohemian Region, Ref. No. OZU-001/86), undated.

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Interior on October 13, 1986, specifically the provisions of Article 1c) providing for the possibility of deploying Special Purposes Section officers *in interventions against organised groups of people violating public order, if this invention cannot be carried out using the forces and means at the S-SNB's disposal without the risk of serious injury or death to officers or passers-by*.⁹⁰ These documents were, in his opinion, sufficient to justify the deployment of the two departments Special Purposes Section in the security operation planned for November 17, 1989.⁹¹

The Chief of the Special Purposes Section, Colonel Marko Solmoši, was informed at about 9 a. m. on November 17 by the Chief of the Operations Department, Major Knížka, that the text of order No. 16/1989 from the Minister of the Interior declaring an emergency security operation was being drawn up at that moment. The order would call for the deployment of 30 officers dressed in uniform version 60, and carrying batons and pepper spray. Colonel Solmoši claimed to have vehemently disagreed with the command for the unit to be carrying firearms. The members of the two departments were to gather in the cinema of the SNB Prague Directorate (Bartolomějská Street) at 1 p. m. to receive their instructions. *I remember that I was still annoyed at having learned of the operation so late [...] in our department we deploy our units at 7.45 a. m., and after the two departments have been separated [to carry out other services] they leave for home. [...] Knížka [...] told me over the phone that he wanted two departments, which is 34 people. I told him that I would put together a maximum of 30 people, and he agreed.*⁹²

Half an hour later, Colonel Solmoši called Major General Šabata to inform him that 1 + 30 officers of the Special Purposes Section were to be deployed to the forthcoming emergency security operation. The Chief of the MV Troop Directorate, as a member of the FMV Operational Staff, had apparently already been informed of the planned deployment, and recommended that Solmoši carry out the request, adding that the order from the Minister of the Interior would be issued afterwards. He also instructed Solmoši to issue his own order.⁹³ Shortly thereafter, Colonel Solmoši gave an oral order to his deputy, Major Petr Šesták, to have 30 officers get ready in uniform version 60, and they should be drawn both from officers at the base in Dolní Břežany and also, if necessary, from their accommodation. *I also told him that I was designating him as the commander of this unit and that he would be responsible not only for the unit's uniforms and equipment, but also for arranging transport and briefing the officers in the cinema...*⁹⁴ The deputy chief of the department drew up a list of 30 officers from various departments of the OZU, and had them gathered in the accommodation area where they were instructed that they were being assigned to the SNB Prague Directo-

90 Cf. *Ibid.*, Nasazení příslušníků odboru zvláštního určení do specifických bezpečnostních akcí ve prospěch Správy SNB hl. m. Prahy a SČK, čj. OZU-0055/86 (Deployment of officers of the Special Purposes Section in specific security actions in support of the SNB Directorate for Prague and the Central Bohemian Region, Ref. No. OZU-0055/86), undated.

91 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. II, Protokol o výslechu svědka J. Šabaty (Record of questioning of witness Josef Šabata), 4. 12. 1989, p. 548.

92 *Ibid.*, sv. V, Protokol o výslechu svědka M. Solmošiho (Record of questioning of witness M. Solmoši), 14. 12. 1989, p. 1423.

93 *Ibid.*, sv. II, Protokol o výslechu svědka J. Šabaty, 4. 12. 1989, pp. 548–549.

94 *Ibid.*, sv. V, Protokol o výslechu svědka M. Solmošiho, 14. 12. 1989, p. 1423.

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rate and told them what uniforms they should be wearing and which equipment they should be carrying.⁹⁵

At around 11.30 a. m., Colonel Solmoši personally informed Major General Šabata that the dedicated unit was being made ready for deployment. Shortly before 1 p. m. he telephoned Major Knížka to inform him that the unit was ready and it would be commanded by Major Šesták.⁹⁶

At 12.15 p. m., 31 officers of the Special Purposes Section gathered at the bus. All were identically dressed in the same uniforms and shoes – version 60 – wearing Border Guards jackets with their rank on the left chest, red berets with badges with the national emblem and a metal base, red armbands with the letters SNB in black letters and carrying their service batons. According to Major Šesták, all 25 long white batons were released from the stores, and six officers had to take their short black batons instead. *Everyone had pepper spray. No-one had a firearm. [...] It was me who decided to take the 25 white batons. I knew from previous operations that the SNB members had white batons with them, and I wanted us to have the same batons as they did [...]. I myself had a white baton.*

The unit arrived in Prague by police bus, which parked in Bartolomějská Street. It arrived at the cinema just before 1 p. m., where it met 10 members of the State Security Prague Directorate dressed in version 60 uniforms including a cap, with black batons and the same armbands on their left arm. Half an hour later, Major Knížka arrived at the cinema accompanied by the Deputy Chief of the Second Department of the StB Prague Directorate, Major Zdeněk Šípek, who informed the gathered officers that the students had permission to assemble from 4 p. m. at Albertov, that the gathering was being held under the auspices of the Municipal Committee of the SSM, and that the students should move from Albertov to Vyšehrad, where there would be a rally, at which point the act of remembrance was to end. He added that they had received information about possible provocations from so-called “independent structures”, that the student gathering could try to march along a route that had not been permitted, either to Wenceslas Square or to the monument to student Jan Opletal at the Main Railway Station, or even to Prague Castle. However, he said, if they did try to march to the centre of Prague, riot police would be used to block access roads from all directions.

Major Knížka stressed at the briefing that the entire unit of the Special Purposes Section, along with 10 members of the State Security Prague Directorate, had been earmarked to reinforce the Trainee Emergency Brigade and would perform tasks as part of that line-up. *He also said [...] literally: “You will perform the same tasks as those last time”.*⁹⁷ [...] He formulated this in a specific fashion: *“Separate the most active anti-socialist elements from the crowd, then hand the leaders from the crowd to the escort groups”.* *In previous*

95 Ibid., sv. II, Protokol o výslechu svědka P. Šestáka (Record of questioning of witness P. Šesták), 3. 12. 1989, p. 488.

96 Ibid., sv. V, Protokol o výslechu svědka M. Solmošeho, 14. 12. 1989, p. 1424.

97 For more on the previous OZU interventions against so-called mass anti-social manifestations, cf. ŽÁČEK, Pavel (ed.): Organizace a řízení represe v ČSSR. Operační štáby generála Lorence 1988–1989. *Securitas Imperii*, 1998, No. 4/III, pp. 594–595; STEHLÍK, Eduard et al.: *URNA. 30 let policejní protiteroristické jednotky* (URNA. 30 years of the Police Counter-Terrorism Unit). Martin Vaňourek – V Ráji, Mohelnice, Prague 2011, pp. 282–283; BAŠTA, Jiří: *Nasazení příslušníků Odboru zvláštního určení k potlačení protikomunistických demonstrací v roce 1989.*

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operations, we performed this task by having three plain-clothes members of our unit identify those concerned and they then handed them over to the escort group. From Major Knížka's briefing, I and I think the other members of the OZU understood that we would perform the tasks in the same way as in previous incidents, but in uniform.⁹⁸ After the briefing had ended, Major Knížka said that a bus had been set aside for the Special Purposes Section and the State Security officers to take them to Roztylské square in Prague 4, where the Trainee Emergency Brigade was deployed. There, Major Šesták was to report to Major Houbal.⁹⁹ Before leaving Bartolomějská Street, the commander of the unit had time to inform Colonel Solmoši by telephone that the briefing had finished and that the unit had been deployed to the Trainee Emergency Brigade.¹⁰⁰

They arrived at the Trainee Emergency Brigade base at 2.35 p. m., travelling in a Karosa bus and accompanied by a four-member escort group of SNB officers. Major Houbal informed Major Šesták that they would be leaving at 3 p. m. in the ŠPO contingent bound for their position on Charles Square; if they were to become involved in blocking the streets, they were to place themselves in the third row behind the ŠPO officers in white helmets. *I would like to add, that while we were waiting in the bus at Charles Square, some passers-by shook their fists at us, made mocking gestures and spat.*¹⁰¹

Major General Šabata recalled that order No. 16/1989 from the Minister of the Interior was also delivered to the Ministry of the Interior Troop Directorate at around 3 p. m. The Chief of the Special Purposes Section issued his own order on the basis of this order. He emphasised: *requirement of the deployment of the OZU met, [and] the moment the commander of the unit reported to the SNB Directorate for Prague and Central Bohemia, my command of the entire unit passed to the commander in command of the emergency security operation.*¹⁰²

At precisely 3 p. m., Colonel Jaroslav Nevřivý, First Deputy Chief and Chief of Staff of the Ministry of the Interior Troop Directorate, telephoned Colonel Solmoši to confirm that the Minister's order had just been issued. *Only on the basis of this telephone call did I draw up my own order, which was practically identical to the oral order issued to Major Šesták.* In addition to the minister's authorisation, he also needed an order from the Chief of the Ministry of the Interior Troop Directorate, which he had received at around 12.30 p. m. *Yet in the documents for my order I also need to know each of the officers deployed to the unit, which I actually did not have until the departure of the unit. However, this does not change the fact that I had already given Major Šesták an oral order that morning.*¹⁰³

98 Major Šesták stated further that *in my report following the operation on October 28, 1989, I proposed that next time the unit should be part of the VB contingent wearing the same uniforms and carrying the same equipment, arguing that deploying the OZU in uniform version 60 had a psychological effect on the crowd. It is therefore possible that my proposals were accepted.* VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. II, Protokol o výslechu svědka P. Šestáka, 3. 12. 1989, pp. 490–491.

99 Ibid.

100 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. V, Protokol o výslechu svědka M. Solmošiho, 14. 12. 1989, p. 1424.

101 Ibid., sv. II, Protokol o výslechu svědka P. Šestáka, 3. 12. 1989, p. 491.

102 Ibid., Protokol o výslechu svědka J. Šabaty, 4. 12. 1989, p. 549.

103 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. V, Protokol o výslechu svědka M. Solmošiho, 14. 12. 1989, p. 1424.

With his order, No. 75/1989, from 1 p. m. onwards a group of thirty-one Special Purposes Section officers – wearing “parachute berets” and armed with “long rubber batons” – were finally deployed to the SNB Prague Directorate as part of the emergency security operation.¹⁰⁴ In addition, Major General Šabata noted that the uniform worn by the deployed Special Purposes Section officers was a training uniform, and added: *OZU troops, of course, have to undergo complete parachute training with a certain number of jumps, which is why they have training suits with red berets.*¹⁰⁵

At around 6.30 p. m., the Trainee Emergency Brigade – including Major Šesták's Unit – moved from Charles Square to Smíchov. Along the way, the officers agreed how they would actually intervene. Based on previous experience, they decided to divide into three-member groups, consisting of two officers of the Special Purposes Section and one member of State Security. Each trio was supposed to act independently, infiltrating the crowd, pulling out a suspect, and handing them over to the escort group.¹⁰⁶ Around 45 minutes later, the entire column crossed the 1st of May Bridge and stopped at Národní Street, in the middle of the road about as far as the Monastery wine bar. One Trainee Emergency Brigade officer instructed them: *“We're getting off; block off the road at the level of the German Democratic Republic Cultural Centre and Karolíny Světlé Street.” We got off the bus and saw that ŠPO officers had formed a cordon in their white helmets, and that an OZU unit had formed a line behind them across the whole of Národní Street, and had formed a third line together with about 10 officers in version 60 uniforms.*

The demonstrators were approximately 50 metres from the first line of riot police on Národní Street in the direction of Wenceslas Square. *As soon as we ran out, the crowd began to whistle and shout various slogans.* Major Houbal, standing behind the third row, gave the commands: *“Riot Unit forward!”*, then after they had moved forward five metres: *“Stop!”* Then he repeated, *“Riot Unit forward!”* the cordon moved another five meters, and this was repeated maybe five times, until the first row of the cordon came to a halt about 10 metres away from the crowd. *At this points, our lines had stopped on Národní Street at about the level of the kitchen utensils shop. The crowd turned to face us, people lit candles, sat down in the road and started singing the national anthem and other songs.*¹⁰⁷ Major Šesták claimed not yet to be aware that behind the crowd, in the direction of Wenceslas Square, there was another cordon of officers from the Emergency Regiment.

104 Ibid., sv. XXVIII, Rozkaz náčelníka odboru zvláštního určení č. 75 „Mimořádná bezpečnostní akce“ (Order of the Chief of the Special Purposes Section No. 75 “Emergency Security Operation”), 17. 11. 1989.

105 Ibid., sv. II, Protokol o výslechu svědka J. Šabaty, 4. 12. 1989, p. 549.

106 According to another version of events, the officers were divided into three-member mixed groups at the ŠPO base. *Their task was to form a second and if necessary third row in the ŠPO lines, to identify and at the time of the intervention to separate the initiators and leaders of the unauthorised assembly from the crowd and hand them over to the escort groups.* BAŠTA, Jiří: *Nasazení příslušníků Odboru zvláštního určení*, příloha č. 5. Věc: Vyhodnocení nasazení příslušníků OZU k zajištění klidu a veřejného pořádku na území hl. m. Prahy dne 17. 11. 1989, čj. OZU 0032/89, 20. 11. 1989.

107 VŮA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. II, Protokol o výslechu svědka P. Šestáka, 3. 12. 1989, pp. 491–492.

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At around 7.40 p. m., the commander of the Special Purposes Section heard an order from the megaphone for the crowd to break up towards the National Theatre. *The call was repeated several times. I don't know how many.* The crowd were waving Czechoslovak flags and various signs and shouting things like *Fuck off!, Kiss our arses!, Gestapo! Gestapo!* There was also whistling. Later, the crowd began chanting different slogans such as: *Down with the Communist Party!, Come with us!, Throw Jakeš in the bin!, Abolish the Communist Party!, Let's get them!, We're not afraid of you!*¹⁰⁸

For about 20 minutes, the demonstrators continued leaving the crowd through the gaps in the cordon; an estimated several hundred people left via this route. Then the cordon was once again sealed, making it impossible to leave. *At that moment I heard a voice say “They're behind us”. That's when I turned around and saw that there was a large group of people behind us, at a distance of about 50–80 metres, in the direction of the National Theatre. Amidst all this, someone – I don't who – shouted “Don't let them leave!” So the cordon was closed again. The crowd behind us at that time either broke up or was scattered, I don't know.*¹⁰⁹ As a result, the cordon of the Trainee Emergency Brigade was partially re-opened and groups of people were allowed through towards the National Theatre. When after 10 minutes there were no more people leaving the demonstration, the lines of riot police were closed for good.

Around 8 p. m., the Trainee Emergency Brigade was reinforced by a further 50 Public Security officers in white helmets and carrying white batons. The entire cordon of riot police – made up of about five rows of officers – then moved about another 20 metres forward towards Na Perštýně Street.

At this point, the crowd began to thicken very quickly and started pushing towards the police lines. The crowd burst through the cordon; several shouts of *“Hold the line!”* were heard. Major Šesták already knew that the Národní Street cordon on the other side from Na Perštýně Street had moved forward, pushing the crowd in their direction. It was, apparently, only in this situation that members of all units began using so-called “mild means of coercion”, i.e. their batons. It appears no command to do so was given; rather it was a reaction to the first row being shoved and punched. *The crowd was suddenly mixed up with the members of our cordon. I saw how officers from various units and even the OZU were using their batons against the crowd [...]. I personally grabbed a man aged about 30 and took him to our bus and handed him over to the escort group. [...] I pushed some people out of the way who were preventing me from taking him to the escort bus, and I admit that in this situation I also bit someone with my baton [...]. But I certainly didn't hit anyone over the head [...] because I was holding it in a horizontal position*

108 The report submitted by Major Petr Šesták on November 20, 1989 stated: *The crowd were chanting various insults, not only at Party and government officials, but also at the SNB officers. The slogans included Down with Jakeš! We want democracy and freedom! We are not afraid of you! Jakeš's Gestapo! We want a different government! Throw Jakeš in the bin! Down with the army! The crowd were carrying Czechoslovak flags and banners demanding the release of political prisoners etc.* BAŠTA, Jiří: *Nasazení příslušníků Odboru zvláštního určení*, příloha č. 5. Věc: Vyhodnocení nasazení příslušníků OZU k zajištění klidu a veřejného pořádku na území hl. m. Prahy dne 17. 11. 1989, čj. OZU 0032/89, 20. 11. 1989.

109 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. II, Protokol o výslechu svědka P. Šestáka, 3. 12. 1989, pp. 492–493.

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at the height of my chest. He then saw about five officers of the Special Purposes Section and several other officers in white helmets running through the arcade towards the Language School. *From there came a shout: "There's someone hurt here." I ran over and saw a man lying on his side on the ground. As for running, I had to push my way through the crowd. There were about five OZU officers by the man, and together we created a tiny circle around the man so that the crowd wouldn't trample him.*

It was at this point that Major Šesták says he finally noticed there were two armoured vehicles with riot barriers on Národní Street, and he understood that the crowd had only one retreat route: through the arcade of the Kaňka palace. *At this point, the crowd pushed my group against the windows of the musical instruments shop, so we had to use our batons to push them back so they wouldn't crush us. I was stuck there with about five OZU officers. We stopped intervening and waited for the crowd to pass.*¹¹⁰ When they were no longer surrounded, Major Houbal came over to him and instructed him to get on the bus. They drove for a short distance along Národní Street, but because it was not the bus they had come with, they got off and got on the next one. They later waited for about an hour in Zborovská Street in Smíchov, and then – following instructions – returned to Bartolomějská Street, where at 10.30 p. m. they were sent back to their base in Dolní Břežany.

At the end of his report, Major Šesták stated that this was the first time the Special Purposes Section had been deployed to such an event. They had no experience of such operations, were not trained for similar situations, so all they simply copied what the other officers were doing. *In other words, when they let the crowd go, we let the crowd go, and when they held the line, we held it too.*¹¹¹

In his correspondence with the District Military Prosecutor, the Chief of the Ministry of the Interior Troop Directorate Major General Šabata did not hesitate to claim that the use of riot units against participants of a mass anti-social manifestation had been in accordance with the law. He added: *Given the behaviour of the crowd, OZU members rightly believed that these were not students and other citizens who wanted to honour Jan Opletal in a peaceful way. They were led to this conclusion by the behaviour of both individuals and whole groups, led by obvious, pre-arranged organisers. [...] Several hundred people answered the call (to leave the area) and they were freely released, without being screened by the riot units. But others remained, and verbally attacked the officers at the scene with expressions that insulted public officials and the pride of the SNB officers (e.g. "Jakeš's Gestapo"). The verbal attacks gradually became physical. [...] In accordance with the abovementioned regulations, mild means of coercion (batons) were used in cases where SNB officers were being physically assaulted, and also to prevent further public acts of disrespect towards society and opposition towards socialist society and the system.*¹¹²

110 Ibid., pp. 493–494.

111 Ibid., pp. 494–495, 496.

112 VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. XXVIII, Zaslání materiálů k zásahu pořádkových sil SNB dne 17. 11. 1989, čj. V-041/89 (Sending of documents on the intervention by SNB security forces of November 17, 1989, Ref. No. V-041/89), l. 12. 1989.

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Colonel Solmoši, on the other hand, at the end of his interrogation presented his newly acquired belief that the Special Purposes Section should be deployed solely to tackle serious crime such as kidnapping or terrorism, and not to be abused as had happened on November 17, 1989.¹¹³

Table 3 – The command structure of the SNB units and troops of the Ministry of the Interior within the ČSSR Federal Interior Ministry (FMV) on November 17, 1989

Function	Rank and name	At the time of the intervention
ČSSR Minister of the Interior	Lt. General František Kincl	Family celebration
First Deputy Minister	Lt. General Alojz Lorenc	Dinner with the deputy head of the Soviet KGB
Deputy Minister	Major General Stanislav Nezval	
Deputy Minister	Colonel Otto Sedlák	On duty at the FMV
Chief of the FMV Internal and Organisational Directorate	Lt. Colonel Dr Miroslav Dostál	
Chief of the MV Troop Directorate	Major General Dr Josef Šabata	
First deputy and Chief of Staff of the MV Troop Directorate	Colonel Jaroslav Nevřivý	
Chief of the OZU	Colonel Marko Solmoši	
Deputy Chief of the OZU	Major Petr Šesták	Commander of the unit on Národní Street

SNB Prague Directorate reserve units

Reserve unit No. 1 (call sign “STROM /Tree/ 910”) was commanded by Captain Exner and Senior Lieutenant Šlajs as deputy commander, both officially assigned to Prague 2. The entire unit gathered at 2 p. m. in front of the Museum of the National Security Corps and Troops of the Ministry of the Interior, where it remained on alert for three and a half hours. After 5.30 p. m. it moved to the local Public Security office in the Prague New Town, where it waited with a bus about 50 metres beyond the intersection of Benátská and Vyšehradská streets. An hour later, it moved closer to the centre of the city, to a position in U nemocnice Street near Charles Square, and then around 7 p. m. to near the Máj department store in Spálená Street.¹¹⁴

After their bus was parked at the intersection of Na Perštýně and Martinská streets, 10 officers were sent to block the entrance to Bartolomějská Street. At 7.30 p. m.

113 Ibid., sv. V, Protokol o výsledku svědka M. Solmošeho, 14. 12. 1989, p. 1426.

114 ŽÁČEK, Pavel: *Z Albertova na Národní třídu*, pp. 100–101.

the entire No. 1 reserve unit was deployed to block the intersection of Národní, Karolíny Světlé and Voršilská streets, to protect the rear of the Trainee Emergency Brigade. A crowd of about 150 people, allegedly only 15 to 20 metres away, gathered in front of 40 officers at the New Stage of the National Theatre. Behind their backs, all the way to Mikulandská Street, were the vehicles of the Trainee Emergency Brigade and officers in version 60 uniforms.¹¹⁵

At 8 p. m., to the chants of “*Gestapo!*” and “*Freedom!*”, Reserve Unit No. 1 moved against the crowd at the New Scene, allegedly in response to the crowd surging forward, whereupon the demonstrators began to retreat away from the unit and dispersed.¹¹⁶

From around 8.30 p. m., various passenger and cleaning vehicles, buses and other equipment were driven from the embankment and May 1st bridge to the Perštýn area. Reserve No. 1 closed off Národní Street about 20 metres from the intersection with Karolíny Světlé Street and ensured its smooth passage.¹¹⁷ At 9.15 p. m., the closure was lifted, the officers boarded their bus at the National Theatre, handed in their riot shields and left for I. P. Pavlova Square, where they were disbanded. *Throughout the whole operation, there was no direct contact with the demonstrators, no police control ticket was written up, and no one was taken away.*¹¹⁸

The commander of Reserve Unit No. 2 (call sign “STROM 920”) was Captain Srdínko with his deputy, Junior Warrant Officer Jeřábek. Members of the unit from the individual SNB District Directorates gradually arrived at the local Public Security station in Prague New Town, where at 3 p. m. they boarded their bus and left for their position in front of the primary school in Botičská Street. At around 6 p. m., they were instructed to return to the local Public Security station, from where half an hour later they went to urgently close off Vyšehradská Street at the level of U Trajců restaurant. Officers of Reserve Unit No. 2 did not even have time to equip themselves with their batons, which were left in an accompanying Avia vehicle. Demonstrators broke through their less than perfect lines.

At this moment, the 1st Company of the Emergency Regiment’s 3rd Battalion intervened to prevent the crowd from moving further towards Vyšehradská Street and Charles Square. Captain Srdínko withdrew his officers into the area around the intersection of Vyšehradská and Benátská streets, and only then had them issued with white helmets and batons. Reserve Unit No. 2 broke up groups of onlookers standing on the pavements. After the protesters were pushed towards Plavecká Street, the Emergency Regiment riot unit left. Shortly afterwards, Reserve Unit No. 2 was also instructed to board the bus.

115 VÚA-SA MO ČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. XXVII, složka (File) INFORMACE k MBA 17. 11. 1989 (podklady), Úřední záznam, kpt. Exner Jiří, npor. Šlajs Jiří (INFORMATION on the MBA November 17, 1989 /documentation/, Official record, Captain Jiří Exner, Senior Lieutenant Jiří Šlajs), pp. 175–176.

116 Ibid., Úřední záznam, Capt. Žába, 24. 12. 1989, p. 90.

117 Ibid., složka INFORMACE k MBA 17. 11. 1989 (podklady), Úřední záznam, Capt. Jiří Exner, Senior Lieutenant Jiří Šlajs, p. 176–177.

118 ŽÁČEK, Pavel: *Z Albertova na Národní třídu*, p. 101.

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At an unspecified time, Captain Srdínko's unit was sent to the National Theatre, where it passed under the command of the Trainee Emergency Brigade commander, Major Houbal. First, Reserve Unit No. 2 reinforced the closure of Národní Street by the New Stage. After half an hour, 30 officers were moved to behind the riot unit, standing about 50 metres in front of Mikulandská Street. The calls to disperse were audible from the Máj department store. The radio transmitter sent reports on the behaviour of the crowd, and the allegedly aggressive behaviour of demonstrators. Captain Srdínko stated: *At that moment I was standing with my deputy, Junior Warrant Officer Jeřábek, on the left side of Národní Street looking at the Máj department store, and we saw a crowd of people running through the arcade on the corner of Národní and Mikulandská streets, heading towards this street and further onto Národní Street, people were running into each other as they were fleeing and in some cases we saw people falling on the road and breaking the ceramic waste bins. Some of the people in the crowd were holding wooden poles, probably from flags, to defend themselves as they ran.* Reserve Unit No. 2 dragged demonstrators to the escort buses, which they had taken from officers of the Special Purposes Section.

Shortly after the crowd had been dispersed and the two riot units of the Emergency Regiment and the Trainee Emergency Brigade had merged, Captain Srdínko ordered his unit to board the bus. Reserve Unit No. 2 received instructions via the local VB station in Bartolomějská Street to return to base, where it arrived between 10.00 p. m. and 10.30 p. m.¹¹⁹

Reserve Unit No. 3 (call sign “STROM 930”), headed by Lieutenant Chroustovský and Captain Roh, was deployed at approximately 7.30 p. m. at the intersection of Divadelní – Krocínova streets with the task of preventing the flow of people towards the National Theatre and the SNB Prague Directorate buildings in Konviktská and Bartolomějská streets. *Pedestrians were directed into Divadelní Street towards the steps leading to Smetana Embankment. During the entire period officers did not need to intervene once. There was minimal vehicular and pedestrian traffic, at a maximum groups of three to four people.*¹²⁰ At the same time, part of Reserve Unit No. 4 (call sign “STROM 940”) commanded by Senior Lieutenant Hojka was used to close off Karoliny Světlé Street (20 officers) and a detachment commanded by Lieutenant Badura was used to close off Národní Street around the National Theatre.¹²¹

Conclusion

Due to their complexity, the deployment and intervention of Public Security, State Security and Ministry of the Interior Troop Directorate forces, whether federal, republican, municipal or district, became one of the factors why the “Operation Student” security measures of November 17, 1989, as part of a national emergency security operation, became – unlike previous measures – unsuccessful, even fatal for Czechoslovakia's Communist regime.

119 Ibid., pp. 92–96.

120 VÚA-SA MO ČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. XXVII, složka INFORMACE k MBA 17. 11. 1989 (podklady), p. 95.

121 Ibid., p. 96.

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Not even this study has yielded a complete and exhaustive reconstruction of the deployment and activities of the most important riot units. For reasons of space, the author was unable to even begin examining the key behaviour of Lt. Colonel Michal Danišovič, who apparently failed in his task, especially from a tactical perspective. It was also not possible to examine the political and official influence from the municipal, republic and federal level.

In addition, it is also to a certain extent – regardless of the effort to remain objective – a one-sided view, presented through the prism of archival material from the provenance of the Communist security forces and the documentation resulting from the November 17, 1989 investigation. This investigation also saw an attempt by all concerned – if not to disguise – then certainly to downplay their role in the dramatic denouement of a brutally suppressed demonstration of students, surrounded in the centre of Prague near Wenceslas Square on Národní Street.

The task of compiling this text was not made easier by the fact that until now, virtually no attention has been paid to examining the view from the other side, from the perspective of the demonstrators at the exceedingly violent behaviour of the security forces of the last normalisation-era totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia.¹²²

For the sake of completeness, it should be added that the participants in this last anti-Communist demonstration, who remained on Národní Street until the end, were not surprised by the misinformation about the beaten student¹²³ which eventually helped topple and bring down the totalitarian monolith of Communist power.¹²⁴

The limited interest of the historian community and the lack of availability of primary sources have hampered and to some extent still hamper an objective examination of the power mechanisms of the Communist totalitarian regime, which remains a challenge for further research into the events related to November 17, 1989, especially in Prague.

122 Cf. HRADIL, Radomil: *17. listopad '89 – co se stalo na Národní*, pp. 66–137.

123 False information that Martin Šmíd, a student of the Mathematics and Physics Faculty of Charles University, had been killed at the demonstration was spread by Drahomíra Dražská, a gatekeeper at one of the university dorms. There were actually two Martin Šmíds studying at the same university in the same year, but nothing happened to either of them on November 17 (the first was not even at the demonstration and the second left before the police intervened). Rumours were fuelled by the presence of a person lying limp on the ground after the intervention on Národní street. It belonged to StB Lieutenant Ludvík Zifčák, who worked in the student movement under the code name Milan Růžička.

124 Cf. ŽÁČEK, Pavel: *Jakešovo gestapo*, pp. 323–377.

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Table 4 – Number of SNB officers and MV troops deployed as part of the Emergency Security Operation of November 17, 1989

Unit	Number of officers
Emergency Security Operation command	6
ČSR VB Emergency Regiment 1st Battalion	24 (commanders) + 350
ČSR VB Emergency Regiment 2nd Battalion	19 + 170
ČSR VB Emergency Regiment 3rd Battalion	25 + 407
ČSR VB Emergency Regiment total	2 + 995
Trainee Emergency Brigade VB Prague Municipal Directorate	4 + 43
Trainee Emergency Brigade VB Central Bohemia Directorate	29
Drivers	4
Motorised Emergency Unit VB Prague Municipal Directorate – chamber	4
Dog-handlers	1 + 5
Trainee Emergency Brigade total	90
Reserve Unit No. 1	2 + 40
Reserve Unit No. 2	2 + 40
Reserve Unit No. 3	2 + 40
Reserve Unit No. 4	2 + 36
Escort Bus No. 1	1 + 7
Escort Bus No. 2	1 + 7
Reserves total	180
Special Purposes Section SV MV	1 + 30
StB Prague Directorate	1 + 10
Reinforcement units total	42
SNB Prague 1 District Directorate	164
SNB Prague 2 District Directorate	3 + 86
SNB District Directorate total	253
Emergency Security Operation total	1568

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Document No. 1a

[1989, November 24]¹²⁵ – Prague. Information from the Chief of the Public Security Prague Municipal Directorate Lt. Colonel Michal Danišovič on the events in Prague on November 17, 1989

A commemorative gathering was planned by the Prague Municipal Committee of the Socialist Union of Youth and the Municipal University Council to commemorate the student Jan Opletal¹²⁶, assassinated by the fascists on November 17, 1939, to take place November 17, 1989. The planned gathering was announced to the Prague 2 District National Committee in accordance with the provisions of Section 10 of Decree No. 320/1951 of the [O]fficial G[azette] on Voluntary Organisations and Assemblies, stating the programme, location and time of the meeting. The National Committee had no objections to the holding of the Assembly, as it appeared to fulfil the allowance of the constitutional freedom of assembly.

The rally was organised in such a way that the participants of the assembly gathered in the area of Studničkova and Albertov streets in numbers of approximately 25,000 people.

The meeting started at 4 p. m. with the student anthem *Gaudeamus igitur*. Already during the speeches, the speakers were drowned out by whistles, chanting of slogans such as “Freedom!”, “Let’s defend ourselves!” and “Long live Charter [77]!”. Banners bearing the slogans “There have been enough lies”, “Europe without political prisoners” etc. were unfurled (see Annex).¹²⁷ At 4.38 p. m., the meeting ended with a minute’s silence and the singing of the national anthem.

After the meeting, the procession set off along Na Slupi, Neklanova, Slavojova, Lumirova and Na Pankráci streets towards Slavín at Vyšehrad.

It was obvious from the behaviour of the participants and the slogans they were shouting that a large part of them primarily came with the intention of demonstrating on Wenceslas Square. They started demanding this immediately after the organisers announced that the demonstration would continue at Vyšehrad. Some participants of the rally immediately began to whistle and chant “Wenceslas! Wenceslas!”, “Go Right! Go Right!” (meaning in the direction of Wenceslas Square). At the same time, the intention of demonstrating on Wenceslas Square on this day was documented by the presence of several people gathered around the statue of St Wenceslas, where they lit candles.

125 Although the information of Lt. Colonel Danišovič is not dated, it was used, among others, in documents dated November 24, 1989.

126 Student Jan Opletal (1915–1939) was fatally wounded during an anti-Nazi demonstration in Prague on October 28, 1939, the anniversary of the establishment of an independent Czechoslovak state. His funeral grew into a second anti-Nazi demonstration, which resulted in the closure of all Czech universities on November 17, 1939, the transport of 1,200 students to a concentration camp and the execution of nine students and officials of student organisations. November 17 was declared International Student Day by the International Student Union as a permanent reminder of this event.

127 Cf. document No. 1b.

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On the way to Vyšehrad the crowd were carrying banners reading “Abolish the monopoly of the Communist Party”, “Palach¹²⁸, Opletal, Zajíc¹²⁹”, “We don’t want a one-party government” and were chanting slogans such as “Throw Jakeš in the bin!”, “We don’t want Štěpán”, “Abolish the army!”, “Abolish the People’s Militia!”, “Long live Havel!”¹³⁰, etc.

At 5.36 p. m., the delegation laid bouquets and candles at the grave of K. H. MÁCHA and at 5.50 p. m. the officially permitted event was brought to an end.

Despite the fact that there were anti-socialist and anti-state speeches during the event, the SNB did not intervene. In accordance with the Municipal Committee SSM’s political and organisational security department, only traffic control measures were taken; there was no deployment of law enforcement officers. The political and organisational security department also asked the SNB’s Prague and Central Bohemia Directorate to be draw up procedures to limit any provocations by groups of students who wanted to follow a different route (Opletalova Street).

After the planned event had ended, some 5,000 participants took off along Na Slupi and Vyšehradská streets towards the centre of Prague. The number and behaviour of the participants in the procession clearly showed that they were not respecting the programme of the officially sanctioned gathering; the march thus ceased to be a manifestation of the right to assembly and took on the nature of an undeclared assembly, which also disturbed the peace and public order in this part of Prague. The slogans “We want a new government!”, “Stalin’s gravediggers!”, etc. were repeated.

From the whole course of the official part of the gathering and especially from the movement of the crowd, it was evident that the organisers were no longer able to cope with the situation and as a result VB units were made ready according to the pre-arranged plan. The crowd was blocked at Vyšehradská Street in front of the intersection with Na Slupi – Trojická streets. A total of 42 officers from the SNB Prague Directorate (commanded by Captain SRDÍNKO) were deployed in riot police uniform. The crowd, however, broke through the unit’s lines (see video), and was therefore reinforced by 120 officers of the ČSR PP VB (commanded by Major VALČÍK)

128 Student Jan Palach (1948–1969) decided to burn himself to death (he died three days after setting himself alight) in Prague’s Wenceslas Square on January 16, 1969 in protest against the emerging normalisation, suppression of freedoms and passivity in society following the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact in August of the previous year (the brutally suppressed commemorative demonstrations in January 1989, the so-called Palach Week, had been the largest anti-regime demonstrations since 1969).

129 The same method of suicide was chosen on February 25, 1969, the 21st anniversary of the Communist putsch in February 1948, by student Jan Zajíc (1950–1969), who burned himself to death in protest against normalisation and disappointment in the fact that Palach’s act had not resulted in any long-term reaction in society.

130 Václav Havel (1936–2011), playwright, dissident, political prisoner and politician. He was involved in public life at the time of the so-called Prague Spring of 1968. He was the co-founder and one of the first spokesmen of Charter 77, and was imprisoned several times. After the outbreak of the Velvet Revolution, he became one of the co-founders of the anti-Communist movement Civic Forum. He had a major influence on the country’s path towards parliamentary democracy and its involvement in the political structures of Western civilization. Havel was the last president of Czechoslovakia (1989–1992) and the first president of the Czech Republic (1993–2003).

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and the crowd returned to Vyšehradská Street. At 6.37 p. m., the first call was made for citizens to disperse. Vyšehradská Street was designated as the exit route. After the third call, the crowd turned back to Vyšehradská Street.

During the event, the crowd showed signs of aggression by chanting the “Gestapo!” at the riot police and, according to the records of the riot unit commanders, throwing various items at them – coins, bottles, stones and attacking them with flagpoles. At 6.51 p. m., the crowd left via Plavecká Street for Engels Embankment.

According to video and patrol reports, from 6.55 p. m. the crowd marched along the embankment to the National Theatre, where the head of the procession arrived at 7.18 p. m. The whole time they were shouting various slogans.

Due to the fact that the crowd did not march to Charles Square, at 7.05 p. m. one company of the PP-VB was moved from Resslova Street to the Máj department store to block off Národní Street. As expected, the crowd turned at 7.21 p. m. into Národní Street and therefore an instruction was given to block Národní Street at the intersection with Spálená and Na Perštýně streets. Subsequently, Divadelní, K. Světlé, Voršilská and Mikulandská streets were also closed off.

At 7.20 p. m., the SNB Prague Directorate riot unit was sent to the May 1st Bridge to prevent the crowd from marching on Prague Castle. Since the entire crowd of about 5,000 people was already on Národní Street, the unit followed it.

At 7.37 p. m., Pavel ŠPAČEK, born November 6, 1943, a resident of Prague 2, [...], approached the commander of the riot unit at the department store and asked if he could speak to the students with the help of the “BOUŘE” radio equipment. The commander complied with the request, and the man called on the crowd to turn back and proceed along the embankment to Mánes. The crowd responded with whistling and shouts of “Gestapo” etc.

At 7.56 p. m., Senior Warrant Officer REMŠÍK from the SNB Prague 1 District Directorate gave the first call over the “BOUŘE” radio equipment. At the same time, the commander of the SNB Prague Directorate riot police unit was instructed to release individual persons, which was carried out on both pavements. The calls were repeated 15 times within the next 50 minutes, until 8.45 p. m. Some people obeyed the calls and left the area.

Women, children and the elderly were allowed to pass through the riot police lines at any time throughout the whole operation. Many people chose this option, so by this time there were some 2,000 people left on Národní Street, who were becoming increasingly aggressive.

According to the records of the commanders, lighted candles were thrown at officers, while the crowd hurled insults (“Bastards!”, “You’ll hang for this!”) and there were also physical attacks against officers (who were attacked with poles, pushed against cars and had shards of ceramics and 3kg of coins thrown at them). Therefore, officers in the front row raised their riot shields for protection. The crowd began pounding the shields with sticks.

Given the situation, an order was given to intervene only in the case of an officer being attacked, i.e. officers were instructed not to let themselves be provoked. Initiators of the demonstration (those breaking the peace) were to be detained if the situ-

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ation permitted it. The PP-VB unit remained in position and the SNB Prague Directorate riot unit began to disperse the crowd in the direction of the National Theatre. Physical coercion and service batons were used in accordance with § 32 of the law on the SNB. The ŠPO unit was reinforced with a unit of the OZU SV MV, who arrived at Národní Street at 7.35 p. m. The OZU unit was in formation by 7.50 p. m. and at 8.05 p. m. received the order from the SNB Prague Directorate riot unit commander to begin taking people away. From this moment onwards, the OZU unit followed its own instructions and the instructions of the Chief of the StB Prague Directorate. The procedure was completed at 9.16 p. m. After the crowd was dispersed, bars, a broken ceramic waste basket and a strip of wax were left on the street. 143 persons were detained. Of these, 32 were previously involved in unauthorised gatherings.

The fact that people could leave the area freely through the lines of riot police even during the course of the intervention to remove the crowd is evidenced by the testimony of suspects Josef KOPECKÝ ([born] June 16, 1972), Tomáš PETŘÍK ([born] April 22, 1969), Petr LEPEŠKA ([born] June 22, 1961), Miloš TOMÁŠ ([born] March 2, 1955), Barbora TOMÁŠOVÁ ([born] October 12, 1962) and Pavel CHARVAT ([born] January 15, 1963).

After the permitted demonstration had ended, from 6.31 p. m. to 10.09 p. m., there were restrictions and rerouting of public and private transport in all sections of the [centre of Prague] where the crowd passed.

Five damaged passenger vehicles were reported to the MO VB at Bartolomějská Street in Prague 1 as a result of the crowd pushing against them on Národní Street.

In the course of the operation, six PP VB ČSR officers suffered injuries requiring treatment at the PP VB ČSR health clinic. These were Sergeant VANĚK Martin, born April 14, 1970 (blow to the head), Sergeant PLOS Tomáš, born April 22, 1970 (contusion of left shoulder blade), Junior Sergeant EXNER Milan, born June 6, 1970 (contusion of left hand), Sergeant SOJKA Petr, born August 17, 1970 (contusion of little finger of left hand), Sergeant KOVAŘÍK Jan, born September 12, 1968, (lumbar spine contusion), Junior Warrant Officer KOZA Frantisek, born November 23, 1964 (contusion of left wrist) and Junior Warrant Officer LERCH Milan (born February 20, 1964), IPS MO VB Libeň (abrasions of left hand and wrist).

After evaluating the situation, it can be stated that the intervention was performed in accordance with § 4 letter i) of Law on the SNB and mild means of coercion referred to in § 32 (1) were used adequately following the prior use of warnings pursuant to § 33 (1) of Act No. 40/74 Coll.

Chief of the VB Prague Municipal Directorate
[...]¹³¹ Lt. Colonel Michal DANIŠOVIČ

VÚA-SA MOČR, f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. XXVII, INFORMACE o mimořádných událostech dne 17. 11. 1989 v hl. m. Praze (INFORMATION on the events of November 17, 1989 in the capital Prague), pp. 8–12. Original, typewritten, 5 pages.

131 Signature: Lt. Colonel Danišovič.

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Document No. 1b

1989, after November 17 – Prague. Annex No. 1: information from the Chief of the Public Security Prague Municipal Directorate Lt. Colonel Michal Danišovič on the signs and slogans shouted during the demonstration in Prague on November 17, 1989.

BANNERS

You can't hold a dialogue on the street
 A free country in a free Europe
 Free elections
 End the monopoly of the KSČ
 NO KOMUNIST
 We don't want a one-party government
 We don't want to be a stake in the fence
 We don't want MILOŠ
 Who, if not us? When, if not now?
 There've been enough lies
 We want a different government
 Democracy for all
 And now us
 Abolish MLF [Marxist-Leninist Philosophy] at universities
 Freedom for academia
 Students of all faculties, unite
 Europe free of political prisoners
 Why should we learn nonsense?
 Stop beating the students
 We want an independent Union of Students

SHOUTED SLOGANS

Free elections!	Abolish the People's Militia!
We don't want Jakeš!	Abolish the StB!
We don't want Štěpán!	Czechs come with us!
Štěpán's not a thief!	We are Czechs!
Štěpán's not a person!	Gestapo!
Show us Fučík! ¹³²	Throw away those rags!
Long Live Havel!	(i.e. the officers' uniforms)

132 Gustav Fučík (1903–1943), was a Czech communist journalist executed by the Nazis during the Second World War for participating in the anti-Nazi resistance. After 1948, he became an icon of Communist ideology.

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Dubček! ¹³³	From Václavák (Wenceslas Sq.) home!
Devátý! ¹³⁴	Our hands are empty!
Abolish the army!	Jakeš's Gestapo!
Where is Štěpán?	Whose fault is it?
Long Live Charter!	Czechs come with us!
Freedom!	Jakeš out!
Down with the KSČ!	Long live Havel!
Democracy!	An end to one-party government!
Down with the monopoly of the KSČ!	We want a new government!
Throw Jakeš in the bin!	StB to the mines!
We don't want a government of grandads!	Open Sanops! ¹³⁵
Mohorita ¹³⁶ away from the trough!	Open the archives!
Stop being afraid!	The keys are ringing – it's the last ring!

After the closure of Národní Street

Rats!
 Police whores!
 Death to the Communists!
 You'll hang for this you bastards!
 Jakeš's Gestapo!
 You bastard, I'm going to remember you!
 [...] ¹³⁷

VÚA-SA MOČR, *f. VVS Tábor, sp. zn. T 10/91, sv. XXVII, Příloha č. 1 (Annex No. 1), pp. 13–14. Original, typewritten, 2 pages.*

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- 133 Alexander Dubček (1921–1992), First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1968 and a symbol of the so-called Prague Spring and “socialism with a human face”. After the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and the onset of normalisation, he was gradually removed from political positions and eventually expelled from the Communist Party. He subsequently worked as a mechanic in the Západoslovenské státní lesy state forestry enterprise in Slovakia. After November 1989, he returned to politics and served as Chairman of the Federal Assembly.
- 134 Stanislav Devátý (born 1952), attorney-at-law, politician, former dissident and signatory of Charter 77 (as well as its spokesperson between 1988 and 1989). During police interventions he practiced methods of passive resistance, and went on hunger strike. In August 1989, he was sentenced to 20 months in prison, but managed to escape from arrest to an already free Poland. He was only able to return to Czechoslovakia during the Velvet Revolution.
- 135 Prague's Na Homolce Hospital was built between 1984 and 1989 as a medical facility for senior Communist officials. Since 1990 it has served the general public.
- 136 Vasil Mohorita (born 1952), was the chairman of the Central Committee of the Socialist Union of Youth and the youngest member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. During the Velvet Revolution he negotiated with Václav Havel and the leaders of the newly established Civic Forum movement.
- 137 At the end is a hand-written distribution list: 1x Deputy Minister of the Interior of the ČSSR, Comrade SEDLÁK, 1x Chief of the VB Main Directorate, 1x Chief of the ČSR MVŽP VB Investigation Directorate, 1x Chief of the SNB Prague Directorate.

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Command structure of The Emergency Security Measures and “Operation Student”



Lt. Colonel Michal Danišovič



Major Bedřich Houbal



First Lt. Jaroslav Ledinský



Major Petr Šesták



Lt. Colonel Břetislav Zdráhala



Lt. Colonel Václav Váňa

Source: ABS, f. Personal registration cards of officers of the Ministry of the Interior, Personal registration card M. Danišovič (photo from 1966); *Ibidem*, f. Personal Files of officers of the Ministry of the Interior, Personal files evidential No. 1464/41, B. Houbal; 2013/48, J. Ledinský; 2315/51, P. Šesták (photo from 1966); 1945/43, B. Zdráhala, and 2331/40, V. Váňa.

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Command structure of The Emergency Security Measures and “Operation Student”



Lt. Colonel František Jüttner



Lt. Colonel Stanislav Petr



Major Antonín Hrbotický



Major Jaromír Soukup



Major Otto Polák



Major Miroslav Valčík

Source: ABS, f. Personal Files of officers of the Ministry of the Interior, Personal files evidential No. 2332/45, F. Jüttner; 2120/40, S. Petr; 2013/48, A. Hrbotický; 2288/52, J. Soukup; 2751/52, O. Polák, and 2315/51, M. Valčík.

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The first row of the cordon of the 3rd Battalion of the PP VB ČSR on the crossroad of Na Perštýně, Národní, and Spálená streets (November 17, 1989) *Source: ČTK (Czech Press Agency)*



The Avia vans of the PP VB ČSR and VB Trainee Emergency Brigade on the crossroad of Újezd and Vítězná streets (November 17, 1989) *Source: ČTK (Czech Press Agency)*