

Jan Hanak As A Soldier



Jan Hanak as a soldier in 1958.

A person has a lot of humorous experiences in the army. My army entrance took place in Trencin. Each barracks had a room that was called the "hlaska" [reporting station]. Each evening all the barracks in Slovakia had to contact Trencin, where the district command the central reporting station were. Women soldiers, professionals, worked there. You had to report. This was done in Morse code. There were acronyms for everything, called Q codes. For example QRS meant "repeat text" and QST "transmit more quickly". So if something wasn't understandable, they'd write QRS from the central station. My roommates struggled with Morse code, and those at the central station would make fun of them. They kept on sending them the Q code for "transmit more quickly". The soldiers at the receiver would be in a sweat, but couldn't send any quicker. They were unhappy because of it, and were also talking about it in the mess during lunch. They were thinking about how to get their revenge on the women at the central station. At that time the reservists had also entered the army. One of the reservists was a Czech who offered to come in the evening and help them. The soldiers gave him the text he was supposed to send. He began incredibly quickly. From the central reporting station they however sent the Q code "transmit more quickly". But despite the fact that he was transmitting awfully fast, the women were still capable of receiving it. Suddenly he pulled out some sort of device. It was an apparatus that had a lever. When he move the lever to the left, it sent dots. When it was moved to the left, it sent dashes. You see, he was an electrical engineer, who'd participated in nationwide and international Morse code races. He began transmitting using this device. Suddenly the Q code "repeat text" came. He repeated. The code "transmit more slowly" came. He was sending so fast that they weren't capable of registering it.

Then he let the soldier back in his place to transmit. They then investigated from the central station who'd been sending so fast, and found it out too. But they never repeated their jokes.

Another anecdote is a bit disgusting, but for a soldier, humorous. During one hockey game the meniscus on my other knee ruptured. They operated on me at the military hospital in Kosice. There were also a few civilian patients at the military hospital. There were eight of us in our room. Four on one side, four on the other. Lying under the window was one old guy. A homeless type, you could say. He had a venous ulcer, and so every winter they'd admit him to the hospital. He was called Jozsi bacsi [Uncle Jozsi in Hungarian]. He pestered everyone around, especially the nurses. They didn't like him. Do you know how he washed? Under the bed he had a bottle of mineral water. In the morning a nurse would come and bring him a washbasin. Jozsi bacsi would take the bottle from underneath this bed, and stand above the basin. Then he'd fill his mouth from the bottle. His cheeks were completely stretched. I'd guess that a half liter of water fit in there. He'd spit the water out into his hands and wash his face with it. It made our stomachs churn. Lying in the bed beside me was a soldier from the air force. When Jozsi bacsi was sleeping, we took his bottle and peed in it. In the morning we were waiting for him to wash. None of us went into the washroom. We were all watching. He repeated his ritual. He took a mouthful, spit it into his hands, and washed himself. We began to roar with laughter. He sniffed the bottle, and realized what was up. He began to yell at us in a mixture of eastern dialect and Hungarian: "The visit will come, the colonel will come. I gonna tell him everything, and you gonna go to the prosecutor's office." We knew that he'd tell, but we didn't know how the head doctor would react, who was at the same time a colonel. The visit came, ten doctors. They came over to Jozsi bacsi: "So, Jozsi bacsi, how are you?"

"Mr. Colonel, you got to arrest those ones over there!"

"What for?"

"They pissed in my bottle."

"Good for them. What's preventing you from going to wash normally? You're always putting on the same act here." Luckily it ended up all right.