

# AFRICA

## THE DREAM AND THE REALITY

FIRST VOLUME

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BY

JIRÍ HANZELKA AND MIROSLAV ZIKMUND

  
ARIIA

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PRAGUE 1955

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## INTRODUCTION

*Jiří Hanzelka and Miroslav Zikmund spent their early years in widely different parts of the Czechoslovak Republic — Jiří Hanzelka in Štramberk in Moravia and for a time in the capital city of Slovakia, Bratislava; and Miroslav Zikmund in Pilsen, the metropolis of western Bohemia. But although they met for the first time in 1938, in Prague, where both began to attend the Commercial College, there were many things they had in common as lads. Travel was in fact the means of livelihood of both families. Ferdinand Hanzelka, whose son was born on Christmas Eve 1920, worked first as a labourer in the limestone quarries, but later on, when he had served his apprenticeship as a locksmith, he used to travel all over the country and even abroad on assembly jobs. He began travelling regularly after the first World War, when he started work as a driver for the Tatra Works in Kopřivnice, and drove back and fore over the whole of the country. As a racing motorist he later got to know many European countries. Miroslav Zikmund was born on February 14th 1919 in Pilsen, the son of an engine driver who travelled hundreds of thousands of kilometres in the course of his work.*

*From childhood both boys loved motor vehicles — as indeed every boy worthy of the name does. Zikmund could tell how he would stand with a crowd of lads and note down the licence numbers and the makes of the cars passing along the road, trying to guess where they had come from by the tracks left by the tyre treads, and discussing nothing so often as motor cars in the breaks between lessons. Jiří Hanzelka's first act as a motorist left him sadder and wiser: his father left the car he was driving standing on the street, and by the time he had had his dinner his son had managed to get it on to the blocks. The boy got the birch for it, but after that he was allowed to help his father with various small repairs, and thus motor vehicles became his hobby.*

*Naturally the lads had more than one hobby, and strange to say they made good use of them all later on. Another of Miroslav Zikmund's hobbies was learning foreign languages. The Pilsen Secondary School, which he attended, was one of the three schools in the country where pupils could*



learn a foreign language as early as the fifth year. Mirek chose English, which he had started to learn on his own two years before. In his fifth year he chose Russian and French as additional voluntary subjects, nor did he neglect Latin, although at first it seemed pointless. He realised he had been wrong, later, when Latin was a great help to him in learning Italian and Spanish at College. Since German was compulsory in secondary schools, Miroslav Zikmund finished his education equipped with at least a grounding in seven foreign languages, supplemented later by the study of Arabic and a Syrian dialect. Languages were among Jiří Hanzelka's favourite subjects, too. He learned German from the time he was nine years old, started French at eleven, English at sixteen, and Russian in his spare time. To these he later added a knowledge of Swahili, which people use to make themselves understood all over Central and East Africa. A working knowledge of languages turned out to be very useful when they were on their travels.

Another hobby the lads shared was shorthand. Shorthand was an optional subject at the secondary school Miroslav Zikmund attended, but he did not neglect it. In 1938 he took part in a nation-wide shorthand competition and came second in the 80 words a minute class. Jiří Hanzelka attended the Commercial Academy in Smíchov, Prague, where shorthand was obligatory. Later both students learned how to adapt the Czech Herout-Mikulík shorthand to German and English. Their knowledge of shorthand was another thing which stood them in good stead on their journey across two continents. They both made good use of it when writing up their log-book, and when building up their dialogues, very important for writers if their story is to ring true. They took shorthand notes of their impressions of the countryside as they drove through and even learned to write shorthand in the dark, making notes for film commentaries while watching the films.

In spite of all his own work as a student Miroslav Zikmund earned money by coaching in Latin and Mathematics; right to the end of his secondary school career he studied with distinction. In this respect Jiří Hanzelka kept pace with him, achieving the same excellent results throughout the second half of his school career and matriculating with distinction. He kept it up at College, too, coming out top of his year.

This of course far from exhausts the interests of both lads. Photography, for example. Miroslav Zikmund began to take an interest in it as a boy, and when his interest grew deeper, in his third year at school, his art master helped to introduce him to the secrets of photography. Jiří Hanzelka studied laboratory photography for two years at the Smíchov Academy. Nor did they ignore music: Mirek Zikmund learned to play the violin well. Music was one of Jiří Hanzelka's passions from childhood, as we can see from the fact that

today he plays the piano, organ and accordion well. Another hobby they shared was the reading of travel books.

Like Miroslav Zikmund, whose favourite sport was mountaineering, Jiří Hanzelka paid plenty of attention to physical training. As a boy he was an active member of the Sokol organisation. In 1938 he won a place in the Prague Youths' Team which won the mixed ten-points competition, comprising five gymnastic exercises with apparatus and five items of light athletics. In the competition for individuals he won second place — an honourable achievement.

At the Commercial College Jiří Hanzelka studied pedagogics and didactics, which formed an essential part of their preparations for newspaper and radio educational work.

It is obvious that successful travellers and outstanding workers in any field are not just born; their achievements are based on profound knowledge which must be acquired from the earliest years. Miroslav Zikmund and Jiří Hanzelka met this demand fully. Looking at what happened to them after 1938 we see that even later on they did not stop learning, and that from that time onwards they deliberately devoted a great deal of their time to preparations for their future journey.

When the Nazis closed down the Czech universities and colleges in 1939 the friends parted and looked for any kind of job which would save them from having to go to Germany on forced labour. Jiří Hanzelka succeeded in getting a post in an insurance company office, but the Labour Exchange authorities would not leave him alone. The only chance he had to avoid being sent to Germany was to work on the land. And so he went as an agricultural labourer on a farm in Zhoř near Tábor. There he met with an accident at work, as a result of which he had a finger amputated. After several weeks in hospital he was allowed to enrol in the one-year co-operative school in Prague. Since the syllabus offered no difficulties, he was able to spend most of his time preparing for the journey he and his friend Miroslav Zikmund had decided to undertake some time in the future. And when he left the school and took up a position in the Co-operative he had the chance to acquire considerable experience of trade and commerce. He was employed in a department which had considerable contact with other occupied countries.

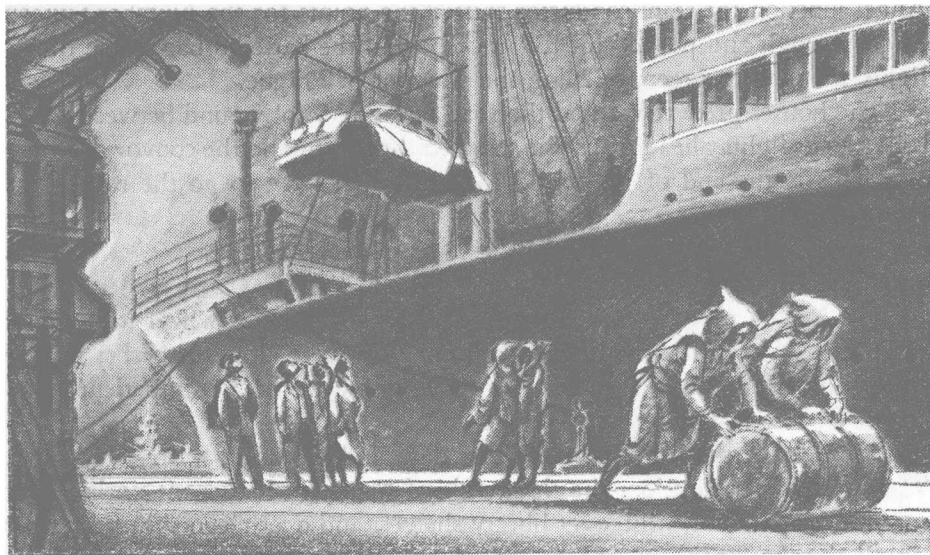
Miroslav Zikmund's fate during the war years was very similar. After November 17th 1939 he went to work in the Pilsen slaughter house, at first in the shambles and then in the suet and pork fat sheds. Half a year later he was transferred to the Bohemian-Moravian Milk and Fat Trust and then finally to Uniexport, a foreign trade company, where he got his first taste of foreign trade. Thus both friends landed in Prague commercial houses

where they were able to carry on together their preparations for the journey they proposed to make after the democratic forces won the war.

During the Occupation their preparatory work centred round the University and the Technical Libraries, improving their command of foreign languages, studying travel accounts, collecting maps and studying geographical and scientific works. In 1945 they had to make their general preparations more definite. Hanzelka and Zikmund went on with their studies at the Commercial College, aware of the necessity of drawing up a definite plan for their journey, acquiring money, planning how to meet the expenses of the journey itself, and — the main thing — getting hold of a car. The Ministry of Information gave them a scholarship of £ 2,000 for the venture; the rest of their expenses they met themselves from the money brought in by their newspaper articles and radio features. It is perhaps worth mentioning that on their return they gave the whole of their scholarship money back.

The Tatra Works in Kopřivnice lent them a car for the journey, naturally on condition both men would spend several months on practical work in the factory, getting to know the car down to the most minute details and learning how to carry out even big repair jobs. Hanzelka and Zikmund proved their efficiency as drivers and kept on improving. In October 1945 they passed their driving tests in the little town of Sušice in South Bohemia.

All obstacles overcome, and their college studies completed, Hanzelka and Zikmund set out on April 22nd 1947 to drive across Africa and South and Central America in a mass-produced Czechoslovak car. In the three volumes of their book "Africa, the Dream and the Reality", you will learn all about their travels in Africa. After three and a half years wandering over two continents they have finished writing up their experiences on their travels. Besides this book on Africa they have written over a thousand features for newspapers and the radio. The films they made themselves on their journey have made three full-length films and twelve short documentary films, and provided material for an exhibition which has been shown in all the larger towns in Czechoslovakia; they have also given a hundred and fifty lectures and discussion evenings in towns and in large factories. In 1953 their work was rewarded with the highest honour conferrable for outstanding achievement — the Order of the Republic. They are now working both on the material they have brought back from South and Central America, which will appear in four extensive volumes, and on preparations for another trip which will really be the completion of their journey round the world — travelling through Asia and Australia. The importance attached to Hanzelka and Zikmund's second trip is clear from the fact that it will be made under the auspices of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences.



## Chapter One

### TO THE SHORES OF MOROCCO

"... and so, goodbye, and we'll meet again here, in front of the Auto Club, three years from now!"

The last handshakes and the smiles of friends who have come to give us a send-off. Spring has come to Prague and scattered her silver visiting cards over the pavements and over the pale green of the trees. The rays of sunlight slid over the open roof of the car, touched the chromium of the seats and alighted on the two tropical sun-helmets.

"Think of Prague the first time you put them on in Africa!"

The film cameras buzzed, eyes narrowed on the cameras' viewfinders, a red light showed by the speedometer, and — we were off on the first yard of our journey round the world. The row of cars moved off, to accompany us as far as the boundaries of Greater Prague.

In their little boats anchored beneath Palacký Bridge fishermen sat gazing meditatively at the waters of the Vltava. The houses along the Smichov river-bank drew a curtain across the panorama of the Hradčany glowing in the morning sun. Women were hurrying along with their shopping bags. At the

Angel junction the tram-conductor shifted the points for the Number Sixteen to go through and pushed his rod back behind the battered bar as the traffic lights changed to green, opening the way out of Prague.

The houses grew fewer and the road beyond Motol wound between green banks. Rear-lights ahead of us, the sound of brakes — and the convoy drew up.

"This is the end of the world for us. You'll have to go the rest of the way alone . . ."

Smiles; silent, resolute handshakes.

"Give my love to Tobruk!"

We looked round for the last time at the row of cars which turned and disappeared down the road beyond Motol. We were alone. A cyclist braked to turn his head and look at the flags waving on our bonnet impatiently and restlessly, like a symbol.

All at once the fatigue of the last days and nights of worry fell away. The years of preparation, the thousands of hours we had spent poring over maps, over pages of print, over library shelves, and over clean sheets of paper — all this narrowed in an instant to a milestone on the road above Motol, which wrote full stop at the end of one chapter, and opened another.

The slender spire of Bartholomew's tower in Pilsen rose above the crown of the Rokycany road, and factory chimneys emerged from the curtain of smoke. The avenue of cherry trees down Slovanská Street was swimming in the fresh green and velvet of its blossom, a melancholy frame for our last handshakes.

Přeštice, Klatovy, the Šumava foothills. And then the frontier post in Železná Ruda, beyond which lay all the continents of the world. A bare-headed lad with mementoes for sale came running up to our Tatra.

"Buy a talisman for luck," he said. "Going far . . .?"

"Not so very far. Just from Czechoslovakia to Czechoslovakia."

He laughed, jingled the small change in his pocket and ran off. A cool breeze blowing from the deep woods of the Šumava Mountains ruffled the tops of the trees. We opened the wooden case with its poker-work view of the tower on Pancíř Hill, and got out our fountain pens.

"22. IV. 1947."

"I wonder where we shall be on the first anniversary of this day? And on the others . . .?"

A customs official stamped our passports and raised the barrier beside which gleamed the symbol of the Czechoslovak Republic. A few yards further on stood a board bearing the word *Deutschland*. Our first frontier.

"Bon voyage — and don't forget your homeland!"

Words stuck in our throats. Trees and thoughts flew backwards . . .

## *Germany and Switzerland from the road*

Much has changed in Munich since the war ended.

Much of the debris in the battered city has been sorted into neat piles of bricks and heaps of bent and rusty iron. But people swarm about among the ruins like troglodytes and grumble because from the next ration period on they will only get 4,000 grammes of bread a month. There are few things more typical of post-war Germany than the Munich Arc de Triomphe. Once a faithful copy of the Berlin Brandenburgertor, today it has lost its monumental decorative figures; it is crippled, with nothing but the torso of the bronze lions and the antique pillars. The busy life of Munich hurries relentlessly by and the overcrowded Munich trams thunder beneath the arches all askew, just as they thunder down the main streets of Prague during the evening rush-hour.

The motionless stumps of the Gothic Frauenkirche grimace against the spring sky and from the ruins of the houses opposite they are carefully sorting out bricks, stone, iron and rafters. To the traveller passing through the living graveyard of the city it remains a mystery where all these thousands of people thronging the streets and hurrying to their place of work can possibly live. They only shrug their shoulders resentfully if you ask them whether they are better off now than during the war.

"They give us 600 grammes of meat a month — and during the war we could get oranges . . ."

In their "*man gibt uns*" you can hear their stored-up hatred, their humiliated pride, their dependence upon those who were meant to serve them and not to be doling out bread and meat by the gramme. You cannot help remembering the loud marches and the jackboots of the Nazi supermen, the luxurious cars sporting the swastika, and the bloated arrogance of the people who now, under the "protection" of the American occupation authorities, stand before you with an embarrassed, servile smile and palm outstretched.

The German roads are not too lively. You meet the occupation army's motor-cars, an occasional lorry, and now and again a foreign car. The millions of tons of concrete on the German highroads are having a rest, and the holes gaping in the side-roads grow larger accordingly.

Switzerland, by contrast, is living at top speed. You do not need to see the frontier posts and the stamps in your passport to realise that you have passed all at once out of one world into another. Instead of the blacked-out towns and villages of Germany you are welcomed by Lake Constance with its bunches of twinkling lights and the reflection of glowing neon signs. Maybe life has even speeded up a little since the war ended, but on the

whole the Swiss give the impression of not yet having realised the difference between the war years just passed and the present day. Berne, Zurich, Geneva, Lausanne, are just one stream of cars, all the latest models. Hundreds of cyclists weave their way in and out of the cars, calmly and in a disciplined fashion. A motorist with the noise of the Prague streets still ringing in his ears feels suddenly oppressed, and cannot understand how his Swiss colleague can consider pedestrians and cyclists his equals on the road. Rather than sound his horn he stops and waits while two friends in the middle of the road fix their next meeting and shake hands in farewell. The Swiss police never even dream of asking whether your horn is in order when they stop you on the road; they are only concerned with your brakes and your lights.

In Switzerland you can buy almost anything you want, but life is very expensive. Everybody in Switzerland grumbles about it when you compliment them on their peace-time prosperity.

"There's plenty of everything, alright, but where's the money to come from?"

In vain did we look for sugar for breakfast in Switzerland. Sugar was rationed and the ration was about half of that in our country. Czechoslovak sugar had recently made its appearance on the market, off the ration, but it was much more expensive.

"You ought to stay longer, and then you'd see that everything isn't as beautiful as it looks at first sight," we were told by the amateur broadcaster in Zurich whom we visited in order to send news of our journey home to radio amateurs in Czechoslovakia. "Don't forget you've been living in a cage for six years, while we were importing everything we needed. But you ought to stand in front of a shop-window and watch how many people can buy the things you see there..."

He was a higher civil servant, and lived in a poky little flat with modest furnishings. The leather patches on the elbows of his worn jacket did not point to too much prosperity...

An interesting feature of Swiss life are the automatic telephones. There is no need to mention the robots which deliver messages in your absence and record conversations and items of news which the owner of the telephone can listen to on his return. The ordinary public telephone booths in the streets are remarkable enough, equipped as they are like clean, neat little studies. The three volumes of the telephone book, arranged according to cantons, are hung side by side in such a way that when you pull one of them out it automatically opens. With the telephone books go sliding aluminium tables of distances with the rates for long-distance calls. A call from Berne to

Zurich costs 90 centimes, about a shilling. You drop your coin into the right slot, according to size; before dialling the required number you dial the three-figure number of the long-distance exchange, and you can talk to Zurich straight away; between six in the evening and six in the morning, while the lines are slack, the rate is lower by one third.

If you walk through the streets of Swiss towns after midnight, you are forced to wonder what garage-owners have to live on. As the flow of motor traffic in the streets gradually slows down during the evening, so the rows of cars parked alongside the pavements grow. The motorist can leave his car anywhere on the street without needing to fear not finding it in the same place next day. Confidence in the honesty of the Swiss is carried so far that they do not even lock their cars. In this way you can save not only valuable Swiss francs, but primarily a great deal of time, for there is no need to go looking for a suitable garage.

The Swiss are excellent psychologists. They are well aware that their mountains and lakes bring valuable currency into the country — currency which means American automobiles, English scooters, or Spanish oranges. They are helpful, polite and anxious to be of service. They are well aware of their international position, yet never forget to thank you with their characteristic “*merci vielmal*”.

### *Indo-Chinese in Avignon*

The change over from the German to the French element is sudden. Incomprehensibly sudden. Fifty kilometres beyond Berne the German names on the signposts suddenly disappear and *Neuenberg* suddenly turns into *Neuchâtel*. And from that moment you will not hear a word of German. The calm Swiss become temperamental Frenchmen. And French goes with you all the way to the continent of Africa.

If you failed to notice the glittering luxury of Geneva with its marble palaces and the League of Nations in liquidation, and did not turn to look back at the alabaster circle of the Alps, you would not even realise that the gates of Switzerland had closed behind you and that you were descending sharply into the valley of the Rhône. On the Swiss-French frontier the anachronism of military occupation still exists, with this difference: the isolation zone is guarded by the military of the country itself. This survival is perhaps artificially preserved by motorists from the rest of France who travel to the frontier zone to buy cheap petrol. On entering France proper they have to pay an equalising tax to the same French government, but even so they make



a good profit on it, for petrol is two-thirds cheaper in the frontier zone. The French customs officials are used to seeing motorists from France with their petrol tanks quite dried up.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen," said the French customs official when he discovered our reserve tank full of petrol, under the front seat. "You'll have to pay duty on this — unless you can find room for it in the tank."

"But it's Czech petrol we've brought all the way from Prague."

"I can't help that, petrol's petrol."

And so the last twenty litres of Prague petrol found their way way from the reserve tank into the petrol tank. This was the petrol we had provided against a rainy day, so that we needn't waste time in Germany running from office to office and trying to get ration permits.

"Très bien, messieurs," the customs man laughed. "Now you can go through."

The mountain road winding between Labalme and Leymiat in no way suffers by comparison with the works of art of the Swiss or Italian road builders. The fertile slopes covered with vineyards soon give way to the open valley with its avenues of plane trees along the main roads. The peasant carts with their high wheels, drawn by donkeys, strike a strange note. Instead of luxurious Cadillacs ancient Renaults dating from the first World War rule the French roads, with their massive tyres and angular bodies. You feel as if you have somehow got into a jubilee exhibition for which some museum has lent its most ancient veteran cars. But by the time you have met a few hundred of these grandfathers of the road you begin to feel admiration for the powers of resistance and the technical qualities of these vehicles which ought to have landed in the cemetery long ago.

About a hundred kilometres north-west of Marseilles lies the old papal town of Avignon. Massive mediaeval ramparts surround the whole town with a wealth of buttresses. Modern hotels with hot and cold running water have been stuck on to the walls of the Gothic and renaissance churches without the slightest attempt to temper their appearance to fit the pure architecture of the church fronts.

It was May Day in the streets of mediaeval Avignon.

From early morning the paved streets rang with the feet of the thousands of working people who had gathered to express their disapproval of their government's policy. At times we got the impression that Hanoi had occupied the streets of Avignon. Representatives of the Indo-Chinese people, who were fighting in their homeland against the French, here marched by their side and under their protection and together with them called for the ending of the French government's senseless adventuring.