

Marína Paulíny.

On the 5th October 1945 a B-24 Liberator plane started to burn a few minutes after take off and crashed near Blackbush airport, 50 km southwest of London. In its wreckage 23 persons: 5 members of the crew and all 18 passengers – Czechoslovak repatriates – perished. Among them was Marína Paulíny, the vice-chairman of the Czechoslovak Red Cross. During the war and after her tragic death her name appeared in many newspapers.

Who was that lady?

If we should briefly characterize the personality of Marína Paulíny, she was a person of strong will determined to do what she held to be right. She devoted her life to activities that had a common aim: to help her nation and countrymen wherever needed. She was sincere and enthusiastic, but tactful and had the gift of persuasion. She was able to win friends in high society as well as among the common people.

Childhood and youth

Marína was born in March 1897 in a small Slovak village Slovenské Pravno in Turiec region (Middle Slovakia) as the eldest daughter of Ján Paulíny and his wife Anna. Here, in a nationally conscious family she spent the first eight years of her life, before in 1905 the family emigrated to the U. S. A. Her father found a job in a chemical factory in Stamford, state Connecticut (not far away from New York), but died in 1916, leaving his wife with 4 children. Marína was then 19 years old and had just finished her studies at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) trade school. In 1917 she started to work in the Central Office of the Czechoslovak national association and the Slovak league in Pittsburgh. It was here in 1918 she witnessed the proclamation of the Czechoslovak republic and establishment of the first president of the new republic T.G. Masaryk. This was a historic event for Slovaks, because until that time Slovakia was a part of the Austro – Hungarian monarchy and was exposed to attempts of the Hungarian authorities to Hungarianise the Slovak population.

In 1918 Marína started to work at the Czechoslovak consulate in New York. The American Red Cross at the end of World War I. organized a relief expedition to Siberia where the Czechoslovak legionnaires were fighting their way to Vladivostok and to be transferred to Czechoslovakia. Marina could not resist the temptation to help and joined as a nurse and official interpreter. In 1919 she sailed with the expedition of doctors and nurses to Vladivostok.

According to the Certificate of the foreign service *Pro Patria* Marína worked oversea for the American Red Cross as a nurse from May 16th till December 27th 1919. This document carries the signature of the American president Woodrow Wilson.

As the only Slovak woman she stayed with our legionnaires until the last transport left Siberia.

In Czechoslovakia she joined members of her family who in the meantime returned home from America.

Activities in YWCA and Chicago period

At that time American help for people in post-war Europe was distributed by the so called Hoover mission and Marína took part in its activities in Slovakia. After this mission ended Marína helped the representatives of the American YWCA (Young Women Christian Association) to establish a branch of the organisation in Slovakia. She became a secretary and later the directress of the YWCA in Bratislava.

In 1924 Marína returned to America and became the head of the Chicago branch of the Czechoslovak Art Studio – a modern store selling articles of Czech and Slovak folks art. In her shop in the Chicago main street she sold objects of art, mainly folk art, embroideries, ceramics from Modra, graphics etc. Women's dresses decorated with Slovak folk embroideries were offered later.

In 1926, besides those in Chicago and New York, the branches of *Czechoslovak Art Studio* were extended to Boston and Miami Beach, and in 1928 to Los Angeles in California, Belleaire in Florida and Detroit.

Marína visited various cities and towns in America, organized exhibitions and lectures and used every opportunity to inform visitors about her native country. By her charm and enthusiasm, she won many friends for Czechoslovakia and established friendly contacts with many Americans.

Marína's apartment in Chicago was a social hub. It was there that Americans and compatriots from Czechoslovakia who stayed in the U.S.A met and socialised.

Again in Czechoslovakia

In 1936 the Czechoslovak Prime minister Milan Hodža initiated the establishment of an office for tourism and travel Slovakotour. Marína was appointed its directress. She returned, as she thought finally, from America to Bratislava. As the directress and at the same time vice-chairman of the Anglo-American Society of Czechoslovakia she accompanied prominent English and American politicians, journalists, writers and artists visiting the country. Thanks to her enthusiasm and personal charm they gained a favorable impression of the country and became friends of Czechoslovakia. Among prominent visitors were for instance writers Robert Bruce Lockhart (1887 – 1970), Claude Houghton Oldfield (1889 – 1961), Storm Jameson (1891 – 1936) and the editor Kingsley Martin (1897 – 1969). Long standing guests of the *Anglo-American Society of Czechoslovakia* as well as R. B. Lockhart, the historians Robert Balmain Mowat (1883 – 1941) and Sir Alfred Eckhard Zimmern (1879 – 1957) were frequent visitors. Marína also met the well-known classic philologist Sir Richard Livingston (1880 – 1960), who was in the 1930-s the head of Corpus Christi College in Oxford, later (1944 - 1947) the Chancellor of the University in Oxford.

In 1938 she accompanied foreign politicians and journalists all over Czechoslovakia and informed them about the position of minorities.

After the Czechoslovak republic fell apart and a pro-nazi regime was established in Slovakia, Marína became a persona non grata and was dismissed from Slovakotour. She continued to work as a correspondent of British and American newspapers, but her position was becoming more and more risky. Finally, on September 14th, after a long hesitation, she went abroad. It was really at the last moment because the very next day the police were searching for her. After many difficulties, travelling through Hungary, Yugoslavia and France she arrived at the end of October in London. Here began the last, but most important chapter of her life.

Activitgo out to London

Only a few days after her arrival in London she delivered a broadcast reporting at length about Czechoslovakia, what it was and what it had become.

In 1940, after the recognition of the Czechoslovak exile government in London by the British government, the Czechoslovak Red Cross was restored and Marína was appointed its vice-chairman. She was assigned one of the most important and most delicate tasks: the cooperation with allied Red Crosses and with the International Red Cross. Thanks to her initiative, tact and deftness the Czechoslovak Red Cross gained thr respect and support of the allies. Besides that, Marína had another task: the care of war prisoners. Since the Germans did not recognize our prisoners under statutes regulating treatment of war prisoners, they could not receive parcels from their relatives. The Czechoslovak Red Cross succeeded in arranging parcels of food and clothing were sent through the British Red Cross. She also initiated a service that searched for countrymen scattered all over the world in order to restore contact between them and their families.

Through her numerous contacts in America Marína was able to gain considerable material help for the Czechoslovak Red Cross. It was however necessary to gain moral support and material help also in Britain. She managed to join the most competent London

circles and succeeded in gaining their understanding and support. This success was possible due to her excellent knowledge of and proficiency in the English language, good understanding of English culture, tact, unusual energy and special charm, as well as the support of the chairman Hana Benešová, the wife of president Edward Beneš, with whom she was friends.

Life in London during the war was not easy. The offices of the Czechoslovak Red Cross were twice burned down and Marína was during one air raid buried in her apartment.

In April 1944 Marína as the only woman among 7 Czechoslovak delegates who took part in the 26th. conference of the *International Labor Office* in Philadelphia. She was interested in the problem of how after the end of the war soldiers could be integrated into reconstruction work as well as how to support of women in the aftermath of the war world.

In May 1944 as a delegate of the Czechoslovak Red Cross Marína undertook a major information and publicity tour across Canada and the U. S. A with the aim to thank compatriots for their help, to inform them about activities of the Czechoslovak Red Cross and at the same time to ask them for new help. She visited Toronto, Windsor, Chatham, Hamilton, Batawa, Ottawa, Montreal, New York, Washington, Pittsburg, Cleveland, Chicago and Boston. Everywhere visited she delivered a speech, took part in numerous negotiations and working parties and established many useful contacts.

She received an enthusiastic response in the press and many letters of thanks as well as numerous contributions in cash and goods for the Czechoslovak Red Cross all of which testifies of the great success of this tour.

In April 1945 Marína took part in important negotiations with the International Red Cross in Geneva seeking help for participants in the Slovak National Uprising who became German prisoners and were held in concentration camps. She also discussed the involvement of the search service of the Czechoslovak Red Cross in the wider international search service and the participation of Czechoslovakia in the post-war arrangement in Europe.

In October 1945 Marína was to take part as a delegate in the international conference of the Red Cross in Geneva. Before that she wanted to make a short visit home and personally hand over one of her "convoys. In Bratislava a ceremonial welcome was being prepared to express thanks for all she had done for her nation and country. But fate did not grant her this happy return. She died in an air crash on her way home and on October 10th was buried in the cemetery at Brookwood near Woking in England.

In March 1947 Marína Paulíny was awarded the Czechoslovak War Cross 1939 *in memoriam*. The communist regime, established in 1948, did not value the work of persons active in the London exile and so Marína became forgotten for many decades. But she certainly deserves to be remembered.