

## FRANTIŠEK PECHÁČEK (15 Feb, 1896 – 3 Feb, 1944)

František Pecháček was a *Sokol* trainer, author of publications on physical education, and a member of the resistance movement OSVO (*Obec sokolská v odboji*). He was a man fulfilling the *Sokol* ideals with his entire life and prepared to fight for the freedom of his country.

He was born on 15 February, 1896 in Záhornice, but spent almost all of his youth in Nová Paka, where he was an excellent gymnast at the local *Sokol* gym, and later a successful trainer of juniors and men. After the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, he joined the army, became a non-commissioned officer and managed a school for physical fitness training in the army. He became a member of the competition team of the *Czech Sokol Society* and gained international awards. When he left the army, he accepted the position of a permanent school trainer of Sokol in Tyrš's house, created mass compositions for team competitions, one of them winning an international gymnastic competition in Paris in 1937. One of his pieces is the song *Oath to the Republic*, performed by 30,000 practitioners on the 10th All-Sokol Rally in 1938. After the occupation of the Czech lands, František completely fulfilled the final words of his *Oath to the Republic*, "We are standing strong, prepared to fight with new power for the better future of our beloved homeland."



Three months later, Czechoslovakia's future was decided in Munich, and within one year Czechoslovakia was occupied by the German army and World War II started. Thousands of *Sokol* people were involved in the resistance. František Pecháček became a commander of the resistance organization *Jindra*. As a part of his illegal activities, resistance fighters met in his apartment, including Jan Kubiš, a member of the *Operation Anthropoid airborne unit*. František helped hiding parachutists sent from Great Britain, and preparing the assassination of *Reichsprotektor* Reinhard Heydrich (27 May, 1942).

After Heydrich's assassination, František, his wife Emilia and his brother's family were arrested. They ended up as prisoners in Charles' Square in Prague. František Pecháček bravely faced torture and didn't say anything. After brutal interrogations, his wife was released and he was imprisoned in a small fortress in Terezín and then sent to the concentration camp Mauthausen. His wife was killed in a gas chamber on 26 January, 1943.

The exact circumstances of František's execution, however, are unknown. Some sources say he was shot by an execution squad. Another version says that he was torn apart by a pack of dogs. The last version says he was seriously wounded by camp commander George Bachmayer's mastiff and then shot after hospital treatment.

František's last words were: "Goodbye, brothers, I know I'm going to die, but I'm not afraid. A brave man dies once, only cowards die a hundred times. I will die calmly, because I know our victims were not in vain." He died on 3 February, 1944.

After more than 74 years his memory was honored with the memorial in his home town of Záhornice.

## Story on František Pecháček's life

Composed by Ruwen (GE), Alexandros, Teo (GR)

### An online radio interview with František Pecháček's friends

*Speaker 1:* Hello from radio "Stand up, Europe" for another little report on how Europeans stood up to resist the Nazi occupation terror before and during World War II. For today's report, our reporters went to Czechia for an interview with survivors of WW II that knew the Czech resistance fighter František Pecháček.

František Pecháček was born in 1896 and was killed in prison by the Nazis at the age of 48. Here is his story, told by members of the Novak family.

*Speaker 2:* Today, as another part in our "Stand up, Europe" interviews, we are reporting from Czechia in our series on people who risked and sacrificed their lives during the National Socialist regime. We are honoured to have the Novak family with us who knew one of these brave fighters for freedom. Mr and Mrs Novak, thank you very much for your willingness to tell our listeners something about your friend František Pecháček who fought against the Nazi German occupation in the 1940s.

How did you get to know him?

*Mr Novak:* Well, the whole story started with our fathers. They were neighbours when the Pecháček family moved to our village. That's how their friendship started. And even though I was some years younger, František and I were childhood friends, growing up together.

*Speaker 2:* So you must have known František pretty well. What can you tell us about his character and his life before the war?

*Mrs Novak:* I, too, knew him because my family lived only three houses down the road. František always was like his father, very dedicated to what he was doing. I remember that František was very athletic and excellent at all sorts of sports, especially gymnastics. After school and army service he decided that he wanted to train young people in gymnastics. He was very successful in what he did and earned lots of awards. Everybody in our village was so proud of him!

*Mr Novak:* He even composed a song for one of the competitions! Its title is "Oath to the Republic". The most famous line runs: "*We are standing strong, prepared to fight with new power for the better future of our beloved homeland.*"

*Speaker 2:* This sounds like a strong political statement. Does this line really express František's point of view?

*Mr Novak:* Oh yes, it does. František was a real patriot and he wanted our country to be free and independent. For him it was only natural to join the resistance when the Nazis came.

*Speaker 2:* I see. And his activities in Czech resistance against the Nazi occupation is, of course, what our audience is interested in most. What can you tell us about František's work as a resistance fighter? Did you stay in contact with him during that time?

*Mrs Novak:* We lost contact because all the resistance fighters were very careful and didn't talk to people who were not active in the underground.

*Mr Novak:* Most of what we can tell you is what František's mum told us after the war. You know, she was the only one to survive... František joined the underground movement right after Hitler's troops had set foot on Czech lands and because he was a leading figure he became head of a resistance group called Jindra.

*Speaker 2:* So what did František do to fight the occupants?

*Mr Novak:* He simply did everything he could to help people that the Nazis chased. That means he found places for them to hide, organized food and so on. He organized supplies for other resistance fighters. And he was involved in the assassination of Heydrich ...

*Speaker 2:* You're talking about so-called Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich. He was killed by Czech resistance fighters in September 1941. This led to a rule of terror that cost many Czech people's lives. In which way was František involved?

*Mr Novak:* Well, he organized all the supplies like weapons for the assassination and helped finding the hiding places for Jan Kubiš and Jozef Gabčík who were the two heroes that killed Heydrich.

But during and after the assassination things didn't work out as planned. Jan and Jozef, as you know, were killed by the SS some time after Heydrich had died. Most of the others involved were killed, too. There must have been some persons that had betrayed them to the Nazis ...

*Speaker 2:* What about František? Did he survive?

*Mr Novak:* First, it seems he could hide somewhere. But he, too, must have been betrayed. I don't know when, but some day they got him...

*Mrs Novak:* I remember the day when they came to get his whole family. His young wife, his brother, wife and kids. František's dad had died not long before. The only one they didn't catch was František's mum because she wasn't in her house then.

*Mr Novak:* The whole family was arrested and tortured, maybe because they wanted to know where František was. I don't know.

*Mrs Novak:* After a while, František's wife returned home ... she was in an awful state because they had tortured her. Then, after a week or so, they came back to get her again. She was deported to a concentration camp and killed there.

*Mr Novak:* Somehow they got hold of František, too. Nobody really knows how they found him and what they did to him.

*Speaker 2:* But the Nazis killed him ...

*Mr Novak:* Yes, they did. They murdered another one of our heroes. There are only myths about how they did it... But there is one thing about him that may be a myth, too, but it gave our people strength to carry on.

*Speaker 2:* What was it?

*Mr Novak:* The legend goes that his last words were: "Goodbye, brothers, I know I'm going to die, but I'm not afraid. A brave man dies once, only cowards die a hundred times. I will die calmly, because I know our victims were not in vain."

*Speaker 2:* Indeed, a very brave, courageous man - František Pecháček.

Thank you very much for sharing the story of his life with our audience, Mr and Mrs Novak.

*Speaker 1:* Thank you for listening to radio "Stand up, Europe" with another story of the unknown heroes who stood up for peace and freedom against the terror of National Socialism.