



Czech resistance

a) The birth of the Czech resistance

Resistance to the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia began **immediately after the formation of the Protectorate on 15 March 1939**. German policy suppressed the acts of resistance and organizations of resistance as well. In the early days of the war, the Czech population participated in boycotts of public transport and large-scale demonstrations.

The Czechs demonstrated against the occupation **on 28 October 1939**, the 21st anniversary of Czechoslovak independence. **On 15 November 1939**, the death of a medical student, **Jan Opletal**, who had been wounded in the October violence, precipitated widespread student demonstrations. Politicians, students and teachers were arrested. **On 17 November, all universities and colleges in the protectorate were closed**, nine student leaders were executed, and 1,200 were sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Further arrests and executions of Czech students and professors took place later. **17 November was proclaimed the international day of students in 1941 in London** – it is the only international day that has the origin in our country.



Demonstrations during Jan Opletal's funeral on 15 November 1939

b) The Czech resistance network and its organisations

The Czech resistance could be divided into three basic groups: the democratic, the communist and the partisan group.

1. Democratic

The resistance network that existed *during the early years operated under the leadership of Czechoslovak president Edvard Beneš, who coordinated resistance activity while in exile in London*. The resistance groups formed under **the Central Leadership of Home Resistance (Ústřední vedení odboje domácího, ÚVOD)**. It served as the principal secret intermediary between Beneš and the Protectorate.

The three major resistance groups that consolidated under ÚVOD were

- **the Political Centre (Politické ústředí, PÚ)**
- **the Committee of the Petition "We Remain Faithful" (Petiční výbor Věrní zůstaneme, PVVZ)**
- **the Nation's Defence (Obrana národa, ON)**

In addition to serving as the means of communication between London and Prague, the ÚVOD was also responsible for the transmission of intelligence and military reports. It did so primarily through the use of a secret radio station, which could reach the Czech population. However, the ÚVOD was known to transmit inaccurate reports, whether false intelligence data or military updates. Sometimes this was intentional. Beneš often urged the ÚVOD to relay falsely optimistic reports of the military situation to improve morale or motivate more widespread resistance.

The most well known act of resistance organised from London was the **assassination of Reinhard Heydrich on 27 May 1942 (Operation Anthropoid)**. He was seriously



Lidice memorial



injured and died on 4 June 1942. After the assassination, the Nazis proclaimed martial law, executed hundreds of Czechs without trial, and **destroyed the village of Lidice near Prague on 10 June, 1942**. Within a few weeks, the entire Czech underground resistance network was wiped out.

2. Communist

The groups mentioned above were all democratic in nature, as opposed to the fourth official resistance group

- **the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ)**

Most of its members were former officers of the disbanded Czechoslovak Army. The ÚVOD's relationship with the KSČ was an important aspect of its daily functions. While the KSČ was not an official part of the ÚVOD and kept its organisational independence, it called for unity of action with all anti-Fascist groups. Leaders of the KSČ ingratiated themselves with the ÚVOD by helping to maintain Soviet-Czechoslovak relations. Beneš often used these KSČ leaders to arrange meetings in Moscow to expand the Soviet-Czechoslovak partnership. The KSČ's fate was also closely linked with the ÚVOD's. It, too, suffered annihilation after the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, unable to rebound until 1944.

3. Partisan warfare

Partisan groups began to form **in forested or mountainous areas**. During the spring of 1945, partisan forces in Bohemia and Moravia had grown to **120 groups**, with a combined strength of around **7,500 people**. Partisans **disrupted the railway and highway transportation by sabotaging tracks and bridges and attacking trains and stations**. Some railways could not be used at night or on some days, and trains were forced to travel at a slower speed. There were more than 300 partisan attacks on rail communications from summer 1944 to May 1945. Partisan groups had a diverse membership including former members of Czech resistance groups fleeing arrest, escaped war prisoners, and German deserters. Other partisans were Czechs who lived in rural areas and continued with their jobs during the day, joining the partisans for night raids.

The largest and most successful group was the **Jan Žižka partisan brigade**, based in southern Moravia. It sabotaged railroads and bridges. Despite harsh countermeasures such as summary executions of suspected civilian supporters, the partisans continued to operate. Eventually, the Žižka brigade grew to over 1,500 people and was operating in large parts of Moravia upon liberation of the area in April 1945.



Resistance culminated in the so-called **Prague uprising of May 1945**; with Allied armies approaching, about 30,000 Czechs seized weapons. Four days of bloody street fighting followed before the Soviet Red Army entered the nearly liberated city.

Barricades along a street in Prague, erected to prevent the passage of tanks and give cover from German fire.

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