



(Workshops 8 & 10/small groups) Resistance fighters' biographies

a) 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 achievements.

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, 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.



b) JAN KUBIŠ (24 June, 1913 – 18 June, 1942)

Jan Kubiš was born in Dolní Vilémovice in 1913. He was a boy scout and started his military career in 1935. During the Czechoslovak mobilisation of 1938, Kubiš served as a deputy commander of a platoon in Czechoslovak border fortifications.

Following the Munich Agreement and demobilisation, Kubiš was discharged from the army in October 1938 and returned to his civilian life, working at a brick factory.

In June 1939, Kubiš fled Czechoslovakia and joined a Czechoslovak unit in Poland. Then he fled to France during the early stage of WW II to fight with the French and received the *Croix de guerre*. After the defeat of the French army, he fled again, this time to Great Britain, where he received training as a paratrooper.



During the allied (led by Britain) *Operation Anthropoid* Jan Kubiš, together with his best friend Jozef Gabčík and seven more soldiers, were airlifted into Czechoslovakia by the *Royal Air Force Halifax* on 28 December 1941. In Prague, they contacted families and anti-Nazi organisations who helped them with preparing the assassination of *Reichsprotektor* Reinhard Heydrich.

On 27 May 1942, Kubiš and Gabčík were waiting at the tram stop near one of the Prague crossroads that was well-suited for the attack because motorists had to slow down in a bend. At 10:30 am Heydrich's car appeared. Gabčík tried to shoot at Heydrich in his Mercedes-Benz open-top but his gun jammed. Heydrich ordered his driver to stop the car. As the car braked in front of him, Kubiš threw a modified anti-tank grenade concealed in a briefcase at the vehicle. The bomb severely wounded Heydrich when it detonated. Kubiš received a minor wound to his face from a shrapnel, but quickly recovered, jumped on his bicycle and rode away.

Heydrich was taken to hospital and the doctors immediately decided to operate. Heydrich was given several blood transfusions. Despite all the doctors' care, he died of sepsis on 4 June, 1942. The dark period called "*heydrichiáda*" began. The human cost was enormous. The villages of Lidice and Ležáky - based on flawed intelligence reports linking them to the parachutists - were razed and their inhabitants shot or sent to concentration camps. Another 15,000 people met the same fate.

Kubiš and his group managed to hide for three weeks before they were betrayed. On 18 June, 1942, they were discovered in the crypt of the church in Resslova Street in Prague. In an uneven bloody battle lasting for six hours, Kubiš was seriously wounded by a grenade and was found unconscious. He was immediately taken to hospital but died within twenty minutes. The other parachutists committed suicide to avoid capture after another four hours' fight with the SS.

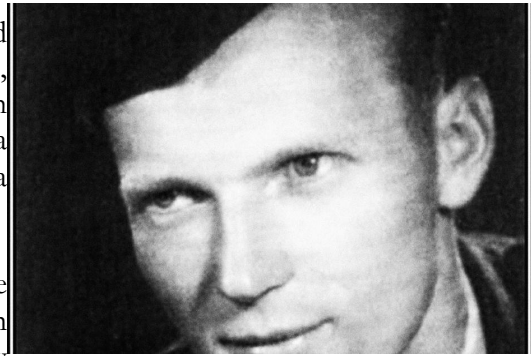
In revenge, the Nazis murdered 24 of Jan Kubiš's family members and close relatives in the concentration camp Mauthausen: his father, both full and half-siblings, including their wives and husbands, cousins, aunts and uncles.

Heydrich's assassination was a subject for a few films, e.g. *Atentát* (1964) or *Anthropoid* (2016).



c) **JAN SMUDEK (8 Oct, 1915 – 17 Nov, 1999) – “the elusive Jan“**

Jan Smudek was born on 8 September, 1915 in Bělá nad Radbúzou. As he spent most of his youth in Domažlice, he knew the western part of Bohemia very well, which proved advantageous later on. In March 1939 he was a college student when the occupation of Czechoslovakia began.



On the evening of 15th March, 1939 the members of the boy scouts, Jan Smudek being one of them, met in an apartment and swore an oath to fight Nazism until they were defeated or dead in front of the pictures of E. Beneš and T. G. Masaryk. Jan Smudek served as a connection between Prague and Domažlice for the resistance.

Jan managed to acquire a gun at a dance party, where a careless German officer left a belt with a holster with the Luger pistol in it. Jan planned a similar event with his friend, František Petr.

On 7 June 1939, František and Jan shot Wilhelm Kniest, a German officer, who was returning to barracks after a night of drinking. The officer's death enraged the occupators. The (first) *Reichsprotektor* K. H. Frank himself went to the town of Kladno and proclaimed martial law. As a consequence, 111 people ended up in concentration camps. The true culprits, though, were not found.

The resistance was planning an attack at a train tunnel for which Jan was supposed to deliver a briefcase full of explosives. This led to a chain of events, after which he was given the nickname “the elusive Jan”: On 20 March, 1940 three *Gestapo* officers came for Jan Smudek and questioned him about the briefcase he had brought from Prague. Smudek answered that the suitcase was in the attic where he was also hiding a gun. In the attic, Smudek managed to wound one of the officers and ran away. The *Gestapo* started the largest search operation since the occupation of the republic. Smudek tried to cross the border via Prague, but was caught by two guards on the night 22 March. He shot both of them. After being caught again, he wounded another officers and fled once more. On 25 March he found shelter with the legionary, Josef Sedláček, who helped him change his appearance by dyeing his hair and giving him glasses.

Shortly after Smudek's runaway from Domažlice, the Nazi repressions began. 150 citizens were arrested and transported to the concentration camp Flossenbürg. Some of Smudek's friends were tortured and executed. The newspapers were full of bounties for catching Smudek or at least providing some information. This only helped spread the legend of the “Elusive Jan”.

After having arrived in Prague, Jan managed to flee to France, where he joined the Czechoslovak foreign army, using the cover name Jan Doubek. After the invasion of France he ran away from the hostage hospital, eventually travelling to Casablanca, then to Canada and finally ending up in Great Britain, where he became a fighter pilot and married a British woman.

After WWII Jan returned home as a hero. In the early days of the communist regime Jan started planning his last runaway. In 1947, Jan and his family fled to Germany and then to France. Jan Smudek returned to Czechoslovakia after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. He died at the age of 84 on 17 November 1999.

It is said his life inspired the 1943 movie “Casablanca”.



d) JOSEF BRYKS (18 March, 1916 – 11 August, 1957)

Josef Bryks was a pilot who actively participated in the resistance from the very beginning in different ways. Nothing broke him down.

Originating from a family of peasants, he was born in Austria-Hungary in the small town of Lašťany in 1916. After graduation from a business academy he studied at the Military Academy and became a pilot.

His resistance activity

After the occupation of Czechoslovakia, Josef first helped organize the escapes of pilots through Poland. In January 1940 he tried to escape himself to Hungary. He was imprisoned in Slovakia – using a fictional identity until his first wife, who decided to collaborate, revealed his real name. However, Bryks managed to escape through Hungary, Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Syria until he reached France and then went to Great Britain, where he became an RAF fighter pilot.



He proved to be an inventive man in captivity. He took advantage of the fact that the Germans did not find any documents with him, and thus managed to conceal his identity.

In Poland, he helped distribute weapons and food during the Warsaw uprising. Bryks also took part in the so-called *Great Escape* (which gave the American film its title). The great escape from the camp in Sagan (present-day Poland) was devised in detail: On the night of March 24-25, 1944, all the prisoners shared the numbers according to which they were to cross a narrow tunnel they had dug using knives, spoons or tins. Bryks and his friend, another pilot, Otakar Černý, were to run quite at the end - they had high numbers. This paradoxically saved their lives, as they did not get out of the camp and subsequently did not become victims of the *Gestapo* that was waiting for the escapees at the end of the tunnel.

Bryks went down in history as was able to flee from captivity constantly. And even though he was brutally beaten, he did not let himself be broken and continued fighting fascism.

After the war, Bryks received several awards and married Trudie - a girl he had met in England and with whom he had corresponded during his captivity. They moved to Olomouc, but their happiness did not last long. Like many other pilots, Bryks ended up in a communist prison. Trudie and her little daughter escaped back to England. Josef died of heart attack on August 12, 1957, in uranium mines in the Jáchymov region.

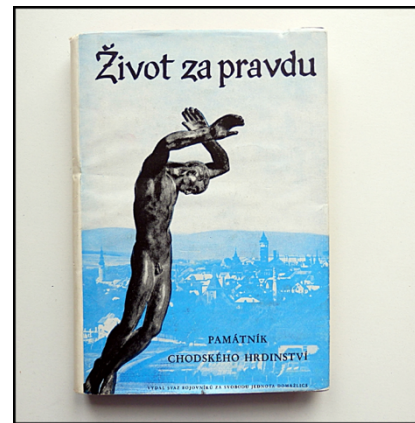
Trudie Bryks did not discover her husband's grave until 52 years after his death. She fought for people to find out about her husband's fate and went to the Czech Republic regularly. In 2006 Josef was judicially fully rehabilitated.



E) JOSEF FAHRNER

Josef Fahrner, probably descending from a Czech-German family, was a Czech resistance fighter and officer, born on 9 November 1910 in Prague. He moved to Domažlice in 1935 to work as an infantry lieutenant in the new barracks. During the protectorate period, he was a district officer.

Together with Jan Havel, Josef Fahrner organised the resistance group NIVA in southwestern Bohemia that had members of several organizations (boy scouts, youth club, etc.). In March 1939, the twenty young men in the group took an oath to fight against the German enemy. Their mission was to sabotage the occupiers' actions and to focus on boycotting the German restrictions. They were responsible for getting and hiding weapons and ammunition and spreading illegal leaflets. Later in spring 1939 they began cooperating with an illegal military organization.



In August 1939 the NIVA resistance group became a main organizer of the traditional Vavřinec fair, which actually was turned into a big national manifestation against occupation in the region.

In 1940 Josef Fahrner and 15 other members of his resistance group were imprisoned – accused of cooperation with the other resistance fighters, who had helped Jan Smudek to escape. Josef Fahrner spent in prison two years which slowed down the group's resistance activities. After his release, he took part in resistance activities again: damaging tyres of German vehicles, scattering nails on the main roads or cutting telephone lines.

In 1943, Fahrner was appointed head of the NIVA resistance group giving the activities a better organization. By 1945 the activities were focused on all south-west Bohemia. At the end of WW II, Josef's group connected with the American army. Their main task was to deliver military reports on the positions of the German troops. This helped the Americans to bomb only military and strategic targets, not civilian ones.

On 5 May 1945, Josef Fahrner was appointed a military attaché for Domažlice by the American military command and two days later, he and Jan Havel created the *Border Guard Regiment* in western Bohemia. As NIVA had finished its mission it expired.

After the war, Josef belonged to the *Union of Liberated Political Prisoners* in Domažlice. He was one of the initiators of building a grave in a cemetery in Domažlice and a monument to the victims of Nazism and the Second World War in Chod Square in Domažlice. He was also a co-author of the book *Life for Truth*. In January 1951, he moved to Karlovy Vary.





f) MARIE PĚTROŠOVÁ (1919 – 1942)

Marie was born in 1919 and raised in the Czech-Silesian town Frýdek. After graduation from a housekeeping academy, she worked as a dressmaker.

Due to her delicate appearance he was nicknamed “toothpick“. Together with her father Emil Pětroš, a train conductor, she took part in the Czechoslovak resistance.



From March to August 1939 she was involved in illegally guiding civilians and soldiers across the Czechoslovak-Polish border, most often using the mountainous landscape in the Beskydy Mountains. Maria's whole family was involved, her father and her aunt for example accommodated the people before crossing the border. In only one week, from 12 to 18 June 1939, Maria managed to help 30 soldiers escape, until the *Gestapo* started to look for her. It took a while for them to find out her identity. On 18 August 1939, she was arrested by the Gestapo. She was 19 at that time. During the investigation, she acted like a naive girl who liked walking in nature and didn't know about any illegal activities. She was released after a short time.

Five months later she was arrested again. But this time she was pregnant. Despite numerous attempts during investigations and being tortured, she refused to denounce the other members of the resistance. The investigators described her as an arrogant and rude person. As she was pregnant, it wasn't possible to send her to a concentration camp but the *Gestapo* was extremely interested in her behaviour and activities because they didn't believe her and only a lack of evidence made them release her again.

She gave birth to her daughter Milena eleven days after she had been released. She was very weak. On 25 June 1940, another seven weeks later, she was arrested for the third time. She was considered a very dangerous person that continued working in the resistance. It was urgent for the *Gestapo* to get rid of her very quickly. So, Marie was deported to the concentration camp in Ravensbrück. Her child, Milena, stayed and was raised by Maria's parents.

Her parents tried to help their daughter but their effort wasn't successful. On 7 December 1940 Marie arrived at Ravensbrück where she sewed military uniforms. She got weaker because of her poor health, hard work and bad conditions in the camp. She was thinking of her little daughter all the time - she wrote fairy-tales and drew pictures for her. She created a booklet as a birthday present for her daughter.

In 1942 she became seriously ill (meningitis, tuberculosis) and on 17 April 1942 she died. Her family was informed about her death three weeks later.