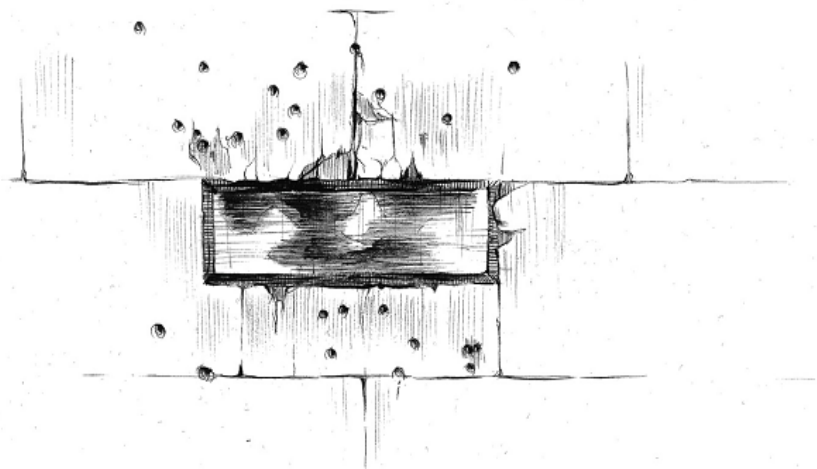
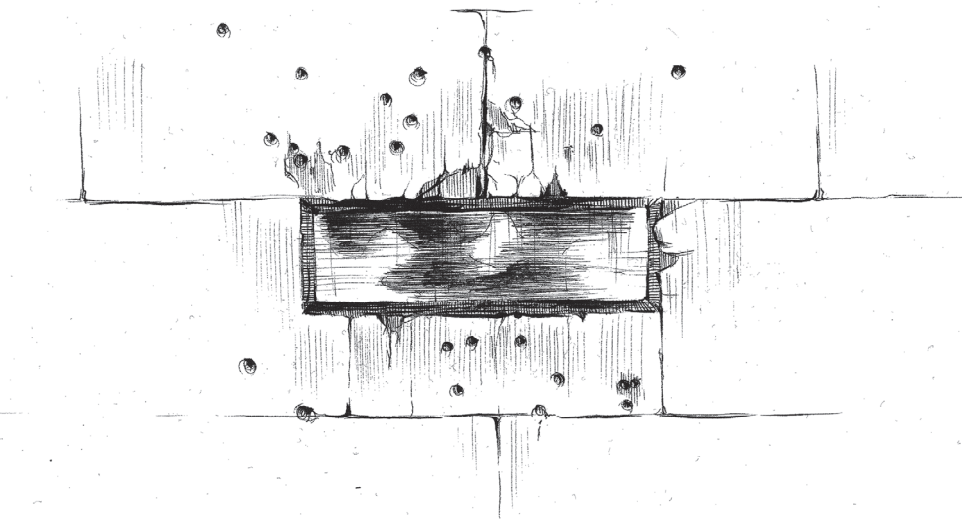


# DIARIES FROM A CRYPT

The final days of seven parachutists  
from the time of the Heydrich Terror



JANA RAILA HLAVSOVÁ



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No part of this book may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any printed or electronic form without permission. Please do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials in violation of the author's rights. Purchase only authorized editions.

This book is dedicated to my dear teachers Dr. Vilém Vránek and Mgr. Romana Valíčková, who, over the course of eight years of secondary school, kindled in me a love for literature and history – two passions which, years later, I have managed to bring together in this book. Both of them believed I could do it, even back then. I am so glad they were right.

Operation Anthropoid, the targeted assassination of Heydrich in Prague, was one of the most dramatic and important missions of World War 2. It came at a huge price with many, many people losing their lives. But, it showed that Czechoslovaks could fight back and now, since the fall of communist control in Prague and all over the country, more and more information is coming to light about the bravery of the soldiers and the civilians who helped in some way, however small, to make it possible.

When I wrote and self-published my little book *The Mirror Caught The Sun*, I was amazed at just how many people from all over the world shared an interest in Anthropoid. Of course, even the “experts” can never say exactly what took place. Many witnesses lost their lives because they were just that, witnesses. Also, some of the information was later written up incorrectly or for reasons unknown, were written with a biased slant. So many things we will never know and can only offer opinions.

But we do know that Heydrich was killed by these incredibly proud and brave soldiers, Jan Kubis and Josef Gabčík. They, together with five other soldiers who were in Prague for various missions, were hiding in the crypt of St Cyril and Methodius Church in the centre of Prague, aided throughout the few weeks spent there, by brave patriots, many who paid with their lives.

This book is a piece of work, through years of dedication, research, passion and pride for fellow country men and women. Raila has produced this body of work, based on the time these seven Heroes were in hiding, in a place they could have stayed hidden for as long as necessary, only that they were betrayed by a traitor, one of their own.

I urge all people with an interest in the subject or even history in general, to support Raila's endeavours and her brilliant idea of concentrating on this short but very historic time in 1942.

This book will be a great addition to scholars and interested people alike, for many generations to come. I wish this book and its author make her country proud, her heritage proud, her Heroes proud and her friends proud. I am immensely proud to call her my friend and to back her work with my heart.

John Martin  
Author  
The Mirror Caught The Sun

[www.heydrich1942.com](http://www.heydrich1942.com)

## Preface

It all began with a simple sentence about how, on 28 May 1942, Jaroslav Švarc entered the crypt. That sentence appeared on 28 May 2016 in the contemporary form of a diary – on Facebook. It was little more than an allusion to the events of times long past, but the reactions of my friends and their unexpected interest – along with my need to start sorting the snippets of information I had gathered over several months of intensive research into Heydrich’s assassins into some kind of order – culminated in a daily diary entry. Each day, my readers had the chance to take a peek into the crypt and elsewhere, and witness events that had taken place two generations earlier. I did the same thing again the following year, but with new information and knowledge. Literally thousands of people were following the lives of the seven parachutists and the resistance, and each day they awaited the next episode of the story – all the way up to its tragic end.

The book you are holding is not a historical account. It is a mosaic of fragments from historical publications,



articles, documents and the opinions and conjectures of experts and professional soldiers. Fragments of first-hand witness accounts, and witness accounts of witness accounts. It is a book inspired by the *genius loci* that haunts you as you stand in the dark crypt, watching a candle flicker in the draught. The very one that haunted me as I sat in the choir loft at half past four in the morning on 18 June, in a silence which – knowing what took place there 75 years before – was deafening. It was inspired by the feeling of holding an original letter from Jan Kubiš to Marie Žilanová and realising what a talent he had for writing to the fairer sex – and that he probably would have captured my heart too (even if his handwriting left much to be desired). It contains something of the moments when, reading the diaries of some of the parachutists, I began to feel I had met them somewhere, got to know them and made friends with them. And the moments when, reading personal letters from their sweethearts, a sense of guilt crept upon me, as I would never dream of snooping around in a friend's private correspondence like that. I wanted to share with my readers all the things that inspired me from historical publications, having experienced for myself how cold the crypt is, the texture of the last arch on the gallery next to the choir, how heavy a Colt 1903 feels in the hand, and how beautiful the choir window looks when, sometime after five o'clock in the afternoon, sunlight streams through it and down into the nave.

I can't tell you everything here. I won't share the full backgrounds of all the characters who grace the pages of the diaries. It is simply an imagined account, based

on what a diary written by one of the parachutists in this crypt might have looked like. It is subjective in many places, infused with the magic of the time and place.

No, I was not standing at the bend of the road where Heydrich was shot on 27 May 1942, and I was neither on the choir nor in the crypt of the St Cyril and St Methodius Church on 18 June 1942. All that is left of those events are snippets, which I have attempted – like many before me – to weave into some kind of story and pass on as best as I can, with a great deal of respect, gratitude and love. I am grateful to those seven men, and to all the others who fought in the resistance, for my future. I say that without exaggeration or pathos; it is simply a fact. Just as it is impossible not to love those men – not for what they did, but for who they were.



## 26 May 1942 / *early evening*

‘That was delicious’, said Jožka<sup>1</sup> Gabčík, pushing away his plate. He had thoroughly enjoyed Mrs Smržová’s cooking – steak in the traditional Czech style. Jenda was eating more slowly, lost in thought, but the atmosphere in the Smrž family home was pleasant.

‘Are you thinking about yesterday?’ Jožka asked later, lighting a cigarette for himself and one for Jenda. The Smrž family and Mr Khodl with his son were sitting with a coffee, talking animatedly about something. The two young soldiers watched their silhouettes through the window, enjoying the fresh air on the balcony.

‘Jindra<sup>2</sup> was on my back the whole time. It keeps meddling in everything. It’s getting on my nerves how shit-scared he is,’ Jenda replied, blowing out a puff of smoke.

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<sup>1)</sup> Czech diminutive names are highly variable, for example the official name Jan can change to Jenda or Honza when used among friends, Josef to Jožka or Pepa. In some places in the book Jan is used and in others Jenda, the same is the case for Josef and Jožka.

<sup>2)</sup> JINDRA was the code name of Ladislav Vaněk, the leader of Jindra, one of the Sokol resistance groups.

‘Uncle Hajský set him straight. But he also confirmed that Jindra had put two and two together.’

Jenda looked out at the darkening sky. ‘It makes no difference anyway. It’s happening tomorrow, whether Jindra likes it or not. I don’t get why everyone’s so bothered by the idea of one dead Nazi, when they’d happily blow up whole trains or factories.’

Jožka glanced over at Jenda. It never failed to amaze him how, whatever chaos was raging inside Jenda’s head, his voice always remained perfectly steady, his movements slow and deliberate. He didn’t look like someone planning to kill the third most powerful man in the Third Reich the following day. Jožka smiled, and he felt a small contraction in his stomach, which wasn’t entirely unpleasant. They had to act – it was now or never.

‘We’ve already gone through the details. Now we just need him to drive around the corner as expected, and it’ll all be in the bag.’

Jenda nodded. ‘What do you think he’s up to?’

Jožka thought for a bit. ‘Heydrich? Dunno. Having dinner, maybe. Eating something ridiculously expensive – meat and whatever else rich Nazi pigs eat. Probably drinking wine. Definitely nothing he had to save food vouchers for.’

Jenda took a drag on his cigarette. ‘Shame he doesn’t know it’s his last supper’. He stubbed out the cigarette and threw the butt into the bin.

‘Are you staying with the Khodl family tonight?’, Jožka said, changing the subject.

Jenda nodded. ‘Pick me up at around eight in the morning?’

Jožka nodded.

Everyone sat for a while, and then Mr Khodl and his son got up and headed home to Vysočany with Jenda. Václav Smrž was sharing a room with Jožka.

‘Night, Václav. I need to get a good night’s sleep before tomorrow.’

Václav didn’t ask any questions, but simply wished Jožka a good night.

Heydrich was enjoying a drink after a concert in honour of his father. He gazed at his wife, who was expecting their fourth child. That evening, she didn’t look in the slightest bit tired or out of sorts. On the contrary; she positively thrived in societal life. As Klein drove them through the dusky streets of Prague to Panenské Břežany, Heydrich breathed in the fresh evening air and wondered if he should try to return from Berlin the next day, or stay the night and check on his brothel – make sure Berlin hadn’t gone wild in his absence. He took his wife’s hand in his. The driver had to brake heavily on the road down from Holešovice. Lina noticed a well-lit street sign on the fence. The street they were on was ‘V Holešovičkách’, but the sign was in German, of course. She was so proud of her husband.

‘You mustn’t forget to say goodbye to the children tomorrow. Silke was asking for you all day,’ she said, taking off her earrings at the dressing table.

‘Of course, I’ll say goodbye. I don’t want my little princess to be upset,’ replied the very same man who had come up with the most effective way to rid the world of all undesirable nations and inferior races. He ran his

hand over Lina's belly and went off to the bathroom. Barely eleven hours separated that powerful leader of the Third Reich and two Czechoslovak fighters the Gestapo had been trying to track down for six months already.

## **Day zero** / *the morning of 27 May 1942*

The sky was a little overcast. Jožka got up, stretching. The curtains at the open window were flapping in the wind. Václav Smrž was already up, making tea. He poured a little rum into Jožka's cup of tea. Jožka took the little bottle and put it into his briefcase. He smiled, but he looked focused. He shook Václav's hand, more firmly than usual. Václav looked surprised. Was this goodbye?

Jenda smiled at Mrs Khodlová. He knew his smile would melt the heart of this wonderful woman, whom he and Jožka affectionately called 'Auntie Khodlová', and that she would remember him forever. Was this goodbye?

Jožka called by the Khodls' flat at Vysočany a little after eight o'clock. Jenda shook Mr Khodl's hand, and shook the hand of little Vašek. He kissed Mrs Khodlová on the cheek. He felt calm. He wheeled his bike outside, where Jožka was waiting with his. Both wore a peculiar, serene smile. Their expressions were calm, focused. Adrenaline coursed through them surely and steadily. It was not fear, but alertness. Concentration. They saw everything and heard everything. They felt the wind on their



faces as they rode through Vysočany towards Libeň and Holešovice. They pedalled harder as they climbed the road towards Kirchmayerová Avenue.

Clouds floated across the sky, and the sun peeked through from time to time. The number 3 tram trundled along Avenue 'V Holešovičkách' up to a bend in the road and on towards Kobylisy. Sometimes the number 14 rattled past on its way to Libeň or back again. People were walking to work. Children were making their way to school. Jenda and Jožka stood a little way apart. They still had time. Just under an hour. Heydrich was usually punctual – it could all be over by half past nine.

They weren't thinking about death – there wasn't time for that. They hadn't thought about death on the front line, either. Time was slowing down, somehow. Every colour seemed more vivid; every sound more acute. The clanging of the trams rang almost painfully in their ears. The odd car passed by, here and there. Plenty of clothed figures walked past without noticing them. A woman with a brown handbag. A girl with a school bag. The face of a middle-aged man peering out of the tram and into the distance.

Jožka lit a second cigarette. Jindra walked by and looked around, as though waiting for someone he was supposed to be meeting. He could easily be a young man waiting for his sweetheart. That was normal. Nobody would find that suspicious.

Jenda lit a third cigarette. He was smoking a lot; he knew that. His face was impassive, but inwardly he felt his muscles tense. It was past nine; both returned to their positions. Jožka gathered grass for a bit.

*If I get stopped by the local policeman, he thought, he'll think I either have an army of rabbits, or I'm trying to feed a couple of them to death.*<sup>3</sup>

It was twenty past nine. Heydrich would be here soon. Take position. Stay alert. The Sten felt cold in his hand. It had only taken a few moments to assemble. Jožka checked it over once again; everything was in place, as he had been trained. He was ready. Half past nine. Both men were in position. Each felt the presence of the other and drew comfort from it.

Jenda glanced at his watch. His face didn't show his anxiety, but Jožka knew when his companion was nervous. It was after half past nine. Another tram trundled past, exactly on schedule.

But where was Heydrich? He should have been there by now. Jožka was on to his seventh cigarette. They had been there for nearly two hours – someone was bound to notice sooner or later. Jenda put a cigarette into the corner of his mouth and fumbled around for his lighter. Or at least, he pretended to. It was all a calculated theatrical performance – they couldn't risk doing anything that would make them look conspicuous.

He approached Jožka, as though asking for a light. One random stranger to another. Jožka pulled out his matches and struck one.

'It's ten o'clock,' Jenda murmured.

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<sup>3)</sup> When food in the Protectorate was scarce, it was common for people to breed and eat rabbits, feeding them greenery gathered from public spaces.

‘There’s no way he could’ve come earlier. No way. But he won’t have gone another way. There is no other way! He has to come through here,’ Jožka replied, trying to look indifferent. The Sten was weighing him down, he was getting too hot in his coat, and he was sure someone must have noticed them.

‘Let’s keep waiting.’

‘I only have one cigarette left.’

‘I’m already smoking my last one.’

‘I only had one pack.’

Breathe in. Breathe out. Colours were brighter, sounds louder. The number 14 passed by on its way from Kobylisy. Its clanging lacerated their ears. A quarter past ten. They switched positions from time to time. The Sten wasn’t cold any more. How much longer could they keep a thing like that hidden under a coat without attracting attention? An hour? Two hours? Where the hell was Heydrich? The guy was usually so punctual you could set your clocks by him. Ten twenty. Still no sign of Heydrich. Jožka tried to loosen up his stiff hand. Carefully, squeezing it into a fist and relaxing it, before taking a firm hold of the gun again. The sun shone through the clouds from time to time. Never for very long. Ten twenty-five. Heydrich nowhere to be seen. Jenda glanced at the traffic and sauntered casually round the bend in the road, making sure he had a good view of Jožka, and turned around again. They had to switch positions carefully. He had both bombs ready. He was too hot, but he paid no attention to that.

Ten thirty. No Heydrich. Jenda noticed another number 3 tram trundling towards the hill from Holešovice.

How many had gone past already? Ten thirty-four. Jožka spotted the number 14 tram from Libeň through the corner of his eye. He turned his head and looked up the hill. His jaw tightened. A black Mercedes was emerging from over the horizon – the very same Mercedes he'd inspected so many times before.

Jožka gave a short hiss. That's all it took – Jenda was conscious of his every move. Both knew exactly where the other was and what he was doing. So, they would have to attack from the positions they were in. Both got ready in an instant. Their expression was one of concentration. Their calm outward demeanour did not betray the storm raging inside them. And then everything went quiet.

The Mercedes was drawing near, and would have to start slowing down in a few moments. Heydrich was sitting next to the driver, wearing the same expression as always: cold, arrogant and self-absorbed. Jožka grinned to himself. The tram from Holešovice would force the Mercedes to slow down even more. He would have Heydrich so close he couldn't miss. He took a deep breath.

Then the whole world slowed down. The Mercedes drew closer, and as the bonnet drew level, in one fast, slick movement Jožka let his coat slide to the ground and cocked his weapon. He pointed the barrel at his target. The target had blue eyes, which now met Jožka's brown ones. Heydrich wondered for a second if he had seen that face somewhere before. By the road from Panenské Břežany, perhaps?

Jožka clenched his teeth, took a deep breath and pulled the trigger. Nothing. Nothing happened. For

an agonising moment a wave of panic rushed over him, but he pulled himself together. He heard the driver shout something in German. The car reached the corner, and Jožka's metre-and-a-half firing opportunity was gone. Heydrich didn't take his eyes off Jožka, but it was too late for either of them to shoot. Heydrich yelled something, and the driver slowed down even more. Neither of them spotted the man with the briefcase standing underneath the road sign.

Jenda didn't hesitate. He saw that Jožka was unable to shoot, but the bomb was ready in his hand – he had unscrewed the cap the moment they had first spotted the car – and he lobbed it at the advancing Mercedes. It was close. Too close. But that's just how fate had it.

There was an explosion. The Mercedes bounced with the shock. The grey leather coat on the back seat flew up into the air and back down again. Heydrich felt a twinge of pain in his back. Something had wedged itself in there, just below his ribs. Smoke. Noise. Confusion.

Jenda felt a wall of air rush over him, and then he was momentarily blinded by the impact and the smoke. He grimaced. There had been no time to shield himself. He felt a sensation on his eyelid – pain, perhaps, but definitely blood. He wanted to pull out his pistol, but found that he could only see through one eye. He tried to move – to pull out his gun, pull the trigger, shoot – but he had lost all spatial awareness. Heydrich clambered out of the car and tried to shoot at Jenda.

Jožka discarded the Sten and pulled out his pistol. He took a shot at Heydrich, but the driver was already getting out of the car. Jožka didn't intend to hang

around and let himself be taken down by that Walter gun, and so he took off up the street. He would never make it to the bicycle – there were people and trams in the way. He would never get through without injuring them or himself.

Jenda ran around the tram, but people were blocking his path – they probably took him for a criminal. It took two shots in the air to get them to move out of the way. Heydrich responded instantly with gunshots somewhere behind him, but suddenly stopped. A quarter of an hour later, Jenda would regret not having spun around to shoot him dead on the spot, but his eye was stinging, he had lost his peripheral vision, and he was bleeding profusely. His handkerchief and shirt were soaked with blood.

He ran up to his bike, climbed on and pedalled in a familiar direction. He was moving so fast it felt as though a fall would break his neck. His right hand felt weak and useless. He kept going. He had just one goal now: to get away. He hadn't come to die. He had come to fight.

Jožka was trying to shake off the driver, Klein, in the back streets. Klein was hot on his tail, but he didn't shoot. Jožka noticed an open shop. Out through the back door, into a garden and off again, he thought. Jožka took a quick decision and darted into Mr Brauner's butchery. The shop was open, but there was no way out through the back. Klein must have seen him go in. Jožka looked around, panting. He couldn't wait any longer. He caught his breath, ran outside, took a left, intuitively found his target and pulled the trigger twice. The SS officer clutched his leg and crumpled to the ground.