

**Martina Kinská**

**PANKRÁC ‘45**

**Translated by Barbara Day**

**Cast and Characters:**

Adina Mandlová, an actress Klára Cibulková

Lída Baarová, an actress Réka Dérzsi

Hana Krupková, Resistance fighter Eva Josefíková

Julča, Jewish woman Andrea Buršová

The New One Marie Štípková

Director Martina Kinská

Dramaturgy Vladimír Čepek

*"Casting for an execution"* - a fictional story based on real-life events

The year 1945 in Czechoslovakia was a time of euphoria from the end of World War II. And yet it was also a time of “national cleansing” – in which traitors and collaborators were harshly punished. Anyone the nation linked (justifiably or not) with Nazi Germany. The basic principles of justice and judiciousness were replaced with a passion for vengeance, explosions of rage were an everyday event. Some were executed by lynch mobs in the streets, while others were called before extraordinary people’s courts. The maximum duration of such trials was three days, and only the chair of the tribunal was a professional judge. The remaining four were so-called jurors from among the people, who could easily outvote the chair of the tribunal. A sentence of death required no more than two unsubstantiated testimonies. Executions were performed within two hours of the passing of the sentence, at the explicit wish of the condemned this timeframe could be extended to three hours. Almost 95% of these sentences were carried out, making Czech retribution in this respect the bloodiest in Europe. Executions often became folk spectacles, the progress of the executions were documented, and the photos obtained were even sold as postcards. The British historian Keith Lowe refers to post-WWII Europe as a “wild continent” in which law and order were practically nonexistent, as were morality and shame.

Hatred was fomented even against certain film stars associated with the Nazis. The most famous of them were the actresses Lída Baarová and Adina Mandlová. Whereas the relationship between Mandlová and K.H. Frank (practically the most powerful man in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia) was merely a rumor, Baarová truly did have a love affair with Joseph Goebbels (one of the highest ranking men in Nazi Germany). While neither of them could be proven to have contributed to any arrests or manhunts during the war, quite the contrary, the postwar conventional wisdom of the street was categorical. Both found themselves in prison. Similarly, 1945 also witnessed the arrest of Hana Krupková, a girl who helped the Silver A group, the people who organized the assassination of the Reich Protector Reinhard Heydrich.

The play Pankrác ‘45 takes place in these very revolutionary days, where a single cell in Prague’s Pankrác prison sets the scene for a meeting not only of Adina Mandlová, Lída Baarová, and Hana Krupková, but also the Jewish Julča and a fifth woman whose identity is revealed only during the course of the plot. They don't know how long they’ll be there. They don't know whether they will ever see the outside world alive. They don’t know whether their meeting is entirely coincidental. They don't know who is truly guilty, or their crime. Each of them responds to the situation differently, and differently seeks to navigate it. The Jewish Julča and Hana Krupková have experienced the concentration camps and know the need to remain calm and save their energy. The unknown woman doesn’t speak at all. Meanwhile the actresses always remain actresses, determined to compete for the attention of their albeit small audience, even behind bars. Their main task is to survive – a task which each envisions differently.

A play about the relativity of guilt, about the blindness of vengeance, about responsibility for one’s actions, about remembering. About the struggle to survive within the machinery of history.

The meeting of these five women itself is fictional; and yet they encountered each other in the Pankrác Prison individually, or could have. The period context and themes from their lives adhere to historically proven facts and a renowned historian contributed to the writing of the play.

The play by Martina Kinská was based on real life events.

**Summer 1945 in Czechoslovakia**

May of 1945 is associated in public memory primarily with the defeat of Hitler’s Germany, the end of the six-year occupation of Bohemia and Moravia by the Nazis, and also the restoration of Czechoslovakia itself. This took place due to an event we nowadays call the “May Uprising”, nonetheless shortly after the war it was referred to as the “National Revolution” so as to reflect the contribution of the entire national community to armed resistance against the occupation regime.

The summer months of 1945 therefore represent not only a time of family members reuniting, as hundreds of thousands of forced workers, prisoners of the Nazi concentration camps, and soldiers in foreign armies were returning home, but also a time of universal euphoria from the end of the war. This was also accompanied by the conviction that there would now begin the building of an "armed republic” and “more just social order”, in other words a “new world” in which it would be possible to live better.

The “national revolution” of course also had its dark side. During the course of the first months of freedom, explosions of unbelievable violence took place in Bohemia and Moravia, whose victims were often women and children. The summer months of 1945 are also a time of “national purges” characterized by the removal of Czechoslovakia’s German residents, including the punishment of “traitors and collaborators”, the term for people who worked with the Nazi regime in any way. There was no doubt of the violent character of the Nazi regime and its criminal repressive methods, nor of the need to punish the perpetrators of such crimes. Nonetheless, the methods that were selected in numerous cases during the course of the “national purges” in 1945 now raise considerable doubt.

Instead of the basic principles of justice, respected since the time of ancient Rome, methods were implemented that often had nothing to do with justice. Immediately in May, people identified by the mob as collaborators or representatives of Nazi armed forces were being lynched on Prague streets.

Since in the previous years Czech actors and actresses had also appeared not infrequently in protectorate weeklies in association with the occupation forces, they too became the subject of mob hatred. At the same time, not a single propaganda film of Czech provenance had been shown during the period of Nazi occupation that would have been supported by Hitler’s Third Reich. In general the only films were comedies meant to divert the citizenry from black thoughts and, in the spirit of Goebbels, to maintain “good morale”. Here and there it was possible to make a film that referred to proud places in Czech history.

While a worker could contribute to the “victory of the German forces” with their work for the arms industry in the protectorate more than any actor or actress of the time, artists were more “in the public eye” and represented a perfect target during the collective national purges. Such a fate was met, for example, by Felix Achille de la Camára, a Czech writer using a Spanish pseudonym, who was doused in gasoline and set ablaze. The actor and director Jan Sviták also met his death in the street frenzy. Someone shouted that he had been responsible for the death of the Czech songwriter Karel Hašler, who had been tortured to death in a Nazi concentration camp. The angry mob began lynching Sviták until he was ultimately subjected to a “mercy killing” by a passing Soviet soldier.

In the fomenting of the atmosphere of “national purges” a completely absurd accusation was all that was needed, and could lead to a cruel death. For artists this applied twice over. The occupation regime used their popularity in its greatest propaganda events in the protectorate – the expression of loyalty to the Reich after the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich. One of these gatherings even took place in National Theater itself. Nothing about these circumstances after the war was changed even by the fact that some of those who publicly decried the “disgraceful murder” had documented contact with the resistance movement. Indeed, many of them were executed promptly afterward for approving the assassination or aiding the resistance.

In an attempt to calm the entire situation, so-called Extraordinary People’s Courts were organized in June 1945 by decree of the Czechoslovak government. An Extraordinary People’s Court consisted of a chair – a professional judge – and four assisting or “people’s” judges who did not require any legal education. It is clear that the “people’s judges” could easily outvote the professional judge. The principles of operation of the Extraordinary People’s Courts broke with the Western European legal tradition in other aspects as well – for example, a legal response to the judgment did not exist, and therefore a conviction could not be appealed.

In the event of a death sentence, the execution was meant to be carried out within two hours, which could be postponed by one hour at the explicit request of the accused. This extremely short timeframe therefore de facto eliminated any hope of receiving a presidential pardon. And it was this shortened timeframe that led to the fact that almost 95% of the death sentences were carried out in Bohemia and Moravia, and Czech retribution in this respect therefore became one of the bloodiest “national purges” in all of Europe – in France only 11% of the convicted were executed, in Belgium only 8%. The horrors of the “purges” can be seen in a simple comparison: while less than two dozen men were executed during the First Republic (1918 – 1938), during the course of the postwar national purges (barely lasting six months at their heaviest) almost 700 death sentences were carried out, whereas no mercy was shown even to women. These numbers do not include retribution against actual or presumed collaborators that took place outside legal process.

In addition to “traitors and collaborators”, violence in the first months after the war also befell Germans. The few days of the Prague Uprising alone saw the deaths of perhaps a hundred German women and children, who clearly presented no military threat. In late May and early June, during what would be known as the Brno Death March, almost 1,700 people died, while in June of the same year several hundred interned civilians in Postoloprty, and 265 people were shot in nearby Přerov, of which the majority were women and children. In short, German nationality or marriage to a German partner constituted guilt in and of itself at that time.

Czechoslovak history is not fully mapped in all of its conflicts during the period immediately after the war; for a long time no one spoke about the dark moments (such as the lynching and expulsion of German residents regardless of their actual guilt). The same applies to the rapid onset of subsequent anti-Semitism. It was a mere three years before the Communist Party definitely seized power. Monitoring, censorship, artificial processes, and death sentences once again became part of the daily order.

**Adina Mandlová**

born Jarmila Mandlová

(28 January 1910 – 16 June 1991)

One of the greatest interwar and wartime Czech film stars had significant behavioral problems from school age due to her rebellious and willful personality; she was expelled from several schools and the repertoire of her youth included significant problems with alcohol, early sexual activity, and running away from home. Literally from her childhood years she experienced numerous erotic adventures, not always willingly and often with great disillusionment. At first she supported herself as a model, but soon one of her lovers (the film idol of his time, Hugo Hass) introduced her to the movies. Soon she became one of the most heavily cast actresses of her time, appearing in eleven films per year. She did not keep secret her rich and influential lovers, and spoke her mind unscrupulously. She could be very funny, though often failed to consider the targets of her jokes. Her almost excessively insensitive honesty did not make her many friends.
Already during the war, a rumor spread that she was the lover of **Karl Hermann Frank** (one of the most influential Nazis of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, who was famous for his cruelty and hatred of Czechs). Adina was at first entertained by this rumor, but eventually even married the painter Zdeňek Tůma in order to dispel it. And yet he committed suicide merely six months after the wedding; one of the causes was the promiscuity of his wife. Adina Mandlová fell fatally in love with her fellow actor Vladimír Šmeral; when she discovered during the war that his marriage was no mere formality, she lost the child they had been expecting together. Even so, at the close of the war she helped provide him a safe refuge when he escaped from the concentration camp.

In the first days after liberation (the beginning of May) she was imprisoned and interrogated. Even though no collaboration or anything like it was ultimately proven, she was blacklisted from the film industry. She got married and moved to England and after several years of marriage she experienced the most satisfying relationship of her life with the homosexual Ben Pearson. After the war she alternated living in Switzerland, England, the USA, Austria, Malta, and Canada. In 1976 her memoir, *Dneska už se tomu směju* (“Today I Laugh About It”), was published by an exile publisher in Toronto.

She returned to her homeland only after the fall of Communism as an old, ill widow, and died within a few months.

**Lída Baarová (Joseph Goebbels)**

born Ludmila Babková

(7 September 1914 – 27 October 2000)

Indisputably the greatest international Czech film star. At sixteen, she won the main role in a film by UFY, at the time the largest European film company of its time. Here she not only met her husband Gustav Fröhlich, but was even visited on set by Adolf Hitler and **Joseph Goebbels**. Both were entranced by Lída, like most men who met her. While she made only a few visits to Hitler (their number would be reduced somewhat in the various editions of her memoirs in the years following the war), with Goebbels she had an intense love affair. The Nazi minister of propaganda was so fascinated by her that he decided to divorce and abandon his wife and their five children (the sixth being proof of their reconciliation after his affair with Lída) and left to act as the ambassador to Japan, etc. Out of her own infatuation (later ascribed to fear), Lída herself turned down an exclusive Hollywood contract. Only after Adolf Hitler intervened at the urging of Magda Goebbels did Joseph recover his senses and ended his relationship with Lída Baarová. In Germany she was forbidden to work in film or make public appearances, and she returned to Bohemia under dramatic circumstances. Soon she would no longer be allowed to make films in Bohemia either, and she therefore left to work in Italy. Even before the war ended many could not forgive her affair with Joseph Goebbels and her fraternization with highly placed Nazis (despite never being proven to have hurt anyone, quite the contrary – she was often an effective advocate), which spilled over onto her younger sister as well, the actress Zorka Janů.

At the end of the war, as a result of warnings from her friends, she escaped from Bohemia only to end up captured by the Americans. She ended up in a Munich insane asylum and from there was transferred in September 1945 back to Czechoslovakia and surrendered to the court.

During the almost year and a half she spent in prison, she suffered family tragedies – her mother died from a stroke suffered during interrogation, her sister Zorka committed suicide at 25 by jumping from the window of the family villa (when one of her actor colleagues refused to allow her into the theater with the words that the sister of Lída Baarová had no place in Czech theater), and her father lost his leg due to negligent medical care. Even though no direct collaboration with the Nazis was ever proven, she was banned for life from the ranks of Czech artists. She ultimately emigrated to Austria under very dramatic circumstances. Once abroad, she gradually resumed her film and theatrical career. She appeared, for example, in the Fellini film *I Vitelloni.* She enjoyed a mere three years of private life as the partner of Swiss gynecologist Kurt Lundwall. She settled in Salzburg as a widow where she lived for almost thirty years until her death. After 1989 she visited Prague several times, but soon retreated into isolation and communicated only with a very small circle of people. She gave herself over to alcohol and revisions to her memoirs.

**Julie**

In her published memoirs Lída Baarová makes reference to the Jewess Julča, who she met after the war in a prison laundry. She is the only one in this play who does not have a specific backstory; her fate is composed of several actual stories.

**Hana Krupková**née Zýková

(31 May 1921 – 16 April 1997)

Just shy of her twenties she married an older former officer of the Czechoslovak army, Václav Krupka, and soon they both joined the resistance movement. In December 1941 the parachutist group Silver A was deployed to the protectorate (their primary objective was to provide radio contact with London). Hana worked for them as one of their most important and capable connections.

After the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, when one of the resistance fighters, Karel Čurda (of the Out Distance unit) gave up a number of contacts; among those arrested were the Krupkas, whom Čurda had stayed with for a few days in the Spring. They were interrogated by Wilhelm Schultz, who had a direct influence on **Karel Hermann Frank**,at that time de facto the most powerful man in the protectorate, famous for his hatred of Czechs. Hana managed to save herself and her husband from the death sentence they faced just for approving of the assassination. While they ended up as prisoners, they survived the war. It was this, however, that aroused attention and suspicion of treason after the liberation. Hana was arrested immediately in the first days of the revolution. At the end of May her husband met the same fate as soon as he returned from a concentration camp.

For several months they were interrogated separately and transferred among various prisons. They first saw each other again in December 1946. In 1947, however, Hana was summoned before the Extraordinary People’s Court and sentenced to three years of maximum security prison. While in prison her son Pavel was born in 1947, but even this did not contribute to the reduction of her sentence. At that time she was already divorced from her husband, since he had hoped that his divorce from a “problematic person” would aid his return to military service. He was wrong. Even after her release, Hana never found peace. Everything came to a head with her attempt to illegally cross the border; Hana therefore fell into a StB trap, and her signed cooperation soon emerged as her only hope of survival. She received false documents in the name of Jana Králová.

After the Soviet invasion in 1968 she emigrated to West Germany and married again, this time to the Czech Ivo Schuster. In 1996 she returned to visit Czechoslovakia.

**The Heydrichiad**

This term describes the period in which Nazi repression grew more intense in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The first Heydrichiad refers to the several months of rule of the protectorate by Reinhard Heydrich. The second was the period of Nazi reprisals for his assassination.

In 1941, **Reinhard Heydrich** assumed the function of Reich Protector of the Protectorate. He increased pay to workers and subsidies to protectorate film. On the other hand, of course, he declared martial law and significantly intensified measures taken against the slightest hint of resistance. He also assumed a harsh position against intelligence; confinement to concentration camps and executions became a daily occurrence.

In addition to the domestic resistance, international resistance becomes active as well. Several paratrooper units were sent from England to the territories of Bohemia and Moravia. Apart from securing radio contact and establishing contacts with the domestic resistance, their tasks included the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich (operation Anthropoid). This took place on 27 May 1942, and Heydrich died on 4 June.

Immediately the Nazis unleashed reprisals. These were led primarily by **Karl Hermann Frank**, at that time the second in command of the protectorate. Now he could fully exercise his longtime hatred of Czechs. Many orders came directly from the highest posts in Berlin. Hitler demanded the immediate exemplary execution of 10,000 Czech and Moravian citizens. He was ultimately dissuaded by his staff. Even so, military law was declared, and extensive home searches and interrogations were carried out. Many people were arrested and sent to concentration camps. The names of those executed in the Protectorate are read every day on the radio as a warning. For the perpetrators of the assassination, however, it was as if the ground collapsed under them.

On 10 June an example was made of the town of **Lidice** by burning it to the ground (despite the leadership's knowledge that this was a dead end); the men were shot, the women sent to concentration camps, and most of the children died in the gas chambers. Only a few of them were released for reindoctrination in Germany.

On 18 June 1942 the betrayal of Karel Čurda revealed the hiding place of 7 parachutists, including the assassins. It was the crypt of a church in the center of Prague. They managed to hold off the force of 800 soldiers for seven hours. Ultimately, however, they all met their deaths.

On 24 June the town of **Ležáky**, where the traces of one of the radios was found, was destroyed in an even crueler manner.

Martial law ended 3 July 1942. The time of the Heydrichiad ranks among the most horrible eras in modern Czechoslovak history.