

# Last Knights, First Heroes: Weaving RAF Pilots into Czech Post-Communist Identity

**JOHANA KŁUSEK**

**Abstract:** After 1989, the story of Czech RAF pilots reemerged at the centre of national memory of the Second World War. Through a newly formed mnemonic regime and flourishing popular-cultural representations, a new collective discourse took shape. Once silenced under communism, the airmen emerged as figures Czechs had traditionally lacked—classic heroes. The hegemonic narrative, captured most vividly in Svěrák's *Dark Blue World* (2001), blends wartime bravery with transnational camaraderie, romance, homesickness, cultural Anglophilia, and the trauma of post-war communist persecution. The presentation sheds light on the functions such discourse serves in Czech post-communist national consciousness, as well as on its historical underpinnings. The image of the heroic RAF pilots is examined within the legitimizing strategies of the new democratic state, the framework of the “distancing anti-communism” of the 1990s, and the revival of soothing historical optimism.

**DISCUSSANT: VERONIKA PEHE**

(INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY HISTORY OF THE CAS)

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