

BIOGRAF JAN SVERAK & PORTOBELLO PICTURES
In co-production with

HELKON MEDIA

and

PHOENIX FILM INVESTMENTS
FANDANGO
CZECH TELEVISION

With the support of

EURIMAGES
And the Czech Film Fund

A Czech-German co-production

Present

Jan Sverak's

DARK BLUE WORLD (TMAVOMODRY SVET)

Starring

Ondrej Vetchy
Krystof Hadek
Tara Fitzgerald
Oldrich Kaiser
Hans-Jorg Assmann
and
Charles Dance

Running Time: 119 mins

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Cast

Frantisek Slama	Ondrej Vetchy
Karel Vojtisek	Krystof Hadek
Susan	Tara Fitzgerald
Wing-Commander Bentley	Charles Dance
Machaty	Oldrich Kaiser
Mrtvy	David Novotny
Hanicka	Linda Rybova
Kanka	Jaromir Dulava
Tom Tom	Lukas Kantor
Sysel	Radim Fiala
Gregora	Juraj Bernath
Houf	Miroslav Taborsky
Doctor Blaschke	Hans-Jorg Assmann
German Officer Hesse	Thure Riefenstein
English Teacher	Anna Massey
Major Skokan	Viktor Preiss
RAF Instructor	John Warnaby
Mrs Brett	Caroline Holdaway
Radio Operator 1	Timothy Otis
Radio Operator 2	William McEnchroe
Pavlata – Armourer	Cestmir Randa
WAAF Jane	Sophie Wilcox
WAAF Sally	Charlotte Fairman
WAAF's	Rhian Heppleston, Lucy Fillery, Amy Huck
Private Pierce	Jeremy Swift
Susan's Husband	William S. Masson
Beth – 4 years' old	Ashley Clish
David – 7 years' old	Lexie Peel
Girl – 10 years' old	Gemma Scrimgeour
Twin - Ann	Blaise Colangelo
Twin - Mary	Sienna Colangelo
Telephone Operator	Noel Le Bon
Bustik - Prison Guard	Jan Dvorak
Vrba Vlastik	Petr Burian
English Mechanic	Joseph John Comer
Rear Gunner Captain	John Norton
Pub Landlord	Jiri Labus
Pecharova	Daniela Kolarova
Jeannette	Anna Vesela
Radio Operator	Jeff Tyler
German Motorcyclists	Frantisek Vyskocil, Martin Dostal
Telephonist	David Fisher

The Filmmakers

Director	Jan Sverak
Producers	Eric Abraham and Jan Sverak
Co-Producers	Werner Koenig and Domenico Proccaci
Screenplay	Zdenek Sverak
Director of Photography	Vladimir Smutny
Editor	Alois Fisarek
Sound Designer	Zbynek Mikulik
Composer	Ondrej Soukup
Production Designer	Jan Vlasak
Costume Designer	Vera Mirova
Make-up Artist	Zdenek Klika
Visual Effects Designer	Milos Kohout
Production Managers	Jo Farr
.....	Martin Korinek
1 st Assistant Director	David Rauch
2 nd Assistant Director	Karel Brezina
Stills Photographer	Jiri Hanzl
Casting Director (Czech Republic)	Sona Tichackova
Casting Director (UK)	Doreen Jones
Continuity	Petra Zachova
Assistant to the Director	Helena Krystofova
Producers' Assistant	Vaclav Mottl
Associate Producer (UK)	Ed Whitmore
Line Producer (Germany)	Massoud A. Abedi
Production Supervisor (Germany)	Hannah Richardson
Production Consultant (Germany)	Tilo Seiffert
Second Unit Manager	Klara Bukovska
Producers for Czech Television	Iva Prochazkova
.....	Jaroslav Kucera
Transport Manager	Katerina Kozakova
Production Assistants	Marketa Makova
.....	Renata Cihulkova,
.....	Jarka Zajickova
Production Secretary	Renata Sodomova
Production Assistant (UK)	Tom Hooper
Production Secretary (UK)	Caroline Raymond
Script Associate (Translation)	Jitka Scoffin
Floor Runners	Nina Knezkova
.....	Jiri Knezek,
.....	Michaela Francova
.....	Monika Petru
.....	Milan Manak
Production Accountants	Tracey Whitmore
.....	Eva Nietschova
Production Accountant (Germany)	Jonna Kohtz
Cashier	Marketa Mutlova
Accounts Assistant	Lenka Cintalanova
Location Managers	Jakub Bily
.....	Martin Pavek

Location Assistants	Michael Mares
.....	Jakub Exner
Location Scout	Jan Pachl
Director of Photography (2 nd Unit).....	Ramunas Greicius
Focus Puller	Vaclav Zajicek
Camera Assistant.....	Karel Havelka
Loaders	Karel Kaliban
.....	Miroslav Hurt
Clapper	Adela Valkova
Video Operator.....	Jan Merhaut
Key Grip	Radim Stefan
Grip	Jaroslav Sinkule
Aerial Camera	Martin Sacha
Art Director	Vaclav Novak
Practical FX.....	Pavel Rample
Art Department Co-ordinator.....	Oldrich Oliva
Construction Managers	Roman Bandas
.....	Milos Vopalensky
Construction Stand-bys.....	Jaroslav Janovsky
.....	Martin Slaby
.....	Karel Elckner
.....	Martin Stefka
Prop Master	Karel Vanasek
Key Prop Man	Marcel Hana
Stand-by Prop Men	Stepan Zacios
.....	Milan Janostik
.....	Zbynek Chvojka
.....	Thomas Lehovec
Action Vehicles	Josef Ourada
.....	Frantisek Koch
Period Airplane Pilots.....	Nigel Lamb
.....	Robs Lamplough
.....	Ray Hanna
.....	Jiri Koubik
.....	Reinhard Roetzer
.....	Ladislav Mackerle
.....	Maximilian Walch
.....	Charly Koidl
.....	John Romain
.....	Daniel Ungerer
Spitfire Mechanic	Adrian Ayres
Helicopter Pilots	Frederick North
.....	Emil Remenec
.....	Petr Cerny
.....	Tim Price
.....	Luc Malhomme
.....	Harold Kaprielian
.....	Gert Uys
Model Co-ordinator	Jiri Krystof
Model Makers	Jindrich Zimak

	Miroslav Manda
	Petr Tax
	Radek Tresnak
	Jiri Mikes
RC Model Pilots	Pavel Fencel
	Bohumil Sova
	Jaroslav Hovorka
Costume Assistants	Miroslav Fantys
	Ladislav Prochazka
	Nada Chrastova
	Milena Adamova
	Karolina Jirova
	Patricie Soptenkova
	Jitka Svecova
Make-up Artist	Ivana Langhamerova
Boom Operators	Thomas Lylo
	Petr Styblo
Gaffer	Jaroslav Betka
Best Boys	Petr Stejskal
	Josef Jancar
Electricians	Petr Prochazka
	Vaclav Ksandr
	Frantisek Wirth
Genny Operator	Vratislav Vosicka
Unit Nurse	Jirina Kabatova
Catering	Eda Raban
	Jaroslava Kozakova
	David Pesaut
Catering Manager	Ivan Vorlicek
Casting Assistants	Lida Matusinska
	Magda Tichackova
Coach to Krystof Hadek	Mykolo Hejko
Public Relations – CZ	Tomas Hoffman
	Magdalena Bicikova
Public Relations – UK	Charles McDonald
Unit Publicist	Jan Bobrowska
'Making of...' film director'	Nellis Alice
Military Aircraft Advisers	Zdenek Hurt
	Miroslav Petru
Historical Consultants	General Frantisek Fajtl
	Malcolm Smith
Stunt Co-ordinator	Ladislav Lahoda
Assistant Editors	Ivan Frossel
	Adam Dvorak
Special FX	Flash, Prague
	Pitt Effects, Munich
Special FX Supervisor	Jaroslav Kolman
Unit Drivers	Frantisek Rys
	Jiri Linha,
	Bohumil Kindl

..... Miroslav Roxer
 Jiri Janda
 Marek Mensik
 Jiri Raftl
 Martin Visvader
 Jan Muller
 Jiri Hoffman
 Facilities Petr Stasak
 Vaclav Kindl
 Jan Dlouhy

Special Effects Unit Czech Republic

Lighting Camera Operator Petr Hojda
 Focus Puller Ivan Simunek
 Jakub Simunek
 Loader Michael Kudlacek
 Video Operator Jan Hojzler
 Gaffer Jaroslav Novak
 Best Boy Zdenek Janecek
 Grip Milan Petrolin
 Electrician Petr Pavlicek
 Caterers Lubomir Dopita
 Karel Havlicek
 Emile Trskova

South African Sea Shoot Unit

Line Producer Genevieve Hofmeyr
 Production Manager Leigh Clarke
 Production Co-ordinator Natascha Leite
 Cameraman Chris Lomax
 Focus Puller Justin Youens
 Loaders Bruce Newton
 Ricardo Koopman
 Video Operator Justin Kirschner
 Key Grip Terry Hoffman
 Best Boy Grip Jimmy Slabbert
 Assistant Grip Nasmie Majiet
 Location Manager Mick Snell
 Wardrobe Mila Meter
 Drivers Craig Banks
 Anton Geldenhuys
 Boat Co-ordinator Grant Spooner
 Stunts and SPFX Antony Stone
 Caterers Shane Eades
 South Africa Service Company Moonlighting Filmmakers
 South Africa Flights Swissair, Prague

Visual and Computer Effects Unit

Visual Effects Universal Production Partners, Prague

UPP

Digital Effects Co-ordinator Vit Komrzy
Visual FX Supervisor (UK) Dennis Lowe
Head of Digital David Vana
Post Production
3D Animation Jaroslav Matys
..... Ales Dlabac
..... Zdenek Urban
Inferno Composition David Vana
..... Jan Malir
..... Ales Dlabac
..... Viktor Muller
..... Helena Keslova
..... Zdenek Urban
..... Jaroslav Polensky
..... Jiri Sabata
..... Miroslav Gal
Digital Film Technologies Ivo Marak
..... Martin Sladky
..... Radek "Hop" Svoboda
Digital Effects Production Petr Komrzy

Music

Performed by The City of Prague Philharmonic
Conducted and Orchestrated by Adam Klemens
Concert Master Antonin Pergler
Administrator Josef Pokluda
Sound Mixer Juraj Durovic
Recorded at Studio Smecky, Barrandov Studio, a.s., Prague

Original Songs
"Svita" composed by Jaroslav Jezek
"Americka Polka" and
"Pochod Karnevalu Umelecke Besedy" composed by Jaroslav Jezek
performed by Dvorak's Chamber Orchestra
"Tmavomodry Svet (Dark Blue World)" composed by Jaroslav Jezek

Spitfire Replicas by GB Replicas, UK
Spitfires Supplied by The Old Flying Machine Company, UK
B-25 Mitchell The Flying Bulls GmbH, Austria
Library Footage World Backgrounds, UK
Editing Equipment UPP, Prague
Camera Equipment ARRI, Munich
..... Vantage, Prague
Costumes Supplied by Angels, UK
..... Studio Barrandov, Fundus Dept
Pilots' Goggles manufactured by Okula Nyrsko a.s.
Set Communication Motorola
Lighting & Grip Equipment Panther, Munich – Prague

Laboratory..... Studio Barrandov – Film Laboratories, Prague
CGI Scanning..... Cinesite, London
Insurers..... AON Ruben, UK – Prague
Bond CompanyFilm Finances, UK

Introduction

DARK BLUE WORLD (TMAVOMODRY SVET) re-unites the entire Oscar®-winning KOLYA (Best Foreign Language Film 1996) creative team, under KOLYA producer Eric Abraham (Portobello Pictures) and the Czech KOLYA director and co-producer Jan Sverak (Biograf Jan Sverak)

Photography on the WWII Czech/English language feature, DARK BLUE WORLD, commenced in March 2000. The film was shot on location in the Czech Republic and South Africa, as well as in studios in the Czech Republic.

DARK BLUE WORLD, written by the director's father, Zdenek Sverak, who wrote and starred in KOLYA, tells the story of the friendship between two Czech pilots, one older and one younger, who escape Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia, make their way to Britain, join the Royal Air Force and fall in love with the same English woman – the ultimate test of their friendship.

The majority financial contributions came from Germany (HELKON AG) with theatric distribution through BUENA VISTA (Germany), as well as Denmark (Phoenix Film Investments); Italy - through Domenico Procacci's FANDANGO Films with theatric and tv distribution through MEDUSA/MEDIASET, together with a major contribution from the European film loan fund – EURIMAGES.

In the Czech Republic the partners were Czech Television, the Czech Film Fund, together with sponsorship from the mobile telephone company – Radiomobil/Peagas.

Short Synopsis (1)

It's 1950 and the height of the Cold War in Communist-ruled, post-war Czechoslovakia. Ex-RAF Czech pilot FRANTA SLAMA (Ondrej Vetchy) – a man in his early forties – is confined to a labour camp as an “enemy of the people”, because he had flown for the RAF during WWII. The new totalitarian Communist regime deemed him contaminated by the Western ideals of democracy and freedom and as such a potential threat to the State.

We flashback to March 1939, just before world peace is irredeemably shattered. Franta congratulates his protégé, fresh faced young trainee pilot KAREL VOJTISEK (Krystof Hadek), for passing his flying test. Soon afterwards, Franta and Karel escape Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia and reach England, where they join the RAF. Both men fall in love with the same woman, SUSAN (Tara Fitzgerald). For Karel, Susan was his first love. The men's friendship is tested to its limit.

Short Synopsis (2)

Our story begins at the height of the Cold War, 1950 in Communist-ruled, post-war Czechoslovakia. FRANTA SLAMA (Ondrej Vetchy) – a man in his early forties – is confined to a labour camp as an “enemy of the people”. The new Communist State deemed him contaminated by the Western ideals of democracy and freedom during his time as an RAF pilot and as such a potential threat to the State. Suffering from pneumonia, he is transferred to the infirmary where Houf, a fellow inmate, becomes his confidant. Franta explains that his “crime against the State” was being a fighter pilot in the British Royal Air Force during WWII.

We flashback to March 1939, just before world peace is irredeemably shattered. Franta congratulates his protégé – fresh faced young trainee pilot KAREL VOJTISEK (Krystof Hadek) – for passing his flying test. That evening, Franta's romantic tryst with his beloved Hanicka is rudely interrupted by the Nazi invasion of their country.

Franta and Karel escape together and make their way to England. At an RAF airbase they are re-united with other Czech pilots. There is a strong best friend/father-son bond between the two men. Franta acts as a mentor while Karel naively pursues first love. They are frustrated at not being allowed to fly against the enemy until they can speak English and their RAF re-training is completed. It is slow and torturous while above them, each day, the war rages.

Eventually, three months later, they are scrambled, but the pilots' joy is swiftly tempered by the death of their youngest and most vulnerable compatriot Tom Tom – so nick-named because of his stutter.

Another mission, and Karel takes a direct hit. His fate is the same as Tom Tom's - or so it seems. Franta watches in horror as his friend's plane crashes into a field. Unbeknown to him, Karel has bailed out. As night falls, Karel arrives at a remote cottage and is taken in by SUSAN (Tara Fitzgerald), a beautiful woman whose Navy husband is missing in action. After nursing his cuts and feeding him, Susan, in a moment of weakness, makes love to Karel and relieves him of his virginity. The next morning, Karel is awoken by a bunch of small children who Karel mistakes as Susan's family. He asks her if it's normal for British families to be so large. Susan laughingly explains that they are evacuees from the German bombing of London.

Karel makes his way back to the base and Franta is overjoyed. Karel tells him that he has fallen in love, and soon afterwards takes him to meet the beautiful Susan. Franta and Susan are instantly attracted to each other. Somehow, the tension of war and the fact that life and death are daily occurrences, brings these two people together very suddenly and very intensely.

One foggy day, Karel receives a letter from Susan saying that their night together had been a mistake. Heart-broken, he sets off to find her. However, that same evening, Susan arrives at the airbase to see Franta and confesses her love for him. Franta, racked with guilt, but unable to repress his desire, falls headlong into a passionate affair with her.

Sometime later, Karel flies over Susan's house and spies Franta's car parked outside. When Franta returns to the base, a drunken Karel lunges at him. In the heat of an air battle, Franta is convinced that Karel fired on him deliberately. Wing Commander Bentley (Charles Dance) intervenes and the accusation is disproved. Quite the contrary, it was Karel's marksmanship that saved Franta's life. Franta apologises, but Karel is inconsolable.

Whilst escorting a fleet of bombers over the English Channel, Franta's plane malfunctions and crashes into the sea. Franta survives, but his rubber dinghy overinflates and bursts. Karel, seeing Franta's plight, attempts to save him by trying to push his own dinghy out of his cockpit. But the dinghy inflates too fast, obscuring Karel's vision and his plane plunges into the sea. The dinghy pops up intact and Franta is saved – the price is Karel's life.

After Franta has recuperated he sets off to visit Susan only to discover that her husband, Charles, has returned – a paraplegic. It's clear to him where Susan's duty lies.

Post-war Czechoslovakia is hardly recognisable to Franta. Hanicka, hearing falsely that Franta was dead, had married the stationmaster, Kanka, and has a daughter. Even Franta's dog, Barce, which he left behind in Hanicka's care, now has another owner – the little girl.

Back in the labour camp, Franta's comfort lies in his realisation that, in spite of the loss of the two most important women in his life, as well as his best friend, he has survived. There is little that life can throw at him which can break his

spirit. He has come to terms with his sense of guilt over his friend's sacrifice and senses the constant presence of Karel's spirit.

Long Synopsis

Our story begins at the height of the Cold War, 1950, in Communist-ruled post-war Czechoslovakia. An aerial view of a wooded, hilly countryside dotted with the last remaining patches of snow. We close in on Mirov, a large imposing fortress now used as a hard labour camp to house "enemies of the State".

The chapel has been converted into a workshop for the inmates. Among the prisoners, is our main protagonist, FRANTA SLAMA (Ondrej Vetchy) – a man of around forty. He suddenly collapses and is sent off to the prison infirmary where he meets Houf, a wily, ex-sign painter who is in for stealing paint. Franta is diagnosed as suffering from pneumonia. The infirmary is run by a German doctor called BLASCHKE (Hans-Jorg Assmann) who is also an inmate. Two small tattoos mark him out as a former member of the Nazi SS. In the courtyard below, the Camp Commandant reminds the assembled prisoners that their only way out is on the cart that goes to the cemetery – somewhat ironically named – the "amnesty" cart.

We flashback to 1939. Franta, now an instructor in the Czech air force, sits in a two-seater trainer plane with his pretty young girlfriend, Hanicka. A relaxed, intimate atmosphere. As he moves the joy-stick in the back, the joy-stick in front mimics the action and wiggles suggestively in between Hanicka's legs.

Franta takes a naïve young pilot KAREL VOJTISEK (Krystof Hadek) on his flying test. Karel passes with flying colours and is overjoyed. Back on the ground, Franta demonstrates how his beloved dog Barce is able to respond to his master's commands over the telephone. Karel and the other young pilots laugh, their respect and affection for their leader is evident.

That night, Franta and Hanicka surreptitiously make love under cover of her father's blaring radio, which resounds with Hitler's speech at a Nazi rally. As the lovers reach their climax, the Fuhrer's rabid audience reach theirs. From outside, there is the sound of a violin and they look out to see a balding railwayman standing on the station platform below. This is Kanka. Hanicka explains that he serenades her every night in an effort to woo her.

Franta and Hanicka are suddenly interrupted by her father who is in floods of tears. At first Franta thinks it's because he has discovered them in bed together, but then he learns the truth: the Germans have invaded their country and the Czech government has issued a warning against any military or civilian resistance.

A gloomy morning. Sleet is falling as the Wehrmacht parades through the conquered city of Prague. Franta heads over to his airbase where the mood is bleak. Karel is all for stealing a plane and flying to Poland, but Franta angrily stops him since the bad weather would make such a journey suicidal.

Just before the Germans arrive, led by the gloating German officer Hesse, Franta is ordered by his superior Skokan, to take command of the handover to the Germans. Franta leads Hesse to the Czech fighter planes. Karel sees Franta's civility as nothing short of treachery, but when Franta asks him codedly to escape with him to England, Karel willingly agrees.

At the railway station, Franta bids goodbye to Hanicka. It's a sad and painful moment. He entrusts her with Barce and gives her touchingly elaborate instructions for the dog's upkeep.

Franta and Karel set off on a motorcycle with a sidecar. He warns Karel to get rid of all papers or documents that could identify him to the Germans as a pilot. Karel shyly confesses he has some 'documents' he'd rather like to hold on to. It turns out to be a pack of postcards, rather tame photographs of a naked woman. Karel confesses that the cards are the closest thing he has to a girlfriend so Franta relents and lets him keep them. They have gone some distance when they realise that Barce is tearing after them. At first she ignores Franta's entreaties for her to go back to Hanicka. It's only when he yells at her that the cringing dog retreats pathetically. They ride on in silence.

The sky is thick with fighter planes. Karel, Franta, Tom Tom and a few other Czech pilots are wearing flying headgear and furiously shouting instructions and warnings to each other. We hear the roar of planes taking off. Gradually we realise that, far from being in the thick of the action, the Czechs are in fact riding specially kitted bicycles in front of an English manor house. All the pilots are beside themselves with frustration when they witness an Allied plane being shot down above them. The RAF will not let them fly until they speak English and a re-trained on British planes. Franta insists that they carry on with the exercise nonetheless. Karel refuses and throws a tantrum. Franta slaps him.

Later, Franta confronts Wing-Commander BENTLEY (Charles Dance) who explains that the Czechs need to be patient. Franta reminds Bentley that they are all fully trained pilots of the Czech airforce who have had to abandon their families to fight with the RAF. Meanwhile, aside from the menial tasks they have been assigned, the Czechs are set to learn English with a crusty and determined ENGLISH TEACHER (Anna Massey). Bored, Karel shows Tom Tom his risqué postcards, letting him borrow one as a 'model' for his drawing. Karel finds English nonsensical and intolerably difficult, but when he threatens to leave the class the seemingly fragile English teacher stops him and in a steely fashion warns him "not to sabotage her war effort".

Another day and the Czechs hang around the airfield, disgruntled. Karel flirts with a young WAAF called Jane. When a booming megaphone suddenly calls them to action, none of them can quite believe it. On their first mission they come face to face with a swarm of German Heinkels and Messerschmitts. Their exhilaration at finally being airborne is swiftly tempered when Tom Tom is shot down. All that survives is the postcard Karel gave him which flutters in the wind.

We return to Mirov prison. Houf tries to get Franta interested in a ruse to escape. He is interrupted when Franta's old friend MACHATY (Oldrich Kaiser) is dragged in. He's been badly beaten by the camp Commandant. Blaschke says he understands why he was imprisoned, but can't see why the Communists should punish Franta and Machaty for defending their country. He suggests that they wouldn't have risked their necks to such a degree had they known their bravery would be so rewarded. Machaty quietly tells him he's wrong.

Back to the war. Karel and Franta are flying deep within English airspace when they spy a German bomber plying its way steadily above the darkened countryside. As Karel swoops down, pummelling the German bomber with bullets, he takes a direct hit from the bomber's cannon. Franta looks on in horror as his friend's plane crashes into a field.

That night in the officer's mess, Franta is inconsolable. He explodes when a mess orderly refers to Karel in the past tense but then, moments later, he makes the same mistake himself. Everyone around the silent table stares fixedly at their plates.

A figure makes his way towards a remote cottage. Inside he sees a woman hunched over her knitting. She answers the door to him, but is alarmed at Karel's foreign accent since he doesn't sound like the British pilot he declared he was. Although she is dubious, she finally lets him in. Karel is taken aback; the hunched figure he spied through the window bears little resemblance to this beautiful woman. Her name is SUSAN (Tara Fitzgerald). She patches up his cuts and gives him a hot meal. As he eats, she tells him that her husband is missing in action.

Karel tells her that all his fellow pilots will now be mourning his passing. Susan is shocked to learn that Karel is only twenty years old. The atmosphere between them grows steadily more intimate and flirtatious. Karel decides to stay until the morning and that night he loses his virginity to Susan.

Meanwhile, German bombers attack the airbase and one of their group, the Moravian, Sysel – whose singing so irritated Karel – is seriously wounded.

At Susan's house the next morning, Karel is awoken by a band of small children. He is baffled and asks Susan if it is customary for English women to have so many children. She laughs and explains that her charges are evacuees from London. As Karel eats his breakfast and watches Susan organise the children, he realises that he has fallen head over heels in love.

Karel returns to the base and he creeps up on Franta. Franta is stunned, then overjoyed. He throws his arms round his friend. Karel tells Franta about the new and first love of his life - Susan.

On a beautiful summer morning, Karel and Franta drive out to Susan's house. Leaving Franta in the car, Karel knocks on the door but is dismayed to find no-one at home. When Susan returns from a walk with the children she is

first met by the solitary Franta. Susan immediately assumes that Karel has told Franta she is an easy lay and is livid. The confusion is only remedied when Karel appears.

The three of them spend an idyllic afternoon in the garden with the children. Karel tries repeatedly to find some sign that Susan loves him, but she seems distant. Very soon it is obvious there is a strong mutual attraction between Franta and Susan. While Karel is distracted by the children, Susan and Franta share an empathetic conversation about the strangeness of war. Susan asks Franta if he is married and Karel swiftly interjects that Franta has a serious girlfriend back home. A fleeting, sad look passes over Susan's face. Franta and Karel return to the base to discover that Sysel has died. Karel is surprised by how upset he feels, only now appreciating how much unspoken affection he held for the man. As Franta silently removes his watch and sets it down next to his picture of Hanicka, Karel declares that in war men should tell each other of their feelings.

At Mirov, two prisoners clear Machaty's bed. Franta's memory of Sysel's dignified burial held in England is cruelly juxtaposed against Machaty's exit on the cemetery cart.

A great fog descends over England, bringing the war temporarily to a halt. The fog is so thick, one can barely see the vague contours of the grounded aircraft. (Over these images we hear Karel reading a letter from Susan in which she urges him not to contact her again saying that their night together had been a mistake.) Karel is mystified and upset and borrows Franta's car to visit Susan, despite Franta's warnings about driving in the fog.

Franta stands at the gates and watches the lights of the car vanish into the mist. Moments later a truck appears at the gate. Franta overhears a woman's voice asking for him and realises it is Susan. He climbs into the cab beside her and explains that Karel has just set off to find her. Susan breaks down and confesses that she has come to see him, not Karel. Ever since that sunny afternoon in the garden she has not been able to get him out of her thoughts. Franta fidgets, powerfully drawn to Susan and yet determined not to betray Karel. Finally, he tells Susan that it is impossible for there to be anything between them. Susan drives home alone.

Franta and Karel take part in a successful mission to escort a badly damaged bomber back to the airbase. That night they celebrate. Franta tries to tell Karel about Susan's visit, but Karel is drunk and talks over him. He tells Franta he is his mentor - a giant among men.

Finally, in the quiet of the dormitory, Franta tries to tell Karel about Susan. He confesses his feelings for Susan and says that he didn't have the courage to explain earlier. Karel says nothing - he has been asleep throughout Franta's confession.

One Sunday, Franta drives out to Susan's house. He persuades himself that the reason for his journey is to talk Susan around to letting Karel down more

gently, but in his heart he knows this is a lie. Franta finds Susan chatting to a neighbour in her garden. Not wanting to embarrass her, he asks if he is on the right road for London. Susan confirms that he is, but warns him to drive very slowly because the road ahead is full of potholes.

Franta drives on at a snail's pace. Suddenly, Susan's car appears right in front of him. Franta climbs out and takes Susan into his arms. So begins a passionate, intense affair that fills Franta with guilt, but which he feels powerless to stop.

Karel and Franta embark on a mission over France and Karel is shot down. Franta makes an emergency landing in a field and rescues Karel. Two pilots in a one-seater fighter. But this bravery does little to dispel Franta's sense of guilt and unease at betraying his young protégé.

Franta spends another afternoon with Susan. While he is there Karel flies over Susan's house and sees Franta's car parked outside. That night Karel drives out to Susan's house to confront them, but when he sees the two lovers inside, he is so emotionally wounded that he collapses in tears. His world has been shattered.

When Franta returns to the base, a drunken Karel lunges at him. Their friendship is in tatters. Later, in the heat of an air battle, Franta becomes convinced that Karel has fired on him. Wing Commander Bentley (Charles Dance) intervenes and the charge is disproved. Quite the contrary, it turns out that Karel's marksmanship saved Franta's life.

In the officers' mess Franta makes a public apology and begs Karel to forgive him. Karel explodes, raining blows on Franta who does nothing to protect himself. Machaty drags Karel off him. Franta's betrayal hurts Karel more than if Franta had been killed.

Back in Mirov, Blaschke says he is disappointed to hear that a man of Franta's character has given in to mere instinct. A German soldier would never betray a fellow officer over a woman. Franta counters that he feels sorry for Blaschke – that he has never felt such an all-consuming passion.

The war has turned against the Germans with the arrival of the Americans. Karel and Franta are escorting American bombers over the English Channel when Franta's plane malfunctions and crashes into the sea. Franta survives but then his dinghy over inflates and explodes. Seeing Franta's plight, Karel swoops down to sea level in order to drop him his dinghy. Raising his cockpit hatch whilst attempting to semi-inflate the dinghy, Karel can't see that his aircraft has changed direction. He is just able to push the dinghy out of the cockpit when his plane plunges into the sea, vanishing beneath the waves. A moment later, Karel's dinghy surfaces intact and Franta is saved, but Karel is nowhere to be seen. Franta clambers onto the dinghy convulsing with the cold and sobbing uncontrollably.

After he recuperates Franta, returns to Susan's cottage where he discovers that Susan's husband has returned, in a wheelchair. He knows instinctively that her loyalties must now lie with her wheelchair-bound husband. Seeing each other for what must be the last time, Franta resorts to their old coded message and asks her if this is the road to London. She confirms that it is, but that now the road has been repaired, and there is no need to drive slowly to avoid the potholes.

Mirov – Houf confesses to Franta that the camp Commandant put him up to the suggestion that he and Franta escape. It was a provocation to enable the Commandant to punish him. Franta is strangely touched by the small time crook's honesty.

Immediately after the war, Franta returns to Czechoslovakia and finds Hanicka married to Kanka. Devastated, she explains that the authorities had told her that he was dead. Franta is reclaiming his faithful dog Barce, when a young girl appears and asks him what he's doing with her dog. Watching the girl, Franta reflects that she could be his daughter – but she's Hanicka's. He leaves without the dog.

Franta is in the labour camp workroom – the converted chapel. In a moment of silence, when the guard Fiala falls asleep, Franta's gaze travels up through the windows to the sky beyond.

Over an empty sky we hear Franta and Karel talking on their radios. Karel confirms that he has been, and will always be at Franta's side. Two Spitfires disappear into the distance.

About the Production

The filmmakers compare the five-year time-span of WWII to their own, four-year struggle to complete the making of DARK BLUE WORLD. Director Jan Sverak says: “We had to polish the screenplay, find the money, gather the army and get ready to shoot. That gobbled up exactly three years. When we at last marched off into battle, some problems began to surface. We had to adjust and improve the strategy on the march. So one could say we were turning into an army, pushing the story ahead and conquering it bit by bit, like patches of enemy territory.”

The hardest part, Jan explains, “was when the shooting dragged on for almost two months past the shooting schedule. This movie was just a lot more complicated than our initial estimate. Almost all the unit members had jobs lined up and had to leave for other movies. Those of us who stayed behind felt like we were losing comrades in a battle. Towards the end of the last shooting day, when there were some final special effects shots to complete, it was my turn to leave, I got into my car and drove home. I was happy it was all over. At the same time, a strange feeling of emptiness gripped me.”

In contrast to the difficulties of the shooting period, Jan found life in the editing room less stressful: “By then the whole thing is done and one can’t mess it up any more. Shooting is a time of compromise when you are constantly fighting the elements and devils of all kinds. It’s the time of battles and losses, which I don’t like very much. I always feel that you only manage to get on film only eighty or seventy, sometimes even less, percent of the original intention. If you capture something you didn’t expect - like a whiff of a breeze blowing beautifully through an actress’s hair - then it’s a gift. Only in the cutting room do you appreciate all the unexpectedly beautiful things that were born during the shoot.”

The birth of DARK BLUE WORLD started in early 1997 when Zdenek Sverak commenced research, whilst KOLYA was being released globally and just prior to its Golden Globe and Academy Awards. KOLYA and DARK BLUE WORLD producer Eric Abraham recalls “Zdenek wanted to write a story about the last Czech heroes – the WWII pilots. Men who did not have to fight against the Nazi evil, they could have remained in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia, but actively chose to escape in order to fight. These men chose a moral course and got kicked in the guts for it when they returned home. They paid the price of moral courage.” He continues: “Although it’s an historical fact that there were a number of Czech pilots stationed with the RAF during the war, some of whom might have gone through similar experiences with the English language, culture and opposite sex as our protagonists, our story is fiction.

Raising the finance for DARK BLUE WORLD was another battle in itself. Eric Abraham clarifies: “Foreign language films occupy about one percent of the North American market and marginally more in Europe. In spite of the global success of films like CROUCHING TIGER, LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL and even KOLYA itself it’s tough to raise money for foreign language movies with

budgets far in excess of their domestic territory norm. DARK BLUE WORLD has ten times the average Czech film budget. We had to secure 80% of the finance from outside its home territory. We also wanted money that did not carry with it control of any kind. KOLYA was successful precisely because we made it as we wanted. Jan had absolute creative control. It's a testimony to the high standing he has in the international film arena that we were able to secure the majority of the budget for a Czech film from outside the Czech Republic and moreover retain total control. What's heartening about CROUCHING TIGER is that it proved to distributors in America that sub-titles are not necessarily the kiss of death for a film and that there is a global audience which is hungry for something different from the standard Hollywood fare. KOLYA made things a little easier but international distributors are used to picking up foreign language films for peanuts and are very hesitant about risking significant money upfront."

DARK BLUE WORLD might have ten times more funding than the average Czech budget, but Eric believes the scale of the movie is also ten times more ambitious than any in the history of Czech cinema of the last fifty years: "A number of seasoned distributors read the screenplay and rejected investing precisely because they couldn't imagine how we would realize the film for the relatively modest budget. Invention was the catchword. But then I've never believed that money is the midwife to creativity. Too often, too much money damages the focus of the filmmaker. We are catering for an audience used to Steven Spielberg-like special effects realized on Hollywood scale budgets so our film couldn't look "amateur" in any department. It's an immensely complicated film technically. DARK BLUE WORLD is about pilots and you have to show what they do convincingly."

To be convincing, it was crucial for the filmmakers to reassemble the KOLYA production team for DARK BLUE WORLD. "We needed the help and commitment of the believers in our faith – our film" says Eric Abraham Director of photography Vladimir Smutny, production designer Jan Vlasak and special effects designer Milos Kohout. "This is the third Czech film I have produced based on a Zdenek Sverak screenplay" Eric Abraham says: "The Jiri Menzel film – THE LIFE AND EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF PRIVATE IVAN CHONKIN; KOLYA and DARK BLUE WORLD. Since meeting Zdenek and Jan at the 1992 Karlovy Vary Film Festival, where I was a Jury member with Jan, a tremendous level of team trust has developed – we all serve the film first."

For Eric Abraham the team's limited resources made DARK BLUE WORLD tough and challenging on every level: "The 100 days of photography were an exercise in Rubik cubing and I became expert in rustling up all kinds of toys for Jan to play with – from a B-25 bomber, Spitfires, helicopters to ships in Cape Town. I became expert too in begging, cajoling and pleading for favours. I don't think I have a pair of trousers without holes in the knees!"

“Jan is an extraordinary visual story-teller. He seems to have retained a child’s perception of the world. He has an eye for detail and unusual ways of seeing things. His style is both simple and sophisticated, Czech-rooted but universally accessible.” says Eric Abraham.

Jan Sverak perceives: “Love is uncontrollable, and that’s what DARK BLUE WORLD is about.” He says: “While friendship is a secure emotion, love is an unpredictable missile. Against such a missile you’re powerless. This movie tries to find out if love can kill friendship. When we were thinking about the story with my Dad, Zdenek, what we found most interesting was that when a woman steps between two men, friendship goes out of the window. Sex is a stronger force than friendship. This situation is quite hard to accept for a young man, but when you get older you understand. This, for us, was the crux of DARK BLUE WORLD. Now that the shooting is over I have come to realize that the roots of a real friendship can survive anything.

Although the story is about love, Jan and Zdenek also wanted to find out what makes people into heroes. “Nowadays, there do not seem to be many heroes about. Look at us, the Czechs” Jan says, “We took a number of hidings in the past. I think we feel there’s no point fighting for anything any more. Then, as the nation gets demoralised by all the thumps it gets throughout history, an interesting question presents itself: Would we ever again find such ‘fools’, who’d volunteer to leave behind their dog, girl, family, house and friends and go to fight for some truth and some freedom? In our movie we do have such examples: the bombers, fighter pilots and soldiers of WWII. Those were the people who did the right thing, behaved like good men and citizens, and in our case were punished for it. Perhaps the film helps us to realize that a man doesn’t do the right thing because he’s a good citizen, he doesn’t even do it for his country, he does it to satisfy his conscience, his inner feeling of right and wrong. That is why I am an optimist about the future heroes of the human race. “

The role of Franta Slama (Ondrej Vetchy) characterises such a man. He does not set out to become a hero, but through instinctively doing the right thing for his country, he becomes one. The producers felt Ondrej Vetchy was the only man for the part. It was not the first time they had worked with him, as Ondrej had portrayed the Gravedigger in KOLYA and he also appeared in Jan Sverak’s Oscar nominated (1991) ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. They decided: “Slama was to be sporty and masculine, not some fake beau, but a guy women would like.” Jan thought, “That’s Ondrej. I was sure his energy and will to fight for King and country would filter into the movie. He was the first actor I approached. Ondrej was delighted, and promptly began to study documents about the pilots. He couldn’t wait to start. “

In contrast, it took them a long time to find an actor to play the 18-year old trainee pilot Karel Vojtisek (Krystof Hadek). The search took a year, with several big casting sessions. They spotted Krystof, a first year drama student, right at the start, but, Jan thought “he was too young: a mop of hair, not one hair on his chin and, what was worse, he had the eyes of a child. Clearly, he had no experience of adulthood, and this didn’t quite fit his part.

Even the youngest pilot, who's landed a plane at least once, knows what it means to confront death. You can see it in his eyes. Krystof was photogenic and hugely natural, he coped well in screen tests with Ondrej Vetchy, but neither my father nor I could see him as Vojtisek. We went searching further and further afield, in Slovakia and Poland, until we realised we wouldn't find a better guy. We came back to Krystof and knew we'd have to do something about him. An ideal recipe would have been to find him a "she-devil" of a girlfriend, who'd manage to charm him and leave him two months before photography! He'd have to suffer for love, and mature this way. Instead, we sent Krystof on a special army-training course, where he learnt to march, salute and stand straight. He no longer looked like a lazy adolescent, but a real soldier. At the same time, he took lessons in acting from a Ukrainian child director, Mykolo Hejko, who once looked after little Kolya (Andrei Chalimon). At first, I thought Krystof was my biggest risk, but when the shooting was over, it dawned on me he was my best bet."

Jan had to rely upon his instincts to find the British actress who could portray Susan (Tara Fitzgerald): "I wanted a really fantastic woman so that everybody would fall in love with her. I found this in Tara Fitzgerald - this Irish girl. When she cries on the screen you can see how it hurts her - the tears come from within." Eric Abraham believes "Tara is perfect for the role. She's beautiful, exotic and has a period face. Just the right combination to attract both Franta and Karel." The other two key English actors, Anna Massey and Charles Dance, who portray the feisty English teacher and Wing Commander Bentley respectively were, Jan feels, perfect casting. "They became the characters."

The other 'stars' of DARK BLUE WORLD are the Spitfires. One Spitfire costs about US\$7,500 per hour, so every minute of flying time means a lot of money out of the budget. Jan says "each time a plane was to land, an inner struggle would take hold of me - the little boy in me wanted to watch the amazing machine fly a little bit longer and the adult producer worried about the extra US\$650 for another round. In the end I always said to myself - let him do another turn. The Spitfire produces a very special sound and when it flies over your head, when you hear the engine for the first time, you appreciate its awesome power. It feels like attending a mass. One understands the boys were not afraid whilst flying these planes, because each machine was like a beautiful stallion, which would pull you out of any danger. Besides, the Spitfire looks cheerful, unlike the Messerschmitt, which reminds you of a shark."

The English pilots on the film inspired Jan: "Nigel Lamb, was a real fighter pilot, who had fought in the guerrilla war in Zimbabwe. He knew his plane so well he was almost a part of the machine. Nigel managed to do amazing things like the raid on a train in Nazi-occupied France, where the plane swerves from right to left in front of the moving train. He could work out precisely when the train would reach the spot visible to the camera, and he'd manage to get there at that exact moment. That's a real achievement. The plane flies at a speed of over three hundred kilometres per hour, and it's hard to make it fly in sync with another moving object, and then to make sure the two are at a certain spot at the same time. Nigel timed it all perfectly. He

went so low he almost cut the grass with his propeller!" I asked him "Nigel, can you do it even lower but please only if it's not too dangerous for you". He replied " Everything I'm doing is safe, after all no one's shooting at me!"

The aerial sequences are a combination of elements. Blue-screen, actual live action aerial filming, models, computer graphics and out-takes from the 1969 epic film THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN aerial footage. Eric Abraham says "Jan ingeniously and seamlessly integrated all these ingredients to produce dramatically organic and exciting aerial scenes. While we did a fair amount of aerial photography it is true to say that the BATTLE OF BRITAIN out-take footage was invaluable because these days some of the period planes we needed aren't airworthy any more and even if they were we couldn't have afforded them on our budget."

Coincidentally, one of the Czech veteran pilots, who came to watch the plane sequences at Hradcany air field, discovered he once took one of the planes being used for filming into action. Eric Abraham comments: "The veterans found it exciting to see a world – the planes, the RAF airbase – which they last encountered in their youth. It was moving both for them and for us."

The story dictated the proportion of 65% Czech and 35% English language used in the film. It was a complicated aspect of filming and, in particular, for Ondrej Vetchy who had a high proportion of lines in English. Jan says "Ondrej's English is very basic and the poor bloke even had some lines in German. He had several rather emotional scenes in English too, which I think would wear out many lesser actors. He couldn't sleep, worrying he'd mess up the lines. The scene in the garden, where he talks to a little girl had to be tender, but not gooey. He had to cope with the trickery of English pronunciation, where you have 'a sting' and 'a stink'. He could hear very little difference between the two. I was really sorry for him but he pulled it off. After each day of linguistic torture he was euphoric with relief ." Eric Abraham was the dialogue coach for the Czechs. "We wanted their English to be clear and credible, not a fake Queen's English or one that would spoil their characters, since Czechs have a tendency to strangle many English words which are vowel rich. I wouldn't be surprised if Vetchy and Hadek weren't inundated with Hollywood offers on the basis of their 'excellent' and fluent English in our film."

When Hans-Jorg Assmann who plays the SS Dr. Blaschke arrived in Prague, he had spent two months learning the complicated Czech text, and knew the difficult lines perfectly. He told Jan "You can cut out any lines you wish, but you mustn't change a word, because I've learnt it all by heart ."

Jan Sverak creates an atmosphere on the set relevant to the scene being prepared. "We worked like this on KOLYA. When we were shooting the sad scenes there was no fun and games throughout that day and for happy scenes everybody had to work themselves up into the highest spirits, even the gaffer had to be in a good mood, otherwise it's all false. If the emotion is real it makes its way onto the screen fresh and undamaged."

Another aspect of filming, which demands a different kind of concentration, is the direction of children and animals. Despite being notoriously difficult to work with, Jan believes: “When you manage to shoot a scene well with children, it adds authenticity to the film.

More serious problems were of a technical nature. The difficulty facing producers was how to recreate the aerial battle scenes of WWII without a multi-million Hollywood blockbuster budget. Jan considers “when you move into the sphere of special effects, they can be good and expensive or cheap, and it shows. We wanted to give the story what it deserved. For instance, we had to blow up a train. We discovered it would cost the same to blow up a real train as it would to build and blow up a model. You may end up spending more on the models than on the real thing. So, we bought a train, sawed off parts of the water tanks, stuffed explosives and petrol inside and camouflaged the cut out bits. Unfortunately, we had to do the whole thing twice, because the first take negative was damaged. But I am pleased with the train scene; our train blew up really nicely – twice!”

The whole production had to fly to Cape Town, South Africa for a week’s shooting. “We needed the English Channel i.e. the Atlantic Ocean, in winter and we needed it cheap” Eric Abraham explains, “and since only seaward shots were required Cape Town was feasible and worked a treat. It turned out to be cheaper than filming in the Czech Republic. Despite the difficulties of gale force weather and seasickness, we were even able to wrap on time and get Jan back to Prague for the birth of his son the next day.”

“We were shooting one of the scenes, where Franta (Ondrej Vetchy) is supposed to be drowning in a rough sea,” Jan adds “the water was not that cold - only fifteen degrees - but, would you believe it, our hero Ondrej wanted to get out! I think he was scared. There was a huge swell, slowly rising and falling, and on top of this were waves of over two metres. We were all seasick. It was only after a while, when Ondrej’s costume got soaked through and he began to drown, we realised that we had forgotten to inflate his life jacket. But, you see, I was always convinced he was a real hero and that any stunt would be a treat for him. Later, I saw a TV documentary about the infamous Great White sharks who regularly came to snack on seals at the same spot where we’d been shooting with Ondrej! “

Recreating war-time England in the Czech Republic proved less demanding than the scenes in the air and sea, but still needed a lot of planning and attention to detail. The old Russian airbase at Hradcany doubled for the English RAF base. However, finding a replica English country house was more complicated. “England differed not only in architecture” Jan found “but in all sorts of ways. We discovered a house near Ostrava, built by Baron Rothschild, which looked as if it had been parachuted in from England – complete with screeching pheasants’.

Music proved a key element to the makers of DARK BLUE WORLD, which takes its name from the old Jaroslav Jezek song of the same title. Jan thinks “when music is cleverly used, it brings emotion into a scene and communicates things words cannot express. The song, Dark Blue World is a work of genius; it expresses pride and sorrow, disenchantment and solace. Oldrich Kaiser, who portrays Machaty, managed to master this complicated tune and played it perfectly. Everyone in the room fell quiet after the first few bars. The way he plays this tune – it’s as if he opens his soul to us.”

The Cast

Ondrej Vetchy - (Franta Slama)

Winning the Czech Lion Best Actor Award three times running between 1995 and 1997, Ondrej Vetchy is a much-admired actor in the Czech Republic. Internationally, audiences know him through his role as the Gravedigger in KOLYA. Other recent film credits include ALL MY LOVED ONES (1999), and WHICH SIDE EDEN (1999). He graduated from the State Conservatoire in Prague in 1984 and pursued a career in film, tv and theatre. In the early 80’s he was often cast as the ‘hardened inmate’ or ‘clever thief’ and other characters on the periphery of society. Ondrej’s career was elevated in 1988 with his film debut as Dan in A HOUSE FOR TWO which gained him critical acclaim and a European Felix best actor nomination.

The friendship between Franta and Karel is rooted in their passion both for flying and for the love for their country. Ondrej explains, “When Franta is training Karel to fly, he is his favourite pupil. In Franta’s opinion he’s an honest young man and is eager to become a first rate pilot for his country - that’s why Franta chooses Karel to escape with him from the Nazi occupation.”

The complexities in the relationships between Franta, Susan and Karel are not easily remedied. He says: “A man can fall in love with a woman who belongs to someone else. Franta tries to fight it. If it was peacetime it might not be so intense.” She never declared her love to Karel. She belongs to him only in his head. In wartime, the animal feelings and passions are much stronger. The wounds are much more open. The tragedy is, Karel is so young. Franta has to carry the baggage of guilt and gratitude with him as he grows older.”

After the war, inside the communist prison, Franta might be considered as a man who has lost everything, but Ondrej explains: “At the end of the film my character Franta looks through the bars of the prison and can’t help thinking how happy he was, up in the sky. At the same, time he thinks of Karel. The only thing desperately lacking in Franta’s life is his friend’s forgiveness. The last scene is like a spiritual meeting. We can all interpret this for ourselves – is it a dream when he hears Karel’s voice say ‘Don’t be sad Franta... I am behind you where I have always been’. It takes Franta a long time to realise that Karel actually forgave him.”

Tara Fitzgerald – (Susan)

Tara Fitzgerald's successful career is recognised through films such as the multi-award winning BRASSED OFF (1996) directed by Mark Herman, co-starring with Ewan McGregor and Pete Postlethwaite; as well as Christopher Monger's THE ENGLISHMAN WHO WENT UP A HILL BUT CAME DOWN A MOUNTAIN (1995) playing opposite Hugh Grant; and SIRENS (1994) directed by John Duigan, also starring Hugh Grant. She recently appeared in Edward Thomas's RANCID ALUMINIUM (2000) with Rhys Ifans and Joseph Fiennes.

"I took the part in DARK BLUE WORLD because I had seen KOLYA" says Tara Fitzgerald "and I thought KOLYA was incredible and I wanted to work with Jan Sverak. Also, I thought DARK BLUE WORLD was a beautiful script and that's not common. It's very poetic and the language is interesting because it only uses what is essential."

"I'm learning from the way Jan Sverak works. He's got this duality, which gives him extraordinary vision. I saw Jan's 'Elementary School' and I realised that he knew himself, he knows his vision very well and that's always incredibly exciting. Jan's work is very much in the moment and is to do with relating to the actors you're with and there's only a limited amount of preparation you can do. He's also very perceptive and it's quite extraordinary, because he knows your tricks and he can see through them. When it's too easy for you, then there's something wrong, it's something you 'do'. Perhaps something you've used before and he eradicates that. It's a challenge."

Looking at the differences in filming in the Czech Republic and elsewhere Tara says: "What's been really lovely is having the time on this film. The biggest difference, for me, is getting used to the pace, as it's so much slower and better for it. You're actually able to explore things properly. I could find a 'place in the centre' of the scene."

Although the film is set during WWII, Tara believes there are universal themes which could be applied to any time or place: "The triangle of two men and one woman is timeless. Another theme is the war-torn situation when, in moments of extremis, people do things they never expect to do and surprise themselves. This really comes across in the script and it's beautiful."

Examining the characters and their extreme circumstances, Tara imagines that "they are like islands; they're very much their own worlds and these worlds come together. Susan is exempt in some way from having to cope with the quarrel between the two men, as she's a married woman. She's in a position where she's waiting for her husband to come back; he's missing in the Navy, and she's in some kind of limbo. It's the war making her behave in ways perhaps she never would normally. She's surprised at herself. The men's friendship breaks down but it's not intentional - it's a very human dilemma."

With Franta, it's the last thing Susan is expecting. "She doesn't know what to do. In those situations it's not about being evil or disrupting anyone's life or destroying relationships; you just can't help yourself. It's beyond any reason. She's a strong woman; she declares her love to Franta. Would she behave like this if her husband were around? It's not a clear situation which is further confused with the war. No-one can close down completely. That would be a death, a tragedy in a young woman."

Krystof Hadek – (Karel Vojtisek)

Born in Prague, 1983, Krystof Hadek is currently in his third year of a music and drama course at the State Conservatoire in Prague. Krystof is the youngest of three children. His mother, Jana Hadek is a documentary filmmaker and his older brother Matthew Hadek is an actor at Vinohrady Theatre in Prague.

Playing the second lead in DARK BLUE WORLD is Krystof Hadek's screen debut. He has previously had supporting roles in several television series.

Krystof Hadek thinks "Karel Vojtisek is very eager for life and keen to experience everything as quickly as possible. When we first see Karel his patience is stretched to the limit as he is desperate to prove himself as a pilot and fight for his country." Considering the complexities in the relationships between Karel, Franta and Susan, Krystof says "Franta is Karel's idol, his hero and friend, whilst Susan is the first woman Karel has ever loved. So, when Franta falls in love with Susan it feels as if Franta has physically struck him. Karel's discovery of their betrayal is like a thunderbolt. It is especially difficult for Karel to understand why Franta has betrayed him. "

"It is also very hard for Karel to carry on and fight in the war alongside Franta when he has been betrayed by his closest friend", Krystof continues, "Whilst Karel still has to give Franta respect as his commanding officer, at the same time, he loses respect for him as a friend. The whole situation is too hard for him. He can't speak to Franta or look at him, but deep down, he still loves him. It's a very strong bond."

Charles Dance – (Wing-Commander Bentley)

Charles Dance shot to stardom through the powerful television series JEWEL IN THE CROWN in 1982. Since then his career has spanned many productions in film, TV and theatre. More recent film credits include Anand Tucker's HILARY & JACKIE (1998), which received several Oscar® nominations, Neil Jordan's MICHAEL COLLINS (1995), and will be seen in the upcoming Robert Altman film GOSFORD PARK (2002). He has also had a long, successful career in theatre, joining the RSC in 1975. More recently, in 2000, he starred opposite Jessica Lange in Eugene O'Neill's LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT in London's West End.

“The Second World War was an extraordinary time for all concerned,” reflects Charles Dance “and there was a feeling amongst people like Wing Commander Bentley in Britain, that anyone who wasn’t English was ‘Johnny Foreigner’. Because of his age it’s safe to assume that Bentley was in the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War and is an experienced flyer and now doing a desk job. He has all these young men from Czechoslovakia, Poland and so on, who managed to escape their occupied countries, now joining in the fight against the Nazis from England. It’s probably their age, more than anything else that bothers Bentley - they were just kids, but incredibly brave. He doesn’t doubt for a minute their ability to fly the machines, but wonders about their ability to cope under extreme pressure. There’s also the difficulty with the language and these guys had to learn English before being able to fly with the RAF. It’s an added chore to what is already a difficult job and Bentley is losing pilots on a daily basis. It’s not until Bentley sees what happens during one of the ‘dog fights’, that he thinks maybe they are actually up to it and he accepts them and becomes grateful for their contribution. Bentley’s character is written as the archetypal British officer, but he is by no means a caricature - there’s no place for caricature in this film.”

Charles Dance says, “I did the film because of KOLYA, which I think is near-perfect, sexy, funny, poignant, sad and in none of those areas is it heavy handed. The relationship Jan Sverak has with his father Zdenek is enviable. Every inch of Jan is a filmmaker.”

“In my experience” he says “films stand or fall on the quality of the script and with this one, you are already more than half way there, from the start. Jan is also lucky to have Eric Abraham, a producer who is concerned with the money being spent right here on the screen. It’s extraordinary what is being done with this film on this kind of budget. There seems to be a great working relationship between Eric and Jan which is all to the good. “

Oldrich Kaiser – (Machaty)

Oldrich Kaiser made his debut in film in 1973 in Karel Kacyna’s romantic movie LOVE. Film roles followed, but it was his comedy talent in TV sit-coms and theatre double-acts which made him popular in the Czech Republic. Jan Sverak says “I knew Kaiser was an excellent actor, an attractive man with a sense of dignity about him, but I had no idea he would master his cinematic comeback with such bravado and shine in this story like a shooting star.”

Hans-Jorg Assmann – (Doctor Blaschke)

Hans-Jorg Assmann is a very well-known film and TV actor in Germany. His film roles include Julius Madritsch in Steven Spielberg’s SCHINDLER’S LIST (1993) and Berger in Sherry Horman’s German/English language romantic comedy FATHER’S DAY (1996).

About the filmmakers

JAN SVERAK, DIRECTOR (and CO-PRODUCER)

TMAVOMODRY SVET (DARK BLUE WORLD) is Jan Sverak's second collaboration with producer Eric Abraham, the first being KOLYA in 1996.

KOLYA was directed by Jan and scripted by his father Zdenek Sverak, who also stars. The film won the 1997 Academy Award® for Best Foreign Language Film (the first Oscar® for the Czech Republic – the previous Czech to win an Oscar® for Czechoslovakia was Jiri Menzel in 1967 with his film Closely Observed Trains). KOLYA also won the 1997 Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film. In the Czech Republic, where it remained on release a year after it debuted, KOLYA won six Czech Lions (Czech National Film Awards) and has become the most critical and commercially successful Czech film since the Velvet Revolution. KOLYA has been released theatrically in forty countries, the widest global release of any Czech film in the country's history. KOLYA was awarded Best Picture and Best Screenplay at the Tokyo International Film Festival and was nominated for European Film of the Year (Felix 1997) and for a BAFTA – for Best Film Not in the English Language.

Jan Sverak's talent first attracted attention through his short film SPACE ODYSSEY II (1986), a dramatic story of two retired women living on a snow-bound estate. Here he paid his first ironic homage to mainstream American commercial film genres.

Jan's ability as a film-maker was confirmed by his "sci-fi ecology" documentary dealing with a "newly discovered species", supposedly flourishing in the devastated region of the then Northern Czechoslovakia. The film ROPACI (OIL GOBBLERS) was popular at festivals at home and abroad. In 1989, OIL GOBBLERS received the most prestigious prize in its category, the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Student Oscar® for the best foreign film.

Two years later Jan Sverak completed his feature debut OBECHNA SKOLA (THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL) (1991). His father, Zdenek Sverak, wrote the screenplay and acted in the film. In 1992 this heart-warming period film set in post-war Czechoslovakia was nominated for the Academy Award® for Best Foreign Language Film.

Jan Sverak directed ACCUMULATOR 1 (1994), an action fantasy about television's vampire-like capacity to suck out a person's life-force and deplete their energy, which he wrote with Jan Slovak, a member of the theatre company Sklep. Zdenek Sverak worked with the two young authors on the dialogue for the final version. At the time, the film with its budget of over forty million crowns, was the largest scale Czech production ever. It was awarded the Media Prize at the 1994 Venice International Festival and received the Grand Prix at the International Festival at Yubari Fanta in Japan. On home territory the popularity of the film brought Jan Sverak the Czech Lion Prize,

awarded by the Czech Film and Television Academy for the most popular film of the year.

Jan Sverak's road-movie JIZDA (THE RIDE) (1994) was also a hit with audiences in the Czech Republic. He wrote the screenplay of this ultra low-budget film with his college mate Martin Dostal. Since its first release, the film acquired an almost cult status and for more than a year it was one of the top Czech box-office hits. JIZDA received the Crystal Globe, the main prize at the 30th International Film Festival in Karlovy Vary in 1995.

Born in 1965 and after completing his secondary education, Jan was accepted for the documentary film course at the Prague Film Academy (FAMU), and graduated in 1988. While at the Academy he directed several short films (among them GOODBYE LITTLE STATION (1985), WINE-MAKER (1985) and two television films: CONVERSATION (1986) and HOW THE CHIMNEY-SWEEPS BRING GOOD LUCK (1987). He is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Czech Film Academy. He is married with three children and lives in Prague.

ERIC ABRAHAM – PRODUCER

Eric Abraham produced the 1997 Oscar-winning Foreign Language Film KOLYA, directed by the previously Oscar® nominated Czech director Jan Sverak.

In 1999, Eric Abraham produced Jez Butterworth's BIRTHDAY GIRL, starring Nicole Kidman and Ben Chaplin for Miramax, HAL and FilmFour. He executive produced Tim Roth's directorial debut THE WAR ZONE (1999) starring Ray Winstone and Tilda Swinton based on Alexander Stuart's powerful rites of passage novel, with SRP and FilmFour.

Eric Abraham also produced Jez Butterworth's debut feature MOJO (1997) starring Ian Hart, Harold Pinter, Ewen Bremner and Aidan Gillen for BBC/British Screen. In 1994, he produced Academy award-winning director Jiri Menzel's ('Closely Observed Trains') last film, a comedy – THE LIFE AND EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF PRIVATE IVAN CHONKIN (a British/Czech/French/Italian and Russian co-production.) The film was written by Zdenek Sverak (KOLYA) and is based on the classic Russian novel by Vladimir Voinovich, dubbed the 'Catch 22' of the former USSR. 'Chonkin' debuted in competition in the 1994 Venice International Film Festival where it was awarded a Gold medal and the Prix du Public at the International Comedy Film Festival (Vervey, Switzerland) in 1995.

In 1991, Eric Abraham produced John le Carre's A MURDER OF QUALITY, starring Denholm Elliot and Glenda Jackson, directed by Gavin Millar. During 1989, Britain's first major family theatrical feature for almost twenty years was produced by Eric Abraham – Roald Dahl's DANNY THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD, starring Jeremy Irons and his son Samuel and a host of British stars. 'Danny' was successfully released in a number of countries including the UK and has received many international awards.

South African born (now a British national) and a former BBC correspondent in Southern Africa, Eric Abraham has, during his twenty years in British television, executive produced and produced numerous television drama series and films. He started as a producer on BBC TV's 'Panorama' current affairs documentary programme, moved on to run top UK drama independent Primetime Television, and in 1987 started Portobello. He specialised in initiating and attracting international funding for much acclaimed television dramas including the BBC series FORTUNES OF WAR (based on Olivia Manning's 'Balkan and Levant Trilogies' featuring Kenneth Branagh and Emma Thompson) adapted by Alan Plater; Stewart Parker's original series LOST BELONGINGS for Thames Television and Channel Four; director Mick Jackson's DOUBLE IMAGE with Tommy Lee Jones as well as the BBC's peak time hit series of detective films DALZIEL & PASCOE with Warren Clarke. In the music and arts arena he produced many documentaries with Sir Georg Solti, Murray Perahia, Kiri Te Kanawa and The Royal Ballet. He is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the British Academy of Film and Television Arts and the Czech Film Academy.

ZDENEK SVERAK – SCREENWRITER

Aside from his writing for film and television, Zdenek Sverak is a playwright, novelist and actor, who once planned to become a teacher. A graduate of a teacher's training college, where he read Czech language and literature, he began his career teaching with his wife in the Zatec region of what was then Czechoslovakia. Since correcting homework did not allow him enough time to write novels, he had to concentrate on shorter works of literature. He contributed to various magazines, wrote stories for young people, fairy tales for children and scripts for television.

In 1962 Sverak joined the Czech Radio Army Service, where he worked as a live commentator of the epic sports events of the communist era. About that time he created, with his colleagues Jiri Sebanek and the jazz musician Karel Velebny, a memorable series of 'live broadcasts' from the imaginary 'Spider's Tavern', designed to playfully mystify their listeners. It was at this time that the character of an unjustly ignored Czech hero, Jara Cimrman, came to life. In 1966 Zdenek Sverak and a few colleagues set up a small theatre named after the fictitious hero. This has become one of Prague's most popular venues. As the leading author and actor, Zdenek Sverak is still actively associated with the theatre.

His film acting debut came in 1968 when he appeared as the lawyer in Jiri Menzel's CRIME IN THE MUSIC HALL. Immediately after that Menzel cast Sverak in his censored film LARKS ON A STRING (1969). Zdenek Sverak's distinctive comic talent found place in supporting roles in a number of Czech comedies, in which he was usually also involved as a scriptwriter. His leading roles include: the exhausted dentist Burda in the tragicomedy WHAT'S THE MATTER, DOCTOR (1984), and the hopelessly enamoured engineer Hnyk in AS GOOD AS POISON (1985), both directed by Vit Olmer. The crowning achievements of his acting career are, without doubt, his performances in

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, ACCUMULATOR 1 and KOLYA, all directed by his son, Jan.

During the seventies, Zdenek Sverak and his friend and colleague Ladislav Smoljak, were well known as the scriptwriters of a whole series of highly successful Czech comedies JACHYM, THROW HIM IN THE WORKS (1974), MARECEK, PASS ME THE PEN (1975) both directed by Oldrich Lipsky; A COTTAGE BY THE WOODS (1975) directed by Jiri Menzel, BALL LIGHTNING (1978) DIRECTED BY Zdenek Podskalsky and Ladislav Smoljak, and the satirical musical THE HIT (1980) directed by Zdenek Podskalsky. The long established Sverak-Smoljak team was the driving force behind the feature films JARA CIMRMAN: LYING, SLEEPING (1983); DISSOLVED AND RELEASED (1984) and the dramatic chronicle THE SEASON WITHOUT SECURITY (1987), all of which build on the poetic concept of the Cimrman Theatre.

Zdenek Sverak wrote LONG LIVE THE GHOSTS (1977), THE THREE VETERANS (1983), both directed by Oldrich Lipsky, the nostalgic comedy WAITER, RUN! (1980) directed by Ladislav Smoljak, the adaptation of Voinovich's THE LIFE AND EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF PRIVATE IVAN CHONKIN and his two popular Oscar® nominated comedies MY SWEET LITTLE VILLAGE (1985) directed by Jiri Menzel, and ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. He has written the screenplays for three Oscar nominees and one Oscar winner – something of a screenwriter's record.

VLADIMIR SMUTNY – DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Following in the footsteps of his father, who was a photographer and his uncle who was a documentary cameraman, award-winning Vladimir Smutny graduated from the Prague Film Academy (FAMU) becoming an assistant cameraman at the Barrandov Film Studios in 1974. He worked under Jaromir Sofr, Frantisek Uldrich and Hiri Macak and made his debut as Director of Photography eight years later on Julius Matula's THE LAST TRAIN. In the same year he began his partnership with Jiri Svoboda, with whom he made RENDEZVOUS WITH SHADOWS, THE DESTRUCTION OF THE BERNHOF HOUSE (1983), SCALPEL PLEASE! (1985), CURSE OF THE HOUSE OF HAJN (1988). Smutny went on to work with other prominent directors such as Karel Kachyna (THE GOOD LIGHT) and Jaroslav Soukup on DISCO-STORY (1987), FRIEND FOR A RAINY DAY (1988) WILD HEARTS (1989), DISCO-STORY 2 (1991) and VAMPIRES' WEDDING (1993). In 1996 Smutny teamed up with Jan Sverak to make KOLYA for which he received the Cinematography Award in Madridimagen

ALOIS FISAREK – EDITOR

Editing was an integral part of Alois Fisarek's studies in film direction at Prague's world renowned film school – FAMU. After graduating in 1965, he worked for the Czech Army Studio and in 1974 joined Kratky Film Praha. Shortly thereafter he began to lecture on editing and sound composition at FAMU and in 1994 was made the faculty's professor.

During the sixties, Alois Fisarek edited a number of documentary and feature films, many of which were later banned by the authorities. He worked with Jan Matejovsky, Jiri Weiss, Pavel Hasa and Ivan Balada. Fisarek considers the documentaries he made towards the end of that decade with Balada as particularly important examples of his work: PANYCHIDA 36, REMEMBERING THREE MORNINGS IN A CZECH FOREST, THE LEGEND OF A BURNING HEART.

In the seventies, Alois Fisarek worked on many foreign productions. He also created several programmes for Laterna Magica (THE MAGIC CIRCUS, ODYSSEUS, MINOTAUR) and was involved in projects for the Expo International exhibitions at Osaka, Brisbane, Vancouver and Singapore. His name appears on the credits of numerous films: THE APPLE GAME (1976), THE FAUN'S VERY LATE AFTERNOON (1983), PRAHA, EUROPE'S RESTLESS HEART (1987) directed by Vera Chytilova, KAREL GOTT (1988) directed by Jiri Janousek and IN THE HEART OF KING LOVE (1990) directed by Jan Nemec.

Alois Fisarek regularly works with leading Czech documentary filmmakers. He edited Ivan Vojnar's films IN THE GARDEN (1994) and ACTORS (1995) and Petr Vaclav's MARIAN (1996).

He has edited all of Jan Sverak's feature films.

ZBYNEK MIKULIK – SOUND EDITOR

Zbynek Mikulik has been the sound designer on all but one of Jan Sverak's films: the student (AMPAS) winning short film OIL GOBBLERS, ACCUMULATOR I, THE RIDE and the Oscar-winning KOLYA.

Studying at the School of Communication Technology and at the Czech Institute of Technical Studies, Mikulik has worked as a Sound Designer since 1968. He spent many years working on numerous documentaries at Kratky Film Praha, particularly in partnership with the company's leading Director of Photography, Jan Malir.

Mikulik was the Supervising Sound Editor on Vera Chytilova's film PRAGUE, THE RESTLESS HEART (1987) and on Helena Trestikova's documentary SEARCHING FOR THE WAY (1988). He has worked with the film director Paul Klee, and Director of Photography Erin Sanders on a series of documentaries.

A special chapter in Mikulik's career relates to his involvement in designing multimedia programmes for the world Expo International exhibitions in Vancouver, Brisbane and Osaka. He designed sound for the FAUN'S VERY LATE AFTERNOON (1983), THE INHERITANCE (1992) directed by Vera Chytilova, THE TANK BATTALION (1991) directed by Vit Olmer.

Besides film, Mikulik devotes time to his other main interest – flying, and owns a light aircraft. This was useful during the shooting of Sverak's THE RIDE, Rene's WAR OF THE COLOURS and for the title and credit sequences of KOLYA. In Mikulik's opinion, in the audio-visual medium, sound can be the decisive element in completing the image.

ONDREJ SOUKUP – COMPOSER

Originally a bass player and a bass guitarist, Ondrej Soukup has become a sought after composer of film music, especially after the work he did on KOLYA. He studied bass at the Prague Conservatory (with Franisek Posta) and gradually moved through a range of musical styles, from jazz, rock and classical to pop music. He played with Milan Svoboda's Prague Big Band and the Metropolitan Jazz Band and is a co-founder of the rock group Prague Choice. In 1982 he left the group and joined the Ladislav Staidl Orchestra, where he remained for eleven years. This move allowed him to set up his own recording studio and gave free reign to his creativity.

Soukup started by composing jazz music and then pop songs and developed into a successful hit composer, able to clearly define a particular mood. Together with his librettist-wife, Marie Osvaldova, he now regularly composes for the popular Czech singer Lucie Bila. Among his stage projects was the music for the ballet CHECK-MATE, performed by the dance group UNO, and THE GARDEN OF DELIGHTS by La Fantastica.

His feature film debut was with Vit Olmer's THE PAWNS SECOND MOVE (1983). He then began working with Olmer regularly (COUPONS AND PEACE, OUR LITTLE CZECH SONG 2, NUDITY FOR SALE). Other films followed including FAILED, RULES OF CIRCLE (Miroslav Balalajka) ANIMALS IN THE CITY (Vaclav Kristek) OUTSIDER, THE WAY SOUTH-WEST (Zdenek Sirovy) REQUIEM FOR A DOLL, WAR OF THE COLOURS (Filip Renc), ACCUMULATOR I and KOLYA.

Ondrej Soukup believes that “every film has its music composed already, as the music follows the story and the mood of the film. When I finished reading the screenplay of KOLYA, a tear ran down my cheek, and that's what convinced me to do it. I worked with Jan Sverak on ACCUMULATOR 1, and I understand that if he sometimes appears relentlessly meticulous it's because he has a clear idea of what he wants.”

Locations

“The recreation of the RAF airbase at Hradcany was quite involved” reflects production designer Jan Vlasak, “and the planning took two years. Another location was planned originally, but then we found this location that had been an airfield, still with a few buildings and it was therefore much better. The hangars are all original and we built the buildings around it to look typically British. The windows, roof and walls were added to the derelict, hollow buildings. Some of the original buildings could already pass for RAF buildings.”

“Susan’s house had to look English and we were lucky to find a house in the Czech countryside that was perfect. The interior had to be specially constructed to be absolutely right for war-time England.”

Hradcany Airfield

Marek Petru, technical and historical adviser to DARK BLUE WORLD, actually flew planes at Hradcany in 1966 when the airfield was in the hands of the Czech airforce and he describes: “It was like a little city within a city, with officers and their families living at the base, and even a school. It is shocking to see the dereliction and devastation left behind by the Russian occupation.”

“The base dates back to mid-1920’s, when it was just a grass field used by the Czechoslovakians as a private club. The Czech military took over the base in the 1930s, having a small airfield for fighter aircraft. In 1939, when the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia, they confiscated the property for the Luftwaffe until after the war in 1945 when the Czech air force took over again. The first concrete runway was built in 1955 when they started using the Mig 15 aircraft. In 1968, when the Russians occupied Czechoslovakia, they took everything, extended the runway and used it for Mig 21. The Russians also had missiles here aimed at Western Europe with atomic weapons and it became a very important base for them during the Cold War. In 1989, after the Velvet Revolution, a deal was struck between the Czech and Russian Governments that the Russians would leave the airfield.” Petru adds “I believe President Havel gave the Russian Officers portable housing in Russia to make their departure more attractive as they had nothing to go back to. The Russians left in 1990, leaving behind them a big environmental disaster. The surrounding areas were land mined and the ground was very polluted by chemicals. Their left-over kerosene was dumped into the ground and the contaminated top soil has been taken away and stored in warehouses. As a result, no-one is really permitted to live near the base, as there could be mines anywhere and the experts are still working every day, dismantling and exploding them. There are certain areas in the forests where the public are not allowed to walk. It will be some time before there is any commercial activity around the airbase.”

Operations Room Equipment

Marek Petru has collected WWII military equipment for 32 years, as a hobby. He has provided the DARK BLUE WORLD production with the Operations Room equipment which is still in working order and which he found some years ago in a deserted airport in the Canadian Prairies. During the war, this Canadian base was used to train pilots from the UK, France, Norway, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Marek explains "As many as 7,000 training pilots were shipped out to Canada at any one time on the Queen Mary and it was hoped the U-Boats did not catch them. I stumbled upon the Operations Room equipment purely by chance. I came across it in the deserted airbase and noticed boxes marked 'Czech section' and I was drawn to it like a magnet. The Canadian Government gave me permission to take it all away and it's all been sitting in my garage until now."

Costumes

Vera Mirova - Costume Designer/Wardrobe Mistress

Vera Mirova finds it more interesting to work on historical rather than contemporary movies, even though it is far more detailed. With military costumes Mirova says "I had to really research to make sure the actual material being used was identical to that worn during the war. The costumes too have to look as if they have seen battle, like the men themselves." The flying jacket, goggles and hat worn by Ondrej Vetchy in the film actually belonged to a pilot in the RAF.

Aircraft - Spitfires

Nigel Lamb, Pilot, Old Flying Machine Company Mark 5 Spitfire

Nigel Lamb's father was in the RAF during the war and he considers "The last sixty years' history revolves around the Second World War, and of course we owe a lot to those guys. I'm not trying to glamourise war, it's just a fact. My father was shot down a couple of times, but never really talked about the war. If he did, it was always humorous and about the fun times. I think the story of DARK BLUE WORLD will strike a very deep chord with its audience. What happened to the Czech pilots is what the film is all about, it's not about the Spitfires and explosions. The paradox of war is that for some people it was the best time of their lives. How can something so tragic be so enjoyable?"

Robert Lamplough - Pilot Mark 8 Spitfire

Ex-RAF pilot, Robert Lamplough, used his own Mark 8 Spitfire for the film. He found the plane in Australia in the 1970s, still in its packing case, like new.

“It’s one that was forgotten by the war, it never caught up and never saw any action”, he says. “I brought it back to England where we started to work on it and the whole renovation took 10 years. The major structures are all original, but the rivets needed replacing, all 133,000 of them. The engine was stripped down and a few minor adjustments were made, but it’s basically as it was when it came out of the factory. Some cosmetic changes needed to be made to both planes before filming, that is, they both arrived in pristine condition, but had to be dulled down in order to look authentic.”

Laplough had to confront technical difficulties whilst filming: “You have to carry various aero-dynamic loads to compensate for the weight and disturbance caused by the camera on the wing. It’s tricky to keep the other plane in shot so the preparation on the ground first is essential. It’s a technical exercise flying the plane in a particular position at relative angles. Both Nigel Lamb and I have had experience of this before. The camera angles are very tight to give the best dramatic effect and there’s no space either side of the plane so you have to hit your target.”

“I’ve not flown with Nigel Lamb before. We have to fly very close together and the overall effect is that it should look easy. Flying close to the B25 is just a matter of taking into consideration its different performance characteristics. Squeezing two planes in formation amongst trees and hills is a risky business. Wearing the costumes with the flying jacket, the May West life-jacket, helmet and goggles makes it authentic, but not so easy for us - the chaps flying in the war were in their early 20s and perhaps not the same physical proportions as us!”

Adrian Ayres, Lamplough’s mechanical engineer, adds “We had a serious oil leak on one of the planes involving a cracked pipe which set us back, but we managed to get the parts over from England and were soon back on track. The worse thing has been having my hair cut, as I had to be in shot wearing the RAF gear, standing immediately behind the revolving propeller, as the engines were started. None of the extras wanted to do it - I can’t question that - but I’m used to it, I’ve done it so many times before.”

John Romain - B25 Bomber Pilot

The B25s were designed in the early 1940s and used extensively. This twin-engined, mid-winged medium bomber could travel fast and over quite a distance with a fair amount of ammunition. “It was used extensively in Europe” John Romain explains “mostly on low level missions into France and Belgium. The B25s would go on a mission into Europe and the Spitfires would fly with them for protection. The nose and rear area, where there used to be a gunner, are both ideal spots for cameras, as well as the side emergency exit. However, timing can be tricky, for instance, getting the movement of the train, the explosion, and actors running from the train just right, in shot - slightly early or slightly late and the whole sequence doesn’t work.

The dangers of this kind of filming are always taken into consideration. Romain says “The Spitfires and B25 needed to keep low and very close together for this scene with the Spitfires following at a 25ft distance from the B25. The problems arise sometimes with prop wash, so the Spitfire has to be slightly below so as not to fly into the turbulence caused by the B25, otherwise the Spitfire could be whipped around violently. You have to be careful not to pull the Spitfire through the weeds. Another element of danger occurs when flying the planes at a slower pace to give the cameraman time to get the shot. We have to make sure we don't go below 140 mph otherwise the engines are in trouble. The low level flying between hills is very risky, but the display flying gives us all the training we need and I've flown with Nigel Lamb and Robert Lamplough a lot before, so the trust is already there. The more important thing is to know the other pilots you're flying with.”

Historical Note

Around 3500 Czech and Slovak military personnel escaped to Britain with the fall of France in June 1940. A formal agreement was signed on 25 October 1940 under which Czechoslovak airmen were enlisted or commissioned into the RAF Voluntary Reserve for the duration of the war, while officially remaining members of a Czechoslovak air force. (Extract from the UK's Ministry of Defence Press Release December 6, 2000).

Of the 87 Czechoslovakian pilots who flew during the Battle of Britain, eight were killed during 10 July to 31 October 1940. Overall, 480 of the Czechoslovak Air Force based in Britain were killed during the war.

Two Czechoslovakian fighter squadrons formed for the Battle of Britain; the 310 in July 1940 and 312 in August 1940, which were both based at Duxford and flew together. A third fighter squadron, the 313, was formed in 1941 at Catterick. The 311 bomber squadron was formed in Honington in July 1940. Whilst most Czechs went into these special squadrons, 100 others served in RAF and Allied units. By the end of the war, the three Czech fighter squadrons had completed 28,335 operational flights. One-fifth of the RAF's 2,927 pilots were from countries outside Britain.*

Many Czech pilots had similar experiences to the fictional Slama in DARK BLUE WORLD. For example, Karel Kuttelwascher escaped just after the invasion in a coal train to Poland. From Poland he crossed to France to join the Foreign Legion, then flew with the French Air Force in the Battle of France. When France fell, he reached Algeria and escaped to Morocco and took a ship to Britain to join the RAF. Similarly, Joseph Frantisek made his way to Poland where he fought against the Luftwaffe. Subsequently, he fled to Romania where he was interned. Escaping from the camp, Frantisek travelled through the Balkans reaching Syria then France, to take part in the Battle of France, before reaching Britain and the RAF.*

In February 1948, the Communists staged a political coup in Czechoslovakia and took over control of the government. As far as the new regime was concerned, anyone who fought with the Western allies, was at best, suspect

and at worst a traitor. Within days of the coup, leading figures were arrested and tried. The head of the Czechoslovak Inspectorate for the wartime RAF Karel Janousek spent 15 years in jail.*

(*Sourced from "Night Hawk" by Roger Darlington, 1985)