

## English resume

### Major Hugo Vaníček

Father Hugo Vaníček was born on 26th October 1906 in Bystřec et Jablonné nad Orlicí. He entered the noviciate of The Society of Jesus. In 1927 he did A levels at Archiepiscopal Grammar School in Prague and then he studied theology in Innsbruck, Cracow and Maastricht. He took orders in Maastricht on 15th August in 1936 and after that he went in for pastoral service of Czechoslovak miners working in Belgium. He spent one year in Prague at St. Ignatius. But all the time he was preparing for a mission to African Rhodesia.

In 1939 Hugo Vaníček went to London where he studied English. When the Second World War started he immediately reacted to the call appeal of Czechoslovak foreign political representation and he enlisted in the Czechoslovak Foreign Army. Since December 1939 Vaníček worked in military camp in Agde in southern France where the first Czechoslovak division was formed. He regularly said a mass in Czech or Slovak language in garrisons and every Sunday and a feast in cathedral. Doing his work he was trying to break prejudice and he quickly gained the soldiers' respect and liking. He went to a first aid station every day, twice a week to a prison, twice a week he also went by train to military hospitals and he visited barracks every evening.

His greatest act was an establishment of „The Home of a Czechoslovak Soldier“ in the town. There was a hall, a studio, a reading room and a music studio, where he organized theatre, film and variety performances and also lectures. There were not many suitable places in the camp, therefore soldiers liked the „Home“ very much and it helped them to make their stay in Agde more bearable.

In June 1940 Hugo Vaníček as the only priest fought (on his own request) at the Seine and the Loire against German troops. In rear-guard actions he continued in his work, which was mostly of charitable character, but he also helped to organize a retreat for example as a messenger. He took the lead of a regimental first aid station when a regimental doctor ran away. He was badged for his courage during passing the Loire near Gien. He prevented a rise of chaos thanks to his calmness, respect and a knowledge of languages. After the capitulation of France he continued in his work and together with other soldiers and army priests was evacuated to England. During the passage from Sète to Liverpool Vaníček tried to keep confidence in victory of fairness by lectures and talks. He also ran a kind of spiritual exercises for Catholics.

He developed his work during his four-year-stay in Great Britain. His religious, cultural and tendentious activities among Czechoslovak soldiers and the British included all available means. In a tent-chapel in a Czechoslovak camp in Cholmondeley he organized discussion evenings, listening to a radio, projections of films and other cultural activities. He regularly published religious, agitprop prints, informative leaflets, booklets with light topics and military handbooks. He sent them to all Czechoslovak garrisons in Great Britain, to Czechoslovak troops in the Middle East and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. His work was known on the both sides of the Atlantic. He participated in publishing of textbooks for a Czechoslovak boarding school. Vaníček propagated the so called Czech idea and resistance in many lectures for the British, especially for students. He tried to put through regular spiritual talks in Czechoslovak broadcasting of BBC.

His mimeo editions became very popular, for example Amusing Reading, Cosy Chat or directories, timetables, manners. We should mention also his religious texts as sermons Words of the Truth, issues for particular feasts or devotions, hymn books, carols, almanacs, and also speeches of church representatives, the Holy Fater and their messages and pastorals.

Hugo Vaníček aroused, argued. He wanted to uplift soldiers in the spirit of Christian principles and to confirm patriotism. He insisted on moral responsibility of officers for their garrisons. He was convinced that any success of organized forces was not only in perfect exercises but also in spiritual power which he saw in religion.

In 1944 he was one of the four chaplains who took part in fights near Dunkerque. He regularly said a mass afield and upcountry, visited patients in first aid stations and buried dead soldiers. He was twice decorated with medals for his activities near Dunkerque.

People remembered Father Vaníček as a priest who was every time prepared to give not only ministrations but also to give material support. When it was needed he carried wounded people. He fairly devoted his time to spiritual administration wherever he was sent during his life and everybody reminisced him with gratitude.

After the war Hugo Vaníček helped to establish Military Chaplaincy in the Czechoslovak army, which was interrupted by February 1948.

He was in an internment for three years in the 1950s. After his liberation he worked as a priest for twelve years in Roudnice nad Labem and for twenty-two years in Libčice nad Vltavou. He devoted his time to pastoral service for parishioners and to repairs of buildings. He gathered a unique collection of contemporary materials and also a lot of his own memories during the Second World War. Hugo Vaníček spent his last years in a clerical home in Stará Boleslav. He died on 13th April 1995.

His merits were never properly appreciated. He was persecuted as a member of the western resistance and he was imprisoned because he was against communistic orders to the Church. He got generalship in memoriam. Bishop Jaroslav Škarvada said in his funeral oration that Hugo Vaníček was a loyal Czech, a honest priest and a brave soldier.

**Keywords:**

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Father Hugo Vaníček

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