

Jaroslav Jan Pála – the Czech electrical engineer, entrepreneur, inventor, and innovator of galvanic cells

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Abstract. *The aim of this paper is to approach life and work of Jaroslav Jan Pála, the Czech electrical engineer, entrepreneur, inventor and regional politician.*

1 September, 1919, this man, after the experience of doing business in Germany, launched an activity of company Pála et al., Factory for electric cells and batteries in Slaný in space of the former sugar refinery.

The enterprise started with 60 employees, however, the demand for batteries was so great that already in 1925, it had to move to its own factory in the Netovická street, and the number of employees grew rapidly.

In 1944, the company employed 600 people and, besides batteries, manufactured radio receivers, pocket torches and chemical products and cleaners, all under the trademark Palaba.

6 May, 1945, J. J. Pála was arrested. A year later, his company was nationalized on the basis of the Beneš's decrees and the national enterprise Bateria Slaný was founded.

In 1947, J. J. Pála was sentenced to life imprisonment for collaboration and alleged share of the Lidice tragedy. He died in prison in 1963.

Keywords

Jaroslav Jan Pála, galvanic cells, batteries, PALABA, pocket torches, electrical equipment.

1. Motto

Once, I bought a pocket torch in a bazaar because they weren't sold in specialized factories. However, the battery didn't light even half an hour, although at the bedside of a sick child should last through the night. On this basis, I secretly began studying galvanic cells. I gave a task to myself that I would have to achieve three hours' luminosity and six months' shelf life...

Jan Jaroslav Pála remembers caring of his sick daughter in Hamburg, 1911.¹

2. Personality of Jaroslav Jan Pála

J. J. Pála was born on 27 September, 1882, in Přelice at Smečno in the family of innkeeper. The family later moved to the nearby Slaný where he began working as a painter in the Bolzano Tedesco factory. J. J. Pála had 4 siblings: Václav, Ota, Otýlie and Marie.



Fig. 1. „Mr Pála, the factory owner, had nicely furnished glazed office to be able to see the whole production. We worked from Monday to Friday from six a.m. to five p.m., and we had an hour break at lunch time. On Saturdays we worked only till 12.00,” recalls Anna Veselá, the former employee of the „Pálovka“.⁵

After finishing elementary and town school, he later trained as a locksmith, in 1903, he left to Germany, specifically to Hamburg, where he founded Czech expatriate clubs and Sunday school, in which he also taught.

In 1906, he married a German woman Elisabeth Nienstedt in Hamburg. They had two children: Rudolf and Anna. The son became director of PALABA after studying in Germany, England, and the relevant practice. Anna's life was negatively affected by polio, which fell ill in infancy.

In 1940, at the period of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, Jan Jaroslav Pála was elected mayor of Slaný. He succeeded, among other things, implement the program *Better Slaný*. After the World War II, he was accused of collaboration, and the People's Court sentenced him to life imprisonment. He died in prison in the Slovak town Ilava on 9 March, 1963.

3. Expert activities of J. J. Pála

3.1 Pála – entrepreneur

In 1913, Jaroslav Pála became a business partner of Karl Dillger, with whom he established the factory for batteries and cells Hamburger Batterienfabrik (HABAFAB). Pála decided to continue in manufacturing the batteries even after he returned to the Czechoslovakia in 1919. He rented a space in the former Slaný's sugar refinery and founded a company called *Pála et al., factory for production of electric cells and batteries in Slaný*. Within a year, the company changed into a public limited company. However, the real boom occurred after 1924, when Pála finally moved from Hamburg to Slaný. In 1926, a brand new factory is built in the Prague suburb of the Slaný town. The main production range of the factory, called Pálovka, were batteries, pocket torches and torch cases, but gradually production expanded with light bulbs or voltmeters. In late 1932, the company got a license to manufacture radios (with two and four lamps) and wavelength switches, which were exported to Hungary, Germany and the United Kingdom. In 1935, emerged within the factory new chemical laboratory producing detergents, adhesives, as well as its own equivalent of the *Francovka* (menthol product with extracts of medicinal herbs) called the *Karmelitka*. After all, the batteries remained the main production program.



Fig. 2. General view of the factory PALABA around 1929.

3.2 Pála – Inventor

31 Czechoslovak patents were granted to Jan Jaroslav Pála. 18 additional patents were granted to him in Germany, France and England.⁷ His inventions can be divided into three areas: electrochemical cells, chemicals with overlap into the military field, and electrical equipment.

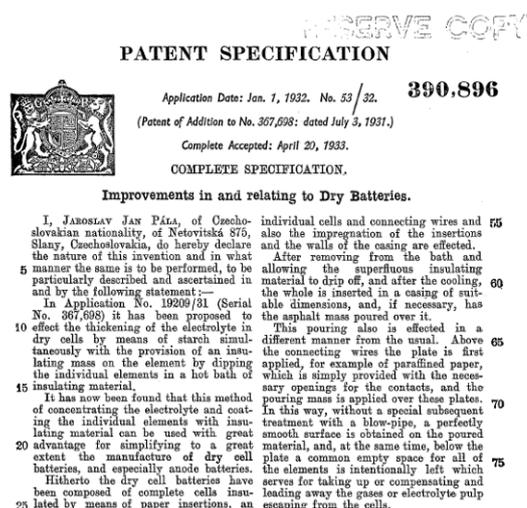


Fig. 3. Specification and drawing of two patents granted to J. J. Pála: *Dry galvanic cell and apparatus for manufacturing the pouch electrodes.*



Fig. 4. The Samaritan mask with the Universal Filter (UF) produced in the factory PALABA before the World War II.⁶

3.3 Pála – Marketing Specialist

Pála invested in advertising 6% of the annual turnover of the firm Palaba. The results were imaginative, attractive for customers and easy to remember. Names, such as *Gold Palaba*, *Excelsior Jupiter*, *Mila*, *Luna*, *Mignon* or *Liliput* were given to batteries marked with the acronym Palaba. To promote products, factory published its own magazine called *Light and Strength*, which was published monthly with a circulation of 20,000 copies.



Fig. 5. The cover of magazine *Light and Strength* with a presentation of the two-lamp radio PALABA B2.



Fig. 6. A few covers of flat pocket batteries with famous logo of the horse in spotlight and the trademark PALABA.

4. Conclusion

Jaroslav Jan Pála was a real self-made man who gained experience abroad, transferred technical knowledge and skills into his original homeland, and – thanks them – developed „from scratch“ very successful business, later associated with the ethos of the first Czechoslovak Republic.

Everything indicates that he was a workaholic, who would hold out even today as a top manager and crisis manager. He has been endowed by curiosity and tenacity. He understood that without the research & development could not successfully compete under free market conditions.

Jaroslav Jan Pála was destined a difficult childhood which, in his youth, provoked tenacious – but nice – efforts

to succeed, leading to the pervasive entrepreneurial success.

Some of his inevitable steps, both in the business, and in the field of municipal politics, however, were evaluated by his contemporaries as moral and civic failure. Pála's tragic fate was thus completed. He was imprisoned, tortured, tried and convicted...



Fig. 8. „At that time, I worked in the expedition. Mr Pála, the factory owner, was my first manager, and, I think, he was a good man. During the war, when I was employed in the Palaba factory, even the batteries for military submarines were produced there,“ recalls Anna Veselá, the former employee of the „Pálovka“.⁵

5. Epilogue

...I had a research department in my company, which I wasn't the boss but the soul and master worker. Nobody thought for my company, I myself gave those sparks of other patents. I did thousands of experiments. Just before I discovered the battery „Excelsior“ without ammonium chloride which proved successful in the radios, I made 3225 experiments...

Jan Jaroslav Pála remembers the organization of the Research & Development in the Palaba.¹

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About Author

Zbyněk NIKEL was born in Bílovec, 1966. Following his studies at grammar school, he graduated stepwise from Engineering service of Anti-aircraft Technics program at Military Engineering College in Liptovský Mikuláš, bachelor degree of Czech Literature at Silesian University in Opava, and later graduated from master's degree in journalism at Charles University in Prague. Currently he works as Defence Standardization Manager at Military Technical Institute, s. e., in Prague.

