

## ***WE AGREED THAT WE WOULDN'T MOAN***

**Vlasta Jakobová (\*1925)**

“In September 1944 our uncle, Lieutenant Colonel Josef Robotka, moved in with us. He was a member of the anti-Nazi resistance organisation Council Three. Uncle got me involved in resistance activities – I was a messenger. For me it was an adventure. I went by bike to various meetings and passed on reports.”

Vlasta Jakobová, nee Nováčková, was born on 13 March 1925 in Ožd'any, Slovakia, where her father was a gendarme. Her mother was Hungarian, so Hungarian was spoken at home. Vlasta's older sister died two weeks after she was and her brother Karel was born in 1928. In March 1939, following the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, they had to move to the Czech lands. They found a home in Náměšť nad Oslavou, where the father worked as an accountant. Vlasta attended the municipal school in Náměšť and later enrolled at the business academy in Třebíč. However, she was unable to graduate because of the war.

In 1942 her father's cousin Josef Robotka cofounded the armed resistance organisation Council Three, which grew out of the ashes of Defence of the Nation. He had to go underground as the Germans had a bounty of 8,000 crowns on his head. When he was forced to get out of Jihlava in the autumn of 1944 he visited the Nováčeks in Náměšť. “He left in the night and returned in the night, nobody had a clue he was at our place. He slept in my brother's room with him. It was just a few steps to the woods, if he needed to escape. Dad wrote military reports for him on a typewriter.” Robotka passed the reports on to a transmitter to abroad. Though most members of Council Three were caught by the Gestapo during the war, Josef Robotka, Vlasta and her father managed to remain hidden until liberation.

After the war, in September 1945, Vlasta graduated. She joined the Union of National Revolution but was soon expelled for being politically unreliable. She later found a job as secretary to the directory of construction enterprise Československé stavební závody. It also built military buildings, which Vlasta was soon able to take advantage of. Following the Communist takeover in 1948 Josef Robotka and Vlasta again got heavily involved in military espionage.

Vlasta again became a messenger but also began transcribing reports herself. She wrote them in invisible ink on love letters that she sent to a made-up address in the Netherlands. She also sent agents who had illegally crossed the border into Czechoslovakia to

clandestine addresses. Her brother, three years younger, escaped to the West and himself returned several times to Czechoslovakia as an agent. He was later sentenced to death in absentia.

The Communist secret police enjoyed more success than the Gestapo and in 1949 broke up Robotka's intelligence gathering group, with Robotka and Vlasta being arrested at the turn of July and August. "They came for me at work. There were five of them. I was unaware they'd arrested uncle a couple of days earlier. I was surprised." They first brought her home and confiscated her apartment keys. For around six months they sniffed about the place in case a cross-border agent showed up.

Vlasta was interrogated on Příční St. in Brno and passed through cells on Orlí St. and at Cejl. The interrogations went on every day for over a month. Despite cruel beatings Vlasta stubbornly denied everything. They even brought her to see her uncle Josef. "He was in a terrible state." When the investigators realised they would get nothing out of Vlasta they left her alone.

In May 1950 she was sentenced to 18 years in an in-camera show trial. Josef Robotka received the death penalty and was executed at Prague's Pankrác prison in 1952. Another 10 members of the group were also convicted. When the verdict was handed down Vlasta didn't believe she'd remain in prison long. Most opponents of communism didn't expect the totalitarian regime would last long. Vlasta was first sent to a prison in Znojmo and later ended up via Liberec and Minkovice in Chrastava. She worked polishing costume jewels in a textile factory and sometimes was deployed working in the fields.

In 1952 she was transferred to Pardubice where a new prison for those with sentences of over 10 years had been established. "There they used washing the floor as a form of harassment. We had to scrub it constantly. You could eat off it. We worked stitching men's prison uniforms. There were 18 of us in a row, like a conveyor belt. I was in charge of laces." They held a hunger strike in Pardubice in protest at the dreadful food that was eventually joined by 60 prisoners. From 1956 Vlasta worked in the technical section, even working on classified documents on MIG jet fighters.

Vlasta served 10 years and was finally rereleased on 10-year probation in October 1959. "My parents never blamed me and in prison the girls and I agreed that we wouldn't moan." Following her return to civilian life she found a job in the dairy of a laboratory in Valašské Meziříčí, to where she and her family had moved. She later did crane tests and worked a crane for over 20 years. In 1968 she got to visit her brother in the US, but she didn't wish

to emigrate. In 2012 she received the Václav Benda Prize for services to freedom, democracy and human rights. Today she lives in Brno.

*Text by Jan Horník*