

## ***THE LAST THING I HEARD WAS: HANDS UP!***

**Drahomíra Strouhalová (\*1930)**

Drahomíra Strouhalová, from Modřice near Brno, was helping clean beetroot jars when the doorbell rang. *“Three fellows in leather coats. They stood there,”* she says, recalling the moment. They immediately asked for her and entered her room. A transmitter was hidden in her bed, which had previously held a machine gun. And other things: Strouhalová frequently gave shelter to two agents who had come across the Iron Curtain. It was an odd scene. The officers joked that they had come a-courting. Then one said he would take a look in the bed. To this day Drahomíra Strouhalová doesn't know whether it was coincidence or if they were certain of what they would find. She only knows it was a poor hiding place. Bad luck. In fact, double bad luck. At that very moment one of the agents entered the house. She didn't have a chance to warn him. Two men in leather coats opened the door to him and demanded: *“Present your identity card!”* The agent whipped out a pistol. This is how Drahomíra Strouhalová remembers those moments: *“The last thing I heard was: Hands up! He just let out a shout and then suddenly the house was filled with men.”*

The agent ran along the main street in Modřice, the men in pursuit. He reached the courtyard of a residential building, which had a workshop at the end. The courtyard was a dead end. He was trapped. He hid in the workshop, where barrels for cabbage were made. He was surrounded. He kept a last bullet for himself and placed the pistol to his chin. They managed to take him to an emergency ward but couldn't save him. Drahomíra Strouhalová: *“He received my address and was told it was safe. He turned up all of a sudden. I believed he was a good person. He was friendly...”*

Drahomíra Strouhalová was arrested on 26 August 1950 and immediately hauled off for interrogation by the StB in Brno. On 19 January 1952 a state court sentenced her to 15 years for alleged treason and espionage.

Drahomíra Strouhalová was born in August 1930 at Modřice near Brno. At the time of her arrest in 1950 she was 20. She attended the Vesna school for girls and was the daughter of a legionnaire. *“I didn't like the Communists. Dad had come from Russia, he'd seen it there. He hated revolutions and didn't like Communists,”* she says. Her father worked as a receptionist at the Zbrojovka armaments plant. Strouhalová herself wasn't a member of any party but exercised at Sokol.

It was no coincidence that she began helping the resistance. She was close to Božena Majerová, a Brno seamstress, whom she assisted. Majerová was one of the leaders of a resistance group connected to the UK intelligence service. Indeed, they were later named after her: "Majerová et al". She provided support to two British agents sent into Czechoslovakia across the Iron Curtain, Tomáš Oliva (real name Jan Brejcha) and Josef Kafka (Josef Kolísko). It was Kolísko who was apprehended near Strouhalová's home that fateful August in 1950.

The wife of the Czechoslovak RAF pilot Ivo Tonder, who the British hoped to employ agents to bring across the Iron Curtain, also found shelter for a time with Strouhalová. Tonder had already escaped and after several attempts Oliva finally got his wife out too. The agent was one of the key men in the resistance and it was him the secret police were after. In the end he was luckier than Kolísko, managing to escape to the West following a dramatic shootout.

Drahomíra Strouhalová met Oliva at a village festival in Modřice on 1 October and from then on provided assistance and support to him and Kolísko. She also provided occasional shelter and relayed messages. The resistance was focused on acquiring information and ferrying refugees across the Iron Curtain. Božena Majerová's daughter worked at the Brno town hall, where she had access to useful information, while policeman Leopold Doležal was also in the group.

On 16 October 1950 Strouhalová visited Majerová in Brno. They discussed the resistance, with the latter expressing major fears for the future. She had hidden four youths who had escaped to Austria and been arrested in the Soviet occupation zone. They had information on her and others, with as many as 10 people in potential danger. The resistance group learned about the youths' arrests by transmitter. They also learned they were to be handed over to Czechoslovakia and would therefore probably "speak".

Three of the resisters managed to escape to the West. The rest waited fearfully. Would they be uncovered? The secret police then began monitoring the building on the corner of Brno's Pekařská and Husova streets, where Majerová lived. The group had no chance. An attempt was made to arrest Oliva at Majerová's apartment but he fled to the park at Špilberk and managed to shake off his pursuers. The following day the police came to Strouhalová's home. They had her. *"I didn't at all countenance them locking me up,"* she says. In custody she met Majerová, who said there was no point denying anything – they already knew it all.

The trial began on 16 January 1952. The jury chairman was the feared Jiří Kepák, who had previously sentenced to death priest Jan Bula and had been a prosecutor in the trial

of Milada Horáková. Sixteen resisters were convicted. One, Leopold Doležal, received the death penalty. Strouhalová got 15 years.

They didn't beat her in prison but she was placed among prostitutes. *"It took more than two months. I didn't wash or change. I was so revolted you can't imagine."* This was probably her lowest point.

On her release from prison Drahomíra Strouhalová returned to Modřice. There she was visited by a woman she didn't know. It was the spring of 1968 and the woman was the mother of the agent Kolísko. *"She thought her son was living on the other side of the Iron Curtain. She didn't believe he was dead,"* she says.

In 2013 Strouhalová was honoured by the minister of defence with a decree confirming her membership of the resistance. Prior to this, in October 2012, she had been bestowed with the Order of T.G. Masaryk at Prague Castle.

*Text by Luděk Navara*