

THEY NEEDED TO DESTROY US ALL

Vladislav Žitňák (*1932)

Vladislav Žitňák from Blatnice in the Uherské Hradiště area was subject to pressure exerted on his entire family by the Communist regime. There were a number of reasons. They behaved independently and had property. Žitňák's father was in contact with resistance members during the war, which made him dangerous to the new totalitarian authorities. The Communists were extremely concerned about armed resistance, particularly in regions with a tradition of anti-Nazi struggle and where people remained armed after the war. In addition, Žitňák's father knew František Bogataj, the leader of the Carbon parachute mission, who had undergone special training in the UK and was dropped into south Moravia in 1944. He had successfully stood up to the Nazis and ended the war a hero. *"Father was in Carbon with Bogataj. They had a transmitter and father operated the Zuzana dead drop,"* says Vladislav Žitňák. However, after the Communist takeover many weapons from the days of the anti-Nazi resistance were known to still be hidden. Some of them by the Žitňák family. What's more, Žitňák Sr. attempted, unsuccessfully, to escape across the Iron Curtain. He was caught and jailed. Then they came for the rest of the family. *"On top of everything, we were bourgeois... we had a wine shop. And when it went up on the notice board that some students wouldn't be allowed to do the leaving exam, my name was among them,"* says Vladislav Žitňák. However, the students revolted, saying either they would all do the exam or none would. So in the end Žitňák sat the test, although he didn't get into university. But that wasn't the worst of it. *"On 8 January 1959, StB men came from Hradiště. We went by car. In Bučovice, we stopped and they asked if I needed anything... I said I'd eat in Hradiště. Their expressions turned strange: We'll buy you something. So they bought me 100 grams of salami and two rolls. And we drove to the jail. Initially I didn't know what was going on. And I was in solitary for eight months!"*

Vladislav Žitňák was lucky he wasn't imprisoned until the late 1950s, when the regime wasn't quite so hard-line. Nevertheless, he received three years for the alleged promotion of Nazism, because he had corresponded with a German girl. Naturally those letters were just a pretext. They also arrested his mother, for allegedly helping an escaped prisoner. In his words, the whole family faced pressure from the Communist authorities and attempts on the part of the regime to destroy them. But Žitňák resisted. After 1990 he was rehabilitated and his conviction overturned.

Vladislav Žitňák was born in Vnorovy in 1932. Later he and his family lived in Blatnice, where his father had a wine shop. More important, however, were his father's activities in the war and acquaintance with the courageous František Bogataj, known for the Carbon parachute mission. *"They had a transmitter, via which they sent reports to London. Because of it they offloaded their weapons. My estimate is that there were about 18 kilos of weapons, which they brought to our place. They were in the garage. The remainder were in our neighbour's cellar. But nothing was done, because the Germans occupied the village. As a boy I knew about them, of course. For me it was like cowboys and Indians. My uncle took the guns away on a horse-drawn carriage. If they'd caught him they would've shot him dead. Naturally they didn't tell me anything. But I heard what father said to mother. At the end of the war, in 1945, I was 13,"* says Žitňák. The war ended and a question arose: What to do with the weapons? *"Then father reached an agreement with the soldiers at the barracks that they'd take them away. There were light machine guns, explosives, energy drink tablets... There were sacks of it. People in the area kept some stuff. I also kept a Colt and our neighbour kept a light machine gun. People knew about it..."* The Communists were of course carefully monitoring the location of the weapons. Following the 1948 coup any independent activity made them uneasy. Unsecured weapons represented a headache. The guns were without question one reason they had their eyes on the Žitňáks.

Another reason was Žitňák senior's relationship with Bogataj. The Communists regarded him as a potential threat and placed him in the reserve. They then attempted to arrest him but Bogataj gave them the slip and bravely reached the West, where he joined the anti-Communist resistance, becoming involved with the intelligence services. He trained and sent agents into his homeland, where they maintained contact with people on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Unsurprisingly, Vladislav Žitňák's father also tried to get to the West.

"When Bogataj did a runner after February 1948, they re-established contact. At that time I was going out and having fun, so I only learned about it later. Mr. Červeňák from Nová Ves used to visit us and sometime in August 1949 he warned father that he was going to be arrested. That the StB knew about him. At that time father began considering escaping across the border. He was looking for a people smuggler. Somebody recommended one who would take him across in the Šumava," he says. Naturally Vladislav didn't know of his father's plans, so he was surprised to meet him on a train in Bohemia. *"I didn't know where he was going. It was odd. He was already looking for passage. He had it all arranged but the smuggler took him to a false border,"* says Žitňák. His father was arrested and imprisoned but had managed to transfer half of his property to his wife. *"He got three years for crossing the border and they confiscated that half of his property."* However, the Communists needed to destroy the family and also seize the

remaining property. Initially they attempted to defend themselves, so that Vladislav could graduate from school. *“There were around six or eight of us then who they didn’t allow to do the school leaving exam. But we all united and wrote a petition saying if anybody was barred the whole class wouldn’t graduate. They reported it to the StB, so the secret police came. But we kept insisting it had to be everybody! One for all! So they said a bus would come on Thursday to take us to Jáchymov. But no bus arrived. So they changed tack. They found a teacher who was meant to fail us...”* In the end Vladislav Žitňák did graduate from school. But he didn’t get into university as they denied him a positive reference. He was good at languages and attended a language school in Brno. But by then January 1958 was drawing near. On 8 January they came for him from Hradiště. He ended up in jail. *“Every day I was interrogated. My questioner was about six years older. It took four or five months and then we began speaking about all kinds of things. After five months I read what he’d written and began correcting the mistakes. Then he informed me there was a stool pigeon close to me. He told me not to talk tripe if I was with anybody in the cell...”*

At that time they also arrested his mother for helping a prisoner who had escaped from Jáchymov. *“Father had been in the labour camp with that prisoner. When he came to our place mother fed him for some time. And when they caught the escapee again they also arrested mum.”* The actual reason for the arrest was to cut the family off from their property and income. *“When mother was convicted, they took the second half of the house,”* says Žitňák. He himself was arrested for the alleged crime of supporting and promoting fascism and similar movements on the basis of private letters he exchanged with a German acquaintance. After 1989 his sentence was overturned. *“In his letters the accused only presented true facts about the repressive situation in our republic,”* reads the substantiation.

Text by Luděk Navara