

Summary

Brigadier General Josef Bartík: Intelligence Officer and Participant of the First and the Second Czechoslovak Resistance Movement

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This publication deals with the life and career of intelligence officer Josef Bartík, who has hitherto not been the subject of any specialized historical research. Bartík was born in the village of Stachy in the Šumava in the south-west of Bohemia on June 30, 1897. Immediately after he had graduated from grammar school in Sušice, his life was hit by the Great War. In 1915, he was enlisted for military service and sent to the Italian front. There he was captured at the end of the following year and after that he volunteered for a Czechoslovak legion being formed in Italy. In May 1918, he was seriously injured while carrying out a reconnaissance mission, and he was to bear the after-effects of this injury for the rest of his life. Young First Lieutenant Bartík remained loyal to the Czechoslovak army even after the end of World War I. In May 1919, he was promoted to the rank of captain, and during the following 20 years, throughout the First and the Second Czechoslovak Republic, he held several positions as an officer of the intelligence department of Czechoslovak army headquarters. From 1935 he headed what was known as the Defence Section, and as such cooperated, for instance, with the legendary agent A-54 (Paul Thümmel); together with his colleagues, he succeeded in uncovering several agents working for the Hungarian or German intelligence services in Czechoslovakia.

The publication also focuses on Bartík's participation in Czechoslovak foreign resistance during World War II. He flew to Great Britain on March 14, 1939 in a group of 11 intelligence officers under the leadership of Colonel František Moravec. These men were among the first members of the Czechoslovak military forces to escape abroad. Bartík was sent on two intelligence missions to Poland in 1939 and later, in the period 1939-1940, he operated in France. After its defeat, he returned to the UK, where – among other things – he was involved in the preparations for the well-known Operation Anthropoid, the goal of which was the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, the Reichsprotektor of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. While Bartík's military career reached its peak, his personal life was hit by tragedy, when his elder daughter Zora died. Between 1942 and 1945 he worked in the

intelligence section of the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior in exile in London. At this time he was appointed to the prestigious Order of the British Empire.

After the end of World War II, in August 1945, Bartík was promoted to the rank of brigadier general. As an intelligence specialist, he served in the upper echelons of the post-war Ministry of the Interior. However, leading representatives of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia pushed to have Bartík, a non-Communist, removed from his position. The schemes of Bedřich Pokorný and Štěpán Plaček resulted in January 1946 in Bartík being „tidied away“ to an insignificant post in the army.

Immediately after the coup in February 1948, the Communists decided to settle accounts with Bartík once and for all: in March that year, he was arrested and subsequently sentenced in a show trial for five years in prison – which meant that he was imprisoned by the very state whose interests he had defended in two world wars. After being released from jail, where his health deteriorated markedly, he worked in menial jobs in the civilian sector.

Unlike many other persecuted Czechoslovak resistance fighters, Josef Bartík was fortunate enough to live to see his rehabilitation. This happened in 1965, three years before Bartík died at the age of 70. However, his lifetime of work for Czechoslovakia was officially acknowledged only after further three decades, in the re-established democratic state. On October 28, 1998, Václav Havel, at that time the President of the Czech Republic, awarded to Bartík the Order of the White Lion III. Class – military group for his exceptional leadership and combat activities.

Translated by Ian Willoughby