

BOOK REVIEW

J. Drabek: VLADIMIR KRAJINA. WORLD WAR II HERO AND ECOLOGY PIONEER – Ronsdale Press; 1st edition, Vancouver, 2012, 199 p., Price \$21.95, ISBN 978-1-55380-147-4.



V. J. Krajina and his wife during their visit of Department of Botany, Charles University in Prague, March 15, 1990 (after more than 50 years in Canadian exile), with the original door label of chair in the Division of Geobotany (Photo by F. Kotlaba)

We can introduce this brief bookreview by citation of well-known professional: „This is a page turner that exceeds expectations: the story of Vladimir Krajina, the Czech botanist whose courage and patriotism prompted him to become a key underground figure in the epic struggle against the Nazis and Communists. No wonder Winston Churchill chose to thank him in person for his daring exploits.“ Peter C. Newman, Canadian journalist and writer (born in Vienna, Austria, and emigrated from Czechoslovakia in 1940).

All the substantial is put on the envelope of the book and it is not too easy to find more pointed sentences than in just mentioned summary: „This biography of Vladimir Krajina describes how the gentle university-trained botanist, who loved nothing more than a field trip in the Tatra Mountains, came to join the Czech Resistance in 1939, and quickly became one of its leaders in the fight against the Nazis. Incredible escapes from the Gestapo followed, while some 20,000 radio messages were sent by this group to London, including those about the pending invasion of the Balkans and of the Soviet Union. As the general-secretary of the strongest anti-Communist Party, Krajina escaped from the country on skis after the Communist takeover. Emigrating to Canada, he became a professor at the University of British Columbia and proceeded to battle the forest barons with their policies of clear-cutting and slash burning. His environmental concerns then led him to become the father of the British Columbia Ecological Reserve Program, since replicated throughout Canada. As a companion of the Order of Canada, he returned triumphantly to Prague in

1990 to receive the Order of the White Lion, the highest Czechoslovak award, from President Václav Havel.“

Vladimir Krajina was geobotanist (plant-, vegetation- and landscape ecologist) born in 1905 at Slavonice, Austria-Hungarian Empire (1918-1989: Czechoslovakia, now: Czech Republic) on 13th April 1905. He graduated with the earned degree of D.Sc. cum laude in 1927 at Charles University, Prague (he described new plant species, *Pinguicula bohemica*, in central Bohemia, during his student years). In 1934 Krajina was appointed Associate Professor in Geobotany and Plant Systematics at Charles University in Prague. His habilitation work with big amount of original data and their elaboration of high level ("Die Pflanzengesellschaften des Mlynica-Tales in den Vysoke Tatry.") was published in the Beihefte zum Botanischen Centralblatt in 1933 and 1934. His resistance and intelligence service for the exile Czechoslovak government and prezident Dr. Edvard Beneš in London during the World War II is described in both this book and the other sources (e.g., Češka, 1993; Jeník, 2002). He returned to Charles University as a professor and he was elected to the Czech Parliament in 1945 and served as Secretary of State in the government led by Jan Masaryk (minister of foreign affairs and son of the first Czechoslovak president T. G. Masaryk).

Krajina with a small "k" is the word in Czech meaning either countryside or a landscape and since it's impossible to detect capitals in spoken language. Associated with our geobotanist („nomen omen“) is really leading us to scientific activity of Vladimir Krajina at landscape level (his biogeoclimatic classification of biotopes – the concept developed in Canada, Columbia University - has that connotation). His immigration to Canada is dated 1948 and he joined the UBC Botany Department in 1949 where he taught plant ecology for 24 years. Prof. Krajina supervised high number of Ph.D. students, many of whom went on to leading positions in ecology (Kovář, 2002; 2003a, b; 2009). He was honoured during his lifetime with honorary degrees including the D.Sc. honoris causa from UBC, and was invested into the Order of Canada in 1981, at his homecountry he became the honorary member of the Botanical Society (Jeník, 1992) – the presidential award by V. Havel has been mentioned above. Vladimir Krajina was touched and happy when he could meet representatives of several generations of botanists at his Alma Mater (Charles University, Prague) in 1990 after long time of life out off his beloved country (Kovář, 1993; 2007). He died on June 1st 1993.

Drabek's book shows portrayal of a man with his family who spent his life engaged in principled struggles for democracy and the environment, from which and from whom much can be learned and use today. Knowledge of nature and relationships of humans to the natural „home“ in our planet were extremely significant attributes of life for him.

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On October 7, 2002, a plaque commemorating Professor Vladimír Krajina was unveiled in the wall of Department of Botany, Charles University in Prague (surrounded by the University Botanical Garden, Photo P. Kovář)..

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