

The Challenges of Our Defence: Military Knowledge and Officers' Writings in Interwar Czechoslovakia

Michal Cáp

A central focus of this study is the process of knowledge creation and circulation of military texts in interwar Czechoslovakia and the role of professional officers in it. Their writings were circulated through books, professional journals and the daily press, but their ability to publish was managed by the military administration. At first, these publications provided a platform for the articulation of the role of the Czechoslovak military in an often antimilitary-minded society. Later, they functioned especially as instruments of military preparedness propaganda. This article aims to demonstrate both the societal context and the control over officers' writings, not only in discussing military thought but also in bolstering society's resolve, thereby contributing to the military culture of fledgling Czechoslovakia in the interwar period.

Introduction: Enter Emanuel Moravec, officer, writer and knowledge actor

In 1937, under the shadow of a military threat to the Czechoslovak Republic from Nazi Germany, the seventh edition (in less than a year) of the book *Úkoly naší obrany* (The Challenges of Our Defence) was published. It was written under the pseudonym Stanislav Yester by Colonel Emanuel Moravec, who would later become infamous as one of the most prominent collaborators with the Nazi regime. In the 1930s, however, he was known as the most prolific Czechoslovak

commentator and writer on military issues, a lecturer at the War College, and a promoter of military preparedness.¹ The book itself was published by the Association of the Czechoslovak Officers (Svaz československeho důstojnictva), a corporate group closely aligned with the Ministry of National Defence and official state policy.

Aimed at the wider public, it contained chapters on the future of war, military theory, strategy in a wider societal context, the roles of politics and policy, and military history. Its opening, though, dealt with the interrelation of the army² and the various types of print media – including the press – and described the perceived two-way road on which the knowledge must pass back and forth in a democratic state.

The army proper does not need uncritical admiration, nor does it need the flat-out defiance of the unthinking. Our army needs to have a healthy and rational understanding of its purpose and meaning, to be what it is, the blood of the people – A citizen who loves his country must honour the task of the army, and the army, in turn, must understand the feelings and aspirations of the citizen and value his convictions.³

The Challenges of Our Defence, from which this article borrows its title, illustrates specifics of interwar Czechoslovak military culture and its relationship with a civilian society in an era of total wars. As was the case in other interwar states,⁴ Czechoslovakia's intellectual

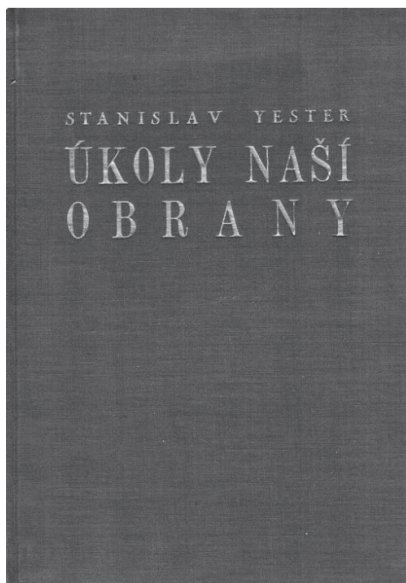
¹ Jiří Pernes, *Až na dno zrady* (Praha: Themis, 1997), 93–118, on his publication activities see Michal Cáp “Konštrukcia profesionálneho dôstojníka v dielach Emanuela Moravca”, *Vita trans historiam*, edited by Mária Molnárová and Viktória Rigová (Nitra: Filozofická Fakulta Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, 2022), 172–173.

² The official name in use was *Československá branná moc*, meaning Czechoslovak armed forces, which included ground and air forces (the small Danube flotilla was operated by the engineer battalion), as well as support services. However, it was used interchangeably even in official documents with *Československé vojsko/Československá armáda*, meaning Czechoslovak army, understood to consist of all the above, even the air force.

³ Stanislav Yester, *Úkoly naší obrany* (Praha: Svaz čs. důstojnictva, 1937), 11.

⁴ See Azar Gat, *Fascist and Liberal Visions of War: Fuller, Liddell Hart, Douhet, and Other Modernists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) and *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, edited by Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). On the debates in smaller European states, see Wim Klinkert, *Dutch Military Thought, 1919–1939. A Small Neutral State's Visions of Modern War* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

Úkoly naší obrany (*The Challenges of Our Defence*), written by Emanuel Moravec under the pseudonym Stanislav Yester, was one of the most popular books published by the Association of Czechoslovak Officers concerning military thinking and especially military preparedness in the interwar era. The edition pictured here was the seventh in less than a year after its first publication in 1937. Source: Author's Archive



officers of the time wrote not only about narrow military themes and not only in technical and professional journals, but also reached outwards, towards civilian society. This paper describes the socio-cultural and institutional basis of the production of these texts and therefore aims not to describe the contents of interwar Czechoslovak military thought,⁵ but to illuminate the process of circulating specific military knowledge. It is inspired by the approaches of the history of knowledge, with “knowledge” being a programmatically nebulous term that combines the approaches of the history of science with cultural and intellectual history.⁶ This attempts to delineate the various forms military knowledge could take, how it

⁵ The main themes of Czechoslovak military thought are covered in Stanislav Polnar, *Vývoj a proměny československého strategického myšlení* (Brno: Univerzita obrany, 2023), 20–32.

⁶ *Forms of Knowledge: Developing the History of Knowledge*, edited by Johan Östling et al. (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2020), 9–11, 14–16, also cf. *Circulation of Knowledge Explorations in the History of Knowledge*, edited by Johan Östling et al. (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018) and *Knowledge Actors: Revisiting Agency in the History of Knowledge*, edited by Johan Östling et al. (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2023).

was produced and circulated, and who the knowledge-producing actors, both individuals and institutions, were. In this article, there is a focus on the infrastructure supporting the process.⁷ The text thus aims to describe the publishing platforms available to Czechoslovak officers, institutional processes of text production and the role of the military administration, generally understood to be the Ministry of National Defence itself.

In the Czechoslovak context, Moravec is often seen as an archetype of officer-intellectual, in part due to his fame and later notoriety, but also thanks to his sheer output. He authored several books and brochures, published numerous articles in a variety of military-affiliated journals, and was a resident military expert at influential civilian newspapers and magazines.⁸ He was not alone, with other more notable examples such as Colonel Rudolf Smetánka,⁹ Major Richard Wolf,¹⁰ generals Vojtěch Vladimír Klecanda and Silvestr Bláha¹¹ and Major Jiří Letov.¹² But these were just a few better-known men from among the many officer-writers who answered the call to produce military texts to improve Czechoslovak military knowledge.¹³ They exemplified a trend of officers in European armies engaging intellectually in military affairs – a result of the professionalisation of the officer corps in the late 19th century.¹⁴

Until the second half of the 20th century, the officers were dominant in producing writings on military topics. Dramatic change after

⁷ *Forms of Knowledge*, 16.

⁸ Cáp, “Konštrukcia profesionálneho dôstojníka” 175–176.

⁹ Prokop Tomek, “Rudolf Smetánka”, *Kalendárium VHÚ*, 18 May 2018, <https://www.vhu.cz/rudolf-smetanka/>, 15 February 2024.

¹⁰ Michal Cáp, *Vojenská história v medzivojnovom Československu* (theses defended at Praha: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2019), 65.

¹¹ Polnar, *Vývoj a proměny*, 20–21, 29–30.

¹² Markus Pape, *Sólo Jiřího Letova* (Praha: Triáda, 2019), 31–65.

¹³ MNO Prezidium 1924–1927, Inv.č. 10560, Sign. 8/1/32, karton 626, *Podpora voj. písemnictví a odborné literatury – pokyny náčelníka hl. štábu*. 1–3, for distribution through official channels ZVV Košice, karton 1, Čs. voj. písemnictví – výzva ke spolupráci, 19 November 1926, 436.

¹⁴ Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge II: From the Encyclopaedia to Wikipedia* (Oxford: Polity, 2012), 221.

the totalisation of warfare during and in the aftermath of the First World War expanded interest in military matters. In central Europe, after the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire and the creation of successor states such as Czechoslovakia, officers wrote not only to discrete professional journals but also to a wider public. The officers, with their professional competence, were among the best prepared to play the role of military experts for the benefit of a whole society, aspiring to be teachers of the nation, as opposed to their Habsburg predecessors, who were cast as “latter-day knights”.¹⁵

As the first president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk put it:

True, the modern democratic officer must be a teacher, but therefore he must teach himself. A teacher who does not learn is worth nothing. But, as said, that is not enough. An officer is not only a teacher of knowledge, but an officer must also be a steady leader and a true model of military prowess, of military manhood, especially he must be a role model in danger, in war. Of course, also in a non-war, whenever there is a more difficult situation where strategic acumen and decision-making are needed.¹⁶

This was an aspirational rather than an accurate image of the new “democratic” officer. But Masaryk was serious about the need for the officer corps to undertake intellectual activity. For example, he personally instructed Moravec to write a scientific yet propagandistic book about Czechoslovakia’s military and society.¹⁷ This thinking illustrates the possibilities that became available to officers in a newly created mid-sized state like the Republic of Czechoslovakia.

¹⁵ Cf. István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹⁶ *Cesta demokracie. I. Projevy, články, rozhovory 1918–1920*, edited by Vojtěch Fejlek and Richard Vašek (Praha: Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, 2003), 101.

¹⁷ Pernes, *Až na dno*, 96–98. This intervention led to the publication of two books: Emanuel Moravec, *Vojáci a doba* (Praha: Svaz československého důstojnictva, 1934) and Emanuel Moravec, *Obrana státu* (Praha: Svaz československých důstojníků, 1935), from the same publisher as the later *Úkoly naší obrany*.



Colonel of the General Staff Emanuel Moravec, despite later gaining infamy as a notorious Nazi collaborator, was by far the most prolific and well-known military writer of interwar Czechoslovakia. Photo from 1935. Source: Wikimedia Commons

Much of the historiography on the interwar Czechoslovak officer corps has focused on personal biographies, memoirs and sometimes outright hagiographies of individual actors.¹⁸ More analytical monographs generally deal with political and structural aspects of the military, such as nationalities policy, democratisation efforts and the influence of the Legionary narrative. They are usually only parts of broader monographs on warfare and society, chief among those being the works of Martin Zückert¹⁹ and Ivan Šedivý.²⁰

Michal Horejší's master's thesis on the Association of Czechoslovak Officer Corps provides a basic outline of its publishing practices and interactions with the Ministry of National Defence.²¹ Karel Straka has

¹⁸ Those concerning officer-writers such as Moravec (Pernes, *Až na dno*), or Letov (Papé, *Sólo*) offer some insights into their motivations to produce the military knowledge, but they often suffer from the typically Czechoslovak limitations of such biographies, focusing disproportionately on the subjects' experiences from the two world wars.

¹⁹ Martin Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität: Die tschechoslowakische Armee und ihre Nationalitätenpolitik 1918–1938* (Munich: Verlag Oldenbourg, 2006).

²⁰ Marie Koldinská and Ivan Šedivý, *Válka a armáda v českých dějinách* (Praha: NLN – Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2008).

²¹ Michal Horejší, *Svaz československého důstojnictva, organizace, vývoj a činnost v letech 1920–1938* (thesis defended at Filozofická Fakulta Univerzita Karlova, 2003).

done important work on the organisation of interwar Czechoslovak military historical institutions and their cooperation with political actors.²² Especially valuable is his research on the last years (1936–38) of the Military Scientific Institute and its plans to expand Czechoslovak military preparedness through systemic reform of its goals and organisation.²³ Czech “non-military” historiography of science and knowledge generally passes over the military press²⁴ and military scientific institutions, or mentions them only in general outlines, such as overviews of Czech scientific institutions and scholarly societies *Bohemia docta*.²⁵

Czechoslovak state, society and military knowledge

Czechoslovak military *písemnictví* (“literature”, “body of texts” or just “writings”)²⁶ and the role of professional officers in it is, of course, part of the transnational discussion of military innovation and thoughts in the interwar era.²⁷ But the political, societal and cultural context is needed to grasp how this military knowledge was produced and distributed.

The Czechoslovak Republic emerged in 1918 out of the flames of the First World War, from the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Its independence was due to many factors, notably to the ability of its foreign resistance, headed by Masaryk, its first president, to gain recognition from the Entente powers. Their success was in

²² Karel Straka, “Památník osvobození (1929–1939) a jeho předchůdci”, *Historie a vojenství: časopis Vojenského historického ústavu* 58, no 3 (2009): 32–64.

²³ Karel Straka, *Souvislosti vědy a výzkumu s obranou Československé republiky. Vojenský ústav vědecký v letech 1936–1938* (Praha: Ministerstvo obrany ČR, 2006).

²⁴ It is completely ignored in the otherwise seminal work, Barbora Osvaldová and Jana Čeňková, *Česká publicistika mezi dvěma světovými válkami* (Praha: Academia, 2017).

²⁵ *Bohemia Docta. The Historical Roots of Science and Scholarship in the Czech Lands*, edited by Alena Mišková et al. (Praha: Academia, 2018).

²⁶ *Vojenské ústavy 1919–1939*, č.j. 19., karton 1, *Patnáct let Vojenského ústavu vědeckého*, 2–3, cf. ZVV Košice, karton 1, *Čs. Voj. Písemnictví – výzva ke spolupráci*, 19 November 1926, 436.

²⁷ Polnar, *Vývoj a proměny*, 20–31, cf. Gat, *Fascist and Liberal Visions*, Murray and Millet, *Military Innovation*.

significant part due to the Czechoslovak Legions, a sizeable volunteer armed force recruited mainly from the Czech and Slovak prisoners of war of the Austro-Hungarian army.²⁸ The so-called Legionaries became the main bearers of the republic's culture of victory,²⁹ and their rights as war veterans (unlike for those who served until the end in the Austro-Hungarian army) were almost exclusively recognised.³⁰ They became politically dominant in the new army.³¹ It was not by chance that many of the officially supported military writers, such as Moravec and Bláha, came from their ranks.

From its founding until the surrender to the conditions of the Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938, Czechoslovakia was a parliamentary republic with strong presidential influence, due to the overwhelming presence of its founding father figure, Masaryk. This was facilitated by a cross-party (and informal) support group known as "the Castle" (a reference to the seat of the president in Prague Castle). It was also supported by society by the formation of a cult of personality centred on Masaryk as an enlightened "philosopher on a throne".³² The Castle was able to mobilise the influence of powerful state and civic society institutions, journals and individuals to create what was described as the myth of Czechoslovakia as a progressive, liberal, tolerant and democratic state.³³

This had its military dimension, in the idea of a so-called democratic army – not in the sense of the army not being a completely hierarchical institution, but as an ideology opposed to the old regime, dynastic army of the Habsburg Empire, from which Czechoslovakia

²⁸ Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914–1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 37–56.

²⁹ James Krapfl, "Sites of memory, sites of rejoicing. The Great War in Czech and Slovak Cultural History", *Remembrance and Solidarity. Studies in 20th Century European History*, no 2 (2014): 109–146.

³⁰ Václav Šmidrkal, "The Defeated in a Victorious State: Veterans of the Austro-Hungarian Army in the Bohemian Lands and Their (Re)mobilization in the 1930s", *Zeitgeschichte* 47, no 1 (2020): 81–105.

³¹ Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*, 80–95.

³² Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 53, 119–132.

³³ *Ibid.*, 57–94.

and its army were born.³⁴ Many writers repeatedly elucidated this point and defended it against the possible misunderstanding that “democratic” meant “anarchic”, or even “antimilitaristic”.³⁵

But the First Czechoslovak Republic was riven by vicious party politics, often opposed to the Castle. It had inherited from Austria-Hungary a political party system defined by class and nationality, along with a vibrant civil society associative culture,³⁶ and vast media ecosystem split along party lines. The idea of Austria-Hungary as a prison of the nations must, at least for its Austrian part, be relegated to the dustbin of historiographic and political interpretations. We must remember that, due to its multinational population, Czechoslovakia can be seen as a miniature Habsburg state in terms of nationality.³⁷ At the same time, it was considered a nation-state of Czechoslovaks³⁸ by a Czech political elite and the country became firmly Czech-dominated.³⁹

Czechoslovakia was a product and proponent of the Versailles system, to which it owed its existence because that system established it as a victor state of the Great War. Czechoslovak citizens who considered themselves Germans, Hungarians or Poles were limited by both democratic and less-than-ideally democratic mechanisms. The participation of Slovaks and Ruthenes was also problematic, as was their incorporation into the unified Czechoslovak narrative, which included the Legionary narrative and the idea of the Czechoslovak army.⁴⁰ By 1938, over 90% of professional officers were Czech,⁴¹ and with a few exceptions, all the military writings, journals and books were published in Czech.

³⁴ Koldinská and Šedivý, *Válka a armáda*, 145–146.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 281–284.

³⁶ Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 83.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

³⁸ Elisabeth Bakke, “Conceptions of Czechoslovakism among Czech politicians in government inauguration debates 1918–1938”, edited by Adam Hudek et al, *Czechoslovakism* (London: Routledge, 2022), 149.

³⁹ This pertains to a military elite as well, see Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee*, 115.

⁴⁰ Zdenko Maršálek, “The failure of Czechoslovakism as a state-civic concept: national minorities in the army, 1918–1945”, *Czechoslovakism*, 251–252, cf. Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee*.

⁴¹ Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee*, 115.

Despite the reality of the new state often not living up to its self-created political myth of a democratic, liberal and progressive “golden age”,⁴² the Czechoslovak First Republic was indeed an era of expanded knowledge production. This was partly due to the newly independent state’s need to create a network of scientific and cultural institutions.⁴³ But the free, democratic and until the mid-1930s⁴⁴ almost unrestricted publishing opportunities played a significant role. Newspapers, magazines, books and brochures were all booming.⁴⁵

Czechoslovak society was often described as antimilitaristic, especially in the 1920s, and there is a kernel of truth in that.⁴⁶ “Antimilitaristic” did not mean uninterested in military matters. Those were monitored and reported on by both the national and the regional newspapers. The texts published ranged from informative to scandalmongering. It was in the interest of the armed forces to monitor these and to allow for their officers to contribute to and thus moderate this written production.

Military control over officers’ publications

The military administration monitored the press’s writings about the armed forces,⁴⁷ but it enforced localised censorship only rarely.⁴⁸ It was more strident in control of what its members published. Every professional soldier, both officer and warrant officer,⁴⁹ was liable for

⁴² Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 219–220, cf. Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State That Failed* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁴³ *Bohemia Docta*, 258, 270–271.

⁴⁴ Osvaldová and Čenková, *Česká publicistika*, 13.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 17; Zdeněk Šimeček and Jiří Trávníček, *Knihy kupovati ... Dějiny knižního trhu v českých zemích* (Praha: Academia, 2013), 227–270.

⁴⁶ Koldinská a Šedivý, *Válka a armáda*, 281–284.

⁴⁷ “Reorganisace vojenské služby tiskové”, *Věstník*, 14 February 1920, 6, 71.

⁴⁸ For example, MNO Prezidium 1924–1927, Inv.č. 8903, Sign. 28/9/1, karton 523. Various cases and ex post summaries sporadically appear throughout the whole interwar era.

⁴⁹ The Czechoslovak term *rotmistr* refers to the professional non-commissioned officer corps established in the new republic, and is best translated as warrant officer as opposed to non-commissioned officers, who were referred to as *poddůstojník*.

disciplinary action concerning the tarnishing of the “good name of the army” in public, which included the opinions published in print.⁵⁰ The officers’ publications, alongside their political and associative activities, were regulated by the service regulations A-I-1, according to which active professional officers and warrant officers could not be publishers or members of the publishing boards of political newspapers. They also were not allowed to discuss military issues that “are against the discipline and interests of the armed forces and which contradict, diminish or even ridicule orders, regulations and decrees”.⁵¹

They were also forbidden to diminish the honour of their comrades and commanders, especially anonymously. Officers’ “literary works themselves” could be only concerned with military affairs or warfare in general, and had to be presented to superior bodies in the military administration and be granted permission from the Ministry of National Defence.⁵²

The ministry was expected to publish a dedicated list of publications edited by military personnel, to which officers could contribute without prior approval. This exemption was given only to texts that “undertake a factual and scientific discussion”.⁵³ The potential critique had to be aimed especially at the “betterment of the armed forces of the state”.⁵⁴ The “list” never actually existed as a single official document. Instead, it took the form of a permission and/or recommendation published in *Věstník čs. ministerstva národní obrany*,⁵⁵ an official

⁵⁰ A-II-5a. *Seznam čs. vojenských služebních předpisů*, Praha: Fr. Borový, 1924, 15. More on disciplinary proceedings see Michal Cáp, “Důstojníci verzus kárne výbory – k (seba)reflexii stavovskej cti v medzivojnovom Československu”, *České, slovenské a československé dějiny 20. století XVIII*, edited by Davod Nykodým et al. (Hradec Králové: Univerzita Hradec Králové, 2024), 107–116.

⁵¹ A-I-1. *Služební předpis* (Praha: Fr. Borový, 1926), 153.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ A-I-1. *Služební předpis*, 154.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ *Věstník čs. ministerstva národní obrany* (Praha: Ministerstvo národní obrany, 1918–1925). After the bulletin was split into different content lines, it became *Věcní věstník ministerstva národní obrany* (Praha: Ministerstvo národní obrany), 1926–1950.

informative weekly bulletin from the Ministry of National Defence informing serving personnel of the newest laws, regulations and events concerning the armed forces. The ministry and its central military administration, represented by the so-called Presidium – which handled personnel matters, education, social care, disciplinary actions, press relations and other non-operational issues under the purview of the Main Staff – along with the relevant departments of the Territorial Land Commands at lower levels, were the principal entities responsible for managing the flow of texts produced by the officers.

Several of the publications mentioned later were never actually given permission in *Věstník* or were only recommended, yet they very clearly expected serving professionals to publish in them.⁵⁶ These general permissions never included works not published directly by the Ministry of National Defence, even when they dealt with military matters. This was established in the service regulations A-I-1 in 1920 and was monitored by the 2nd Department (Political), which included the press service officers of the Presidium, the Ministry of National Defence and the respective departments of the army Territorial Military Commands (located in Praha, Brno, Bratislava and Užhorod, later moved to Košice).⁵⁷

Because of these obstacles, very few officers published in the non-military institutional press regularly. Few newspapers had truly competent military writers on their payroll. Here again, the prime example was Moravec (under his pseudonym Stanislav Yester), writing in the 1930s for the pro-Castle weekly *Přítomnost* and pro-Castle newspaper *Lidové noviny*. Both were among the most respected publications of the time and were not affiliated with any political party – a rarity in the interwar press landscape.⁵⁸ He commented on

⁵⁶ The regulation could likely have been interpreted quite liberally when it concerned official or semi-official institutions and associations. Another problem is that very few individual permissions remain in archival collections. Archivists at the Vojenský historický archiv (Military History Archive) suggest this could be because such documents were discarded, or the permissions were given only orally.

⁵⁷ “Reorganisace vojenské služby tiskové”, *Věstník*, 14 February 1920, 6, 71.

⁵⁸ Čáp, “Konštrukcia profesionálneho dôstojníka”, 173.

ongoing military conflicts, such as the wars in Abyssinia, China and Spain, and the military situation in Europe.

We have no archival evidence and only historiographic speculation on why he used the pseudonym. Some of the speculation concerns his politically exposed role in the so-called Gajda Affair in 1926⁵⁹ – the rather sordid removal of General Radola Gajda from the military – in which Moravec played a role in service of the Castle.⁶⁰ But in terms of military writings in the early 1930s, he might have wanted to present more critical views without being disciplined. By 1938, it was common knowledge that Stanislav Yester was actually Emanuel Moravec, because of his prolific writing and public activities.

He remained a staunch, pro-Castle partisan (which might seem rather ironic in hindsight, given he became a Czech Quisling during the Nazi occupation). As this group fully realised the need to reinforce the Czechoslovak myth,⁶¹ it had chosen Moravec to publish an important piece of defensive cultural propaganda, *The Strategic Importance of Czechoslovakia for Western Europe*.⁶² This attempt at projecting strength and knowledge of the military position of the First Republic was also published in German and French, and was reprinted several times. It shows the military side of a wider attempt to tie Czechoslovakia to the fortunes of the Western allies.⁶³ Moravec was one of the very few active service officers who gained such prominence.

⁵⁹ The Gajda Affair was a series of rumours, scandals, investigations, disciplinary proceedings and trials between 1926 and 1928 concerning the supposed ambitions and conspiracies allegedly involving General Radola Gajda (1892–1948), hero of the Czechoslovak Legions and deputy chief of the General Staff, which led to his being sacked and eventually becoming the leader of the National Fascist Community. It is generally seen as an exertion of civilian control over the military by President Masaryk and the Castle, and an effort to curb the right-wing authoritarian tendencies of a popular army leader with political ambitions, albeit by unsavoury extralegal means. Cf. Ivan Šedivý, “Gajdova aféra 1926–1928”, *Český časopis historický* 92, no 4 (1994): 732–758.

⁶⁰ Pernes, *Až na dno*, 73–81.

⁶¹ Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 11.

⁶² Emanuel Moravec, *The strategic importance of Czechoslovakia for Western Europe* (Prague: Orbis, 1936).

⁶³ Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle* provides a comprehensive overview of Czechoslovak cultural propaganda and its mechanisms.

Perhaps Moravec's best-known colleague was Major Rudolf Smetánka, who was in retirement for most of the interwar era.⁶⁴ He was a resident military expert for *Tempo*, a publishing house owned by independent nationalist politician Jiří Stříbrný, whom Smetánka later joined as a member of the parliament. *Tempo* produced what we could justly consider coarse tabloid publications, such as *Polední list* (Noon paper) and *Kurýr* (Courier), by their nature the most read daily newspapers in the interwar era.⁶⁵ Smetánka's writing consisted of staunchly anti-Castle analyses of military preparedness, lessons (not) learned from the history of the Great War, and the current military, strategic and international situation. Despite being critical, he was never disciplined because he was retired for most of his writing career, so the A-I-1 regulation did not concern him. Also, he never strayed into an all-out attack on the army. Under disciplinary regulation A-XIV, he could still be penalised – for example, his pension could be cut if he besmirched “the good name of the army”.⁶⁶ The military controlled the narrative it wanted to present and circulate.

Self-publishing was one of the ways in which a dissident view on military matters could be voiced, but its impact was limited. It could be considered entering the political “wilderness”. After the fall of Gajda, his friend Captain Jan Karlík published views contrary to the orthodoxy of the Czechoslovak military administration but stopped writing for military-approved journals.⁶⁷ Only a few officers got their

⁶⁴ Rudolf Smetánka (1887–1958) was a Czech military officer, politician and writer. He served both in the Austro-Hungarian army and the Czechoslovak Legions, and was pensioned from the Czechoslovak armed forces in 1923. Smetánka was reactivated during the Munich Crisis and later emigrated to Great Britain, becoming a member of the Czechoslovak State Council in London. He went on to serve as director of the Military History Institute in Prague, but after the communist takeover in 1948 was forced to emigrate again. He was posthumously rehabilitated and reinstated to the rank of brigadier general after 1989. Prokop Tomek, “Rudolf Smetánka”, *Kalendárium VHÚ*.

⁶⁵ Osvaldová and Čeňková, *Česká publicistika*, 19–20.

⁶⁶ A-II-5a. *Seznam čs. vojenských služebních předpisů*, 15; Cáp, “Důstojníci verzus”, 111.

⁶⁷ Polnar, *Vývoj a proměny*, 18–19; Koldinská and Šedivý, *Válka a armáda*, 154–155.

Rudolf Smetánka pictured here after World War II, when he was a colonel and before retiring as a brigadier. Despite being retired for most of the interwar era, Smetánka was an important military writer, especially because he reached a wider public. During the World War II he served as a propaganda officer in London and in the postwar years was the director of the Military History Institute in Prague. Photo c. 1946. Source: Vojenský ústřední archiv – Vojenský historický archiv, Praha



books on military subjects⁶⁸ published in respectable publication houses not affiliated with the military, but more often than not, those proved to be regular contributors to military periodicals.

Among the most influential was *Budování armády*⁶⁹ from the series *Z války a revoluce* (From War and Revolution), published by the famous interwar publishing house Melantrich and written by Rudolf Kalhous, an important former Habsburg officer and one of the architects of the Czechoslovak armed forces after 1918.⁷⁰ Written

⁶⁸ There was a small exception in a sub-genre of “Legionary literature,” which was mostly a cross of romanticised memoirs and fiction. The authors were mostly Legionary veterans and not serving officers.

⁶⁹ Rudolf Kalhous, *Budování armády* (Praha: Melantrich, 1936).

⁷⁰ Rudolf Kalhous (1879–1939) was a professional officer and military writer. He served as a staff officer in the Austro-Hungarian army during the First World War and after that, was one

as a half memoir, half contemporary critical history of the early years of the state's military, combining institutional and operational history with questions of the military's culture, its social background, and the future of art of warfare, including society-wide military preparedness and mechanised warfare. The reception of his work never really critiqued his opinions on the need for wider societal mobilisation or his views on the future of warfare, which included predicting the total industrial warfare expanded by a new technology. Instead, it focused on his negative opinions of the Czechoslovak Legionaries and the French Military Mission, which were even in the 1930s considered statements that went against state policy and undermined its military culture.⁷¹

Professional writing was not only a way to further the intellectual (and political) debate, but also a welcome addition to the officers' wages.⁷² Letov⁷³ has said that it was crucial for Moravec and probably for others.⁷⁴ Official calls for articles in *Věstník* offered the writers money for their work.⁷⁵ In the 1930s, during the heightened propagation of military preparedness, few illustrated magazines with military themes – such as monthly *Vojenský svět* (published 1933–September 1938)⁷⁶ – were brought out by private civilian publishers. Serving officers did write for them, but they needed official permission.⁷⁷

of the instrumental organisers of the Czechoslovak armed forces. He was pensioned off in 1920 due to his disagreements with the direction of the army organisation and personnel issues. He wrote widely on military affairs and became an influential patron of various associations of Czech Habsburg veterans and projects. Koldinská and Šedivý, *Válka a armáda*, 153–154.

⁷¹ *Důstojnické listy*, 28 May 1936, 9.

⁷² Pernes, *Až na dno*, 96–97.

⁷³ Pape, *Sólo*, 33.

⁷⁴ Jan Zellinger, an Air Force officer facing dire financial straits and disciplinary proceedings due to them in the early 1930s, suddenly reappeared several years later as an author of numerous works about the country's airpower and anti-aircraft defences, such as Jan Zellinger, *Letectvo* (Praha: Svaz československého důstojnictva, 1938), cf. Kárne Výbory, inv.č. 93, č.j. 11/27, karton 29.

⁷⁵ ZVV Košice, karton 1, Čs. voj. písemnictví – výzva ke spolupráci, 19 November 1926, 436.

⁷⁶ *Vojenský svět* (Praha: Otakar Vaněk, 1933–1938).

⁷⁷ Pape, *Sólo*, 322.

But as described above, it was a limited and dangerous market. Politics was a sore issue and from 1926, after years of fear of both communist agitation and protofascist sympathies – exacerbated by the Gajda Affair – enlisted men and active officers were deprived of their active and passive voting rights.⁷⁸ Public statements by serving officers that could be seen as damaging the “good name of the army”, which was supposed to be apolitical, were actively prosecuted by the army disciplinary committees even when they were expressed only as opinions.⁷⁹ Rudolf Kalhous was the target of one such proceeding,⁸⁰ and a whole chapter about the role of the French Military Mission, an issue he was especially bitter about, is missing from his book, with the explanation that “pages 93–115 were excluded at the wishes of the Ministry of National Defence”.⁸¹ It was much safer and more stable for officers, as actors producing military knowledge, to circulate their texts in the periodicals green-lit by the Ministry of National Defence. This was explicitly called censorship, and it did not necessarily carry negative connotations.⁸² What divided the approved texts from the ones that were blocked was not differences in tactical or strategic concepts, but questions of politics, interactions with society and military tradition.

The army, its official institutions and their production of knowledge

In spite of the heroic Legionary myth and its achievements in the creation of the republic, the military was not popular in the new Czechoslovakia. This was a sign of continuity with the Habsburg era, especially when the Czech national society considered armed forces

⁷⁸ Koldinská and Šedivý, *Válka a armáda*, 297.

⁷⁹ Numerous cases in fond Kárne Výbory (Disciplinary Committees).

⁸⁰ Kárne Výbory, inv.č. 12, č.j. 9/38, karton 15.

⁸¹ Kalhous, *Budování*, 93–115; MNO Prezídium 1928–1939, Inv.č. 15867, Sign. 24/4/26, karton 11496. His articles at the time also came under criticism, and he was denied permission to have them published. Inv.č. 16054, Sign. 24/5/533, karton 12402.

⁸² There are numerous cases of “censorship,” but it was viewed by the ministry as a useful tool for institutional control. Horejší, *Svaz československého důstojnictva*, 81.

in general to be a threat to the national culture. The army and its officers were seen as remnants that needed to be “de-Austrified”.⁸³ But the new state needed armed forces, and they needed their institutions for knowledge production and circulation. These served as platforms for propaganda, information, as well as scientific discourse and were formed under the strong influence of active military officers.

Many politicians, including for a short time Masaryk himself, at first advocated the creation of a militia based on the Swiss model or the retention of the returning Czechoslovak Legions as a volunteer force.⁸⁴ One of the proponents of the militia solution was the staunch antimilitarist Václav Klofáč (who started in his youth as an anarchist),⁸⁵ the first minister of national defence.⁸⁶ At his initiative, the first official military weekly magazine, *Bratrství* (Brotherhood), subtitled “the Paper of the Czechoslovak Militia”,⁸⁷ was launched in late 1918. It was a magazine aimed at soldiers and its production values were often low, but it contained various kinds of official texts that were loyal to the state, propagandistic and informative, including describing changes in the military’s legislature and regulations. Its articles provided news about the army and technological innovations, and were often aimed at building a military tradition through commemorative and historical topics. Articles were often penned by professional officers. After the first few years, the magazine attempted to expand its appeal by prominently featuring popular pictures and large print photographs.

The militia project proved unrealistic and so the Czechoslovak army was at first a combination of Legions, volunteer detachments

⁸³ Koldinská and Šedivý, *Válka a armáda*, 162–164; Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee*, 88.

⁸⁴ Koldinská and Šedivý, *Válka a armáda*, 149–151.

⁸⁵ Václav Klofáč (1868–1942) was a Czech politician, journalist and co-founder of the Czech National Socialist Party (not to be confused with or considered an equivalent of the Nazi party). A fervent advocate for Czech independence, he was persecuted during the First World War by Austro-Hungarian authorities and later served as the first Minister of National Defence of Czechoslovakia. He was active in interwar politics until the late 1930s when he withdrew from political life and retired to his country home, where he died in 1942.

⁸⁶ Koldinská and Šedivý, *Válka a armáda*, 147.

⁸⁷ *Bratrství* (Praha: Miloš Maixner, 1918–1927).

Naše vojsko (Our Army) was a periodical directly published by the Ministry of National Defence to influence soldiers and keep them culturally mobilised. Despite the Czech domination of the officer corps, the magazine reflected the multinational character of the Czechoslovak army by publishing German and Hungarian versions. The magazine issue pictured is from November 1937. Source: Digitální studova Ministerstva obrany ČR



and former Austro-Hungarian units that swore loyalty to the new republic. After 1920, it was refashioned into an army based on mass compulsory military service, with a professional cadre of officers and warrant officers.⁸⁸ This was reflected in magazine subtitle being changed to “The Paper of the Czechoslovak Army”, and finally, in 1927, it was retitled *Naše vojsko* (Our Army) and published biweekly for the rest of the interwar era; after the breakup of Czechoslovakia it continued to be published in exile.⁸⁹

Bratrství/Naše vojsko was one of the first magazines that explicitly allowed serving officers to publish without prior permission.⁹⁰ Although it was distributed to the general public, it was aimed at enlisted men. In its first year, it was supposed to be distributed for free. The weekly publication was also one of the few Czechoslovak military magazines published in the minority’s languages – German

⁸⁸ Cf. Koldinská and Šedivý, *Válka a armáda*; Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee*.

⁸⁹ *Naše vojsko* (Praha: Tiskárna MNO, 1927–1938).

⁹⁰ “Reorganisace vojenské služby tiskové”, *Věstník*, 14 February 1920, 6, 71.

and Hungarian – either as special issues or as supplements. Due to the universal military service and conscription policy, the Czechoslovak state couldn't ignore soldiers who did not speak Czech or Slovak, but its attempts to reach them were far from ideal.⁹¹

Another group the state ignored for a long time was non-Legionary veterans.⁹² At the same time, permission and recommendation for publication in *Bratrství* were also given⁹³ to the magazine *Československý legionář* (Czechoslovak Legionary), which came out weekly throughout the First Republic era.⁹⁴ Like *Naše vojsko*, it was an official bulletin of the Chancellery of Czechoslovak Legionnaires, serving as a source of social and political information, and proclamations loyal to the state, as well as texts about the history of the Legions and their battles. As the ministry's official publication, it showed the privileged position of the Legionary narrative and culture of victory. Experience and the needs of the non-Legionary Czechoslovak veterans, either from the Habsburg army or later the Czechoslovak volunteer forces in 1918–1919, were not officially recognised in the Czechoslovak nation-building project.⁹⁵

As made clear by Masaryk's words, as well as the works of the various military writers mentioned, Czechoslovakia fully subscribed to the idea of an army as a school of the nation. The national and nationality problems of this aspiring nation-state, as well as the democratic ideology of the army, were considered to be at the forefront of useful military knowledge. This was fully supported by the Ministry of National Defence and its publication of the magazine *Vojenská výchova* (Military Education), which brought out ten issues a year between 1924 and 1939.⁹⁶ It was aimed at the educational officers – or what were referred to in Czech as *sosvětový* or “enlightenment” officers.

⁹¹ Cf. Maršálek, “The failure of Czechoslovakism”.

⁹² Václav Šmidrkal, “The Defeated”, 84–90.

⁹³ “Reorganisace vojenské služby tiskové”, *Věstník*, 14 February 1920, 6, 71.

⁹⁴ *Československý legionář* (Praha: Kancelář čsl. legií, 1919–1938).

⁹⁵ Cf. Šmidrkal, “The Defeated”; Krapfl, “Sites of memory”.

⁹⁶ *Vojenská výchova časopis věnovaný otázkám metodiky výcviku a výchovy československého vojska* (Praha: Fr. Borový, later Praha: Otakar Vaněk, 1924–1939).

These officers were established first in the Czechoslovak Legions and, in contrast to the old-regime ethos of aloof officers, were taken over by a new army. On its pages, officers disseminated the knowledge of how to educate soldiers from less-developed parts of the republic – such as Subcarpathian Ruthenia or parts of Slovakia (who often had problems such as illiteracy and poor hygiene) – and how to educate the men on the idea of the new state and its military traditions. Hygiene and medicine found their place in another magazine, *Vojenské zdravotnické listy* (Military Scientific Medical Papers), published from 1925 until 1939, with a new version launched after the Second World War and still active. It was published directly by the ministry and targeted medical and veterinary officers.⁹⁷ It was repeatedly officially recommended (but not “put on the list”) in *Věstník*. It is possible, or even probable, that due to its “scientific” and “non-political” nature, there was an implicit understanding that serving officers did not need permission to write in it. They covered highly technical and seemingly non-military topics, such as medicine and hygiene.

In an era of rapid military innovation and technologisation of warfare, the army also created scientific institutions to systematically research and produce useful military knowledge. The Technical Military Institute and the Aeronautic Military Institute were merged to form the Military Technical and Aeronautic Institute,⁹⁸ with its journal *Vojensko-technické správy*, published monthly from 1923 to 1938.⁹⁹ This became a forum for discourse on the problems with military technology and innovation. The functioning of the institute was marred by a lack of funding and practical questions of rearming the military with standardised infantry and artillery weapons and,

⁹⁷ *Vojenské zdravotnické listy. Vědecký orgán československých vojenských lékařů, zvěrolékařů a lékárníků, vydávaný vojenským zdravotnickým poradním sborem za podpory ministerstva národní obrany* (Praha: Vojenský zdravotnický poradní sbor, 1925–1939).

⁹⁸ *Bohemia Docta*, 272.

⁹⁹ *Vojensko-technické správy. Časopis věnovaný otázkám vojensko-technickým a vydávaný péčí Vojenského technického ústavu za účasti odborů M. N. O.: technického, dělostřeleckého a zbrojního a leteckého* (Praha: Vojenský technický ústav, 1923–1938).

later, fortifications. Questions of motorisation and tanks were of secondary importance. Aeroplanes and airborne warfare were discussed mostly in technical terms, without a wider doctrinal vision. The foreign debates were followed, and it remained a professional journal of the technical branches, dealing with problems of armament. Another new military institute that proved necessary to the new state was the Military Geographical Institute.¹⁰⁰ Its officers were fully engaged in military mapping and map creation, and their only publications other than maps were yearbooks.¹⁰¹

The scientification of the conduct of war was visible in another journal, *Vojenské intendační rozhledy*,¹⁰² published quarterly by (High) Intendancy School between 1928 and 1938. This became the professional journal of intendancy focusing on supply, logistics, nutrition, and the question of the national economy and its mobilisation for warfare. It also followed and commented on logistical issues in foreign armies, especially the increasingly threatening Germany. It highlighted the importance of materiel in waging modern total war. Interestingly, despite repeatedly advertising calls for articles from serving professional soldiers, it was never put on the list of approved publications by *Věstník*.

Another issue arising from the creation of the new state was the need for a military archival service and an army military history service. Here, the situation was fluid and complex. At least three different archives were created in 1918–19, alongside a forgotten historical section of the Main Staff, which was supposed to produce an analytical monograph of “useful” operational histories of the Great War as well as the wars in Teschen (Těšín) and Slovakia.¹⁰³ During the 1920s, they coalesced into the Memorial of the Resistance, which focused on the history and popularisation of Czechoslovak Legionaries, and the Military Archive and Museum of the Republic of Czechoslovakia,

¹⁰⁰ *Bohemia Docta*, 272.

¹⁰¹ *Výroční zpráva za Vojenský zeměpisný ústav* (Praha: Vojenský zeměpisný ústav, 1923–1949).

¹⁰² *Vojenské intendační rozhledy* (Praha: Vojenská intendační škola, 1928–1934, Praha: Vysoká intendační škola, 1934–1938).

¹⁰³ Cáp, *Vojenská historie*, 58, 72–73.

whose *Zprávy*¹⁰⁴ (News) became the first Czech(oslovak) periodical dedicated to military history. It was published rather irregularly between 1926 and 1929, with a total of six issues. It also focused on “useful” histories and military history in the more scientific sense, not only in terms of practicalities or tradition building.

In 1929, these disparate institutions were united in the Monument of Liberation, which systematised archival and museum work in the army.¹⁰⁵ In the 1930s, it also launched *Vojensko historický zborník*, published twice a year between 1932 and 1938.¹⁰⁶ Again it was propagated, but never officially put on the approved list in *Věstník*. It was another curious case of a periodical seemingly illogically lacking ministry approval, but we might consider that military history is highly sensitive, and the organisational problems of the institution in the early 1930s may also have played a role.¹⁰⁷ Monument of Liberation also produced editions of historical sources and published its members’ private research, which yielded several regimental histories of the Legionary units. It must be said that the quality of the publications and of the officers assigned to these institutions was often questionable. Basic, but all the more appalling, deficiencies in the professional military historical training of personnel meant that the project of creating a military historical department remained a mere declaration or indeed, wishful thinking. The output of history as military knowledge was often on the shoulders of a few dedicated individuals, such as military archivist Major Richard Wolf. The problem with the military historical work in the army was that officers who committed to it fully received no special bonuses to their career progression. This could also be said about the other forms of this kind of military knowledge work. It truly depended on the personal motivation of the individual to make a full-time commitment to scientific work and professional writing in the military.

¹⁰⁴ *Zprávy Vojenského archivu a musea* (Praha: Vojenský archiv a vojenské museum RČS v Praze, 1926–1929).

¹⁰⁵ Straka, “Památník osvobození”, 42.

¹⁰⁶ *Vojensko historický sborník* (Praha: Památník osvobození, 1932–1938).

¹⁰⁷ Straka, “Památník osvobození”.

But this work was instrumental in the creation of a Czechoslovak military culture. As was recognised about military history, but applied to all fields of knowledge, during an audience with the republic's second President Edvard Beneš in 1938: "The issue of good historical study is the basis for further enhancing the operational effectiveness of our army leadership. But it is also important for the strategic and political education of the leaders in the state and, psychologically, for the establishment of tradition".¹⁰⁸

Military culture, associations and the production of military knowledge

Military culture, as any sum of beliefs, mentalities and practices,¹⁰⁹ cannot be created only from above and is nearly impossible to create from scratch. Czechoslovak officers as a specific socio-professional group were both successors of their Habsburg predecessors and attempts of the new democratic republic to forge something new. Professional officers of the old regime were a separate group – in the nationalising atmosphere of late Austria-Hungary, they were supposedly loyal only to the emperor and aloof from the problems of wider society.¹¹⁰

This cultural image of a proper officer survived even after the officers themselves were mowed down by machine-guns in the fields of the Great War. The prewar professional officer corps ceased to exist as early as late 1914, and relying on the junior field command positions, it became a war of reserve officers. In Austria-Hungary, these officers came mostly from the ranks of the educated middle class of each national society, as they would in the future Czechoslovakia. The First World War marked the beginning of a true age of total

¹⁰⁸ Vojenská kancelář presidenta republiky. Č.j. 128/38, karton 270, 25 February 1938.

¹⁰⁹ Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray, *The Culture of military organizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 17.

¹¹⁰ Cf. István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*; Koldinská and Šedivý, *Válka a armáda*, 136.

war, emphasising the need to understand and adapt to new trends in warfare. It also highlighted the necessity of preparing society for potential future conflicts. This shift was recognised not only by the later historians but also by the interwar officers, who themselves were veterans.¹¹¹

Veterans associations, newspapers, literature, theatre plays and movies were all parts of the larger Czechoslovak military culture and provided an important background, both intellectual and institutional, for the production of various forms of military texts and thus publication opportunities for military officers. Veterans of the Great War in Czechoslovakia fell into two broad categories – the dominant Legionaries and the largely ignored non-Legionaries. Both were internally divided, and these divisions produced civic associations and publication platforms that were open to serving officers, but carried the dangers of politicisation and disciplinary action.

Czechoslovak officers found themselves in a radically different cultural climate from the one in which their Austro-Hungarian predecessors operated. The transition from the Habsburg military tradition to the Czechoslovak armed forces represented more than a mere change in allegiance; it marked a fundamental reorientation of the officer corps' role within society. Czechoslovak officers were no longer bound by allegiance to a multinational empire but were instead imbued with the responsibility to nurture a cohesive identity for a nation-state, which was Czechoslovak and mostly Czech in practice.¹¹² But they retained their separate corporate identity, which could flourish when combined with the associative culture for which Czechoslovakia was famous. It was an umbrella of various associations, which proved conducive to the production of various forms of military texts.

The first attempt to create the Association of the Czechoslovak Officers failed in early 1919, as it was perceived by the Ministry of National Defence and various commanding officers as potentially

¹¹¹ Emanuel Moravec, *Vojáci a doba* (Praha: Svaz čs. důstojnictva, 1934), 6–11.

¹¹² Cf. Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee*.

an antistate body.¹¹³ But the need for officers to organise was met through several asymmetric means. First was the creation of the Support and Education Association of Czechoslovak Officers (Podpůrný a vzdělávací svaz československého důstojnictva), focused on education and social support.¹¹⁴ The second, more successful initiative was the utilisation of the drive to promote military knowledge, as opposed to narrow corporate interest. The Scientific Association of Czechoslovak Officers (Vědecký svaz československého důstojnictva) was founded under the auspices of Minister of National Defence Václav Klobáček. It was inspired by the older military scientific societies, but the only known direct predecessor was the so-called Militärwissenschaftlicher Verein of the Prague garrison, whose library the association took over.¹¹⁵ Its stated goal included the defence and social support of officers and their dependents (showing the undercurrent of social and corporate interest), strictly forbidding any political entanglements. But this was achieved by its main task, and that was the propagation of “useful”¹¹⁶ military knowledge. It planned to publish a professional journal and handbooks, as well as create an army museum (which later merged into the Monument of Liberation, as mentioned above) – all in cooperation with the military administration and the Ministry of National Defence.¹¹⁷

The difference between the two main goals was recognised, and when the political situation of the new republic calmed down in 1920, the organisation split into the Military Scientific Institute (Vědecký ústav vojenský (VÚV)) and the Association of Czechoslovak Officers.¹¹⁸ The latter took over the representative, professional and corporate interests and became one of the most influential military associations in interwar Czechoslovakia.¹¹⁹ The association continued

¹¹³ Horejší, *Svaz československého důstojnictva*, 36–37.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹¹⁵ Vojenské ústavy 1919–1939, č.j. 19., karton 1, *Patnáct let Vojenského ústavu vědeckého*, 2–3.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Karel Straka, “Památník osvobození”.

¹¹⁸ Čáp, *Vojenská história*, 83.

¹¹⁹ Horejší, *Svaz československého důstojnictva*, 38.

engaging in knowledge production and circulation, firstly through publishing the weekly (originally biweekly) *Důstojnické listy* (Officer's Papers). It was published from 1921 until 1939,¹²⁰ and was also sent to all paying members of the association. From its starting print run of 8,000 in 1921, it expanded to 30,000 in the 1930s.¹²¹ It was a forum promoting discussions of social and corporate interest but often strayed into debates on army organisation, military needs, and military history and traditions.

The association created its own publishing house, Military Professional Bookshop (Vojenské odborné knihkupectví (VOK)),¹²² which distributed military publications by Moravec/Yester, Bláha and many others – not only officers (the most notable was probably Beneš) – via both subscriptions and commercial booksellers. Its publishing expanded after 1933, with state support and interest in promoting military preparedness and cultural mobilisation for the defence of the republic against the rising German threat.

Numerous books received new editions, often several times in a year, as *The Challenges of Our Defence* shows. It started producing the magazine *Obrana obyvatelstva* (Civil Defence; 1935–39, total of six issues), aimed solely at the question of civil defence,¹²³ as well as the biweekly *Branná politika* (Defence/Military Preparedness Policy; 1938–39),¹²⁴ aimed at societal questions of military preparedness in international contexts, following the pan-European preparations for the next world war. These magazines and books were regularly put on the recommended list in *Věstník* or approved through weekly orders from higher units of the military administration.

In the late 1930s, the association cooperated with several other organisations, both military and civilian, as well as with the Ministry of National Defence to create two massive representative

¹²⁰ *Důstojnické listy* (Praha: Ústřední výbor Svazu československého důstojnictva, 1921–1939).

¹²¹ Horejší, *Svaz československého důstojnictva*, 78.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 83.

¹²³ *Obrana obyvatelstva ústřední orgán pro obranu a ochranu obyvatelstva proti leteckým útokům* (Praha: Vok, 1935–1939).

¹²⁴ *Branná politika list věnovaný branným otázkám doma i v cizině* (Praha: VOK, 1938–1939).

publications: *Armáda a národ* (Army and the Nation)¹²⁵ and *Dvacet let československé armády v osvobozeném státě* (Twenty years of the Czechoslovak Army in the Liberated State).¹²⁶ Although these were propagandistic and did not delve into the less-than-positive sides of the history and practices of the interwar army, they remain even today the most comprehensive publications about it. They describe the army's composition, traditions, ideology, education system, military preparedness, relationship with society and much more. Being very much part of the myth of Czechoslovakia and its democratic army, they also show what by 1938 was the official image of Czechoslovakia as an aspiring nation-in-arms.

The association shared this shift from a narrowly corporate group to a society-wide propagator of military knowledge with its sibling organisation, the Association of Czechoslovak Warrant Officers (Svaz československých rotmistrů). The latter group defended the interests of long-serving professional non-commissioned officers through its own periodical, *Hlas národní obrany* (Voice of the National Defence; initially weekly, biweekly from 1920 to its closure in 1939).¹²⁷ It published a regular supplement aimed at the educational *osvětová* (enlightenment) work in the army, as well as editions of books concerning military history, science and Czechoslovak military tradition. Despite being a corporate journal often at odds with the officer corps, several officers (again, including Moravec) contributed to it.

It must be noted that both Officer's Papers and Voice of National Defence were not only absent from the official *Věstník*, but their pages dealt with issues of military science and conscription in a broader sense, and their corporate interest sometimes clashed with official structures. Both Papers and the Voice, especially the latter, featured

¹²⁵ *Armáda a národ*, edited by Jan Malypetr et al. (Praha: Národní rada československá v nakladatelství L. Mazáče, 1938).

¹²⁶ *Dvacet let československé armády v osvobozeném státě 1918–1938*, edited by Rudolf Medek and Silvestr Bláha (Praha: Svaz čs. důstojnictva, 1938).

¹²⁷ *Hlas národní obrany* (Praha: Ústřední svaz jednot československých poddůstojníků z povolání, 1919–1939).

articles by more combat-minded warrant officers, and were subject to preliminary censorship and direct control of the military authorities.¹²⁸ Both associations were nominally independent from the army, but members who were serving officers had to keep in mind the possibility that if their activities crossed the interests of the military administration, they might be reassigned from their serving locations, especially if they were based in Prague – the capital giving the most access to the influential associative culture – to a less-popular border garrison.¹²⁹ The shadow of the disciplinary proceeding was still present, even for inactive officers and warrant officers.

Most of the scientific and scholarly publishing functions were taken over by the VÚV. Despite its name, it was a voluntary association¹³⁰ primarily devoted to research and popularisation of the military sciences, or “only scientific and educational work”.¹³¹ In other words, it was devoted to the creation and dissemination of military knowledge. Its most important publication was the premier Czechoslovak professional military scientific journal, *Vojenské Rozhledy* (Military Revue).¹³² This was published monthly from 1920 until early 1939, and was reinstated between 1941 and 1944 by the exiled Ministry of National Defence in London. Its successor is still active today. Its goals were to study the history, strategy, tactics, technology, supply and personal experiences of the Great War, to deal with the history of past wars (especially Czech ones) and military traditions, to learn about military advances abroad and at home, and to keep track of all important military and war literature.¹³³

Revue was the main place for officially sanctioned discussions¹³⁴ of military knowledge in interwar Czechoslovakia. It included

¹²⁸ For example, MNO Prezídium 1928–1939, Inv.č. 12638, Sign. 24/7/8, karton 7818, 5–9, 11–13 and others.

¹²⁹ Horejší, *Svaz československého důstojnictva*, 79–82.

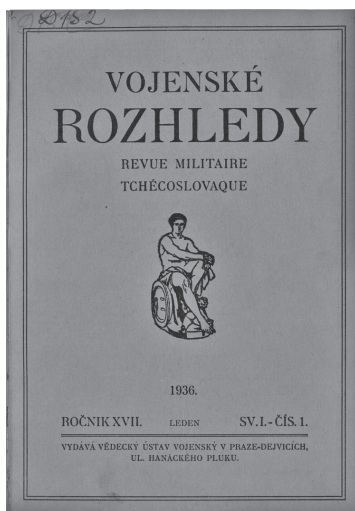
¹³⁰ *Bohemia Docta*, 105–106 incorrectly considers it state “institute”; Cáp, *Vojenská historie*, 83.

¹³¹ *Vojenské ústavy 1919–1939*, č.j. 19., karton 1, *Patnáct let Vojenského ústav vědeckého*, 1.

¹³² *Vojenské rozhledy Revue militaire tchécoslovaque* (Praha: Vědecký ústav vojenský, 1920–1939).

¹³³ Cáp, *Vojenská historie*, 88.

¹³⁴ “Reorganisace vojenské služby tiskové”, *Věstník*, 14 February 1920, 6, 71.



Military Revue was a monthly journal published by the Military Scientific Institute. It was the flagship publication for discussions on military science, art and thought in interwar Czechoslovakia, following the international trends and literature. Its successor of the same name is still being published. Source: Digitální studovna Ministerstva obrany ČR

numerous supplements on various types of military units (Infantry Revue, Artillery Revue, Air Force Revue, etc.). In the 1930s, it also published summaries of foreign military-themed articles. Revue was not VÚV's only product. It also published handbooks for officers, warrant officers and army specialists, books and brochure series on military technical topics and other "useful" knowledge, as well as books on Czechoslovak military history.

Many of the publications were reprints or collections of articles originally published in the Revue, such as "Nástin spolupráce politiky a strategie" (Sketch of Cooperation Between Politics and Strategy)¹³⁵ by Silvestr Bláha, a close adviser to both Beneš and Masaryk and later chairman of the VÚV. This and other publications illustrate a recognition of the wider contexts of military knowledge, beyond the realms of tactics, technology and narrowly defined strategy.¹³⁶

The VÚV also organised its members into topic "circles", and one of the first, coordinating between officers and civilian academics,

¹³⁵ Silvestr Bláha, *Nástin spolupráce politiky a strategie* (Praha: Československý vědecký ústav vojenský, 1932).

¹³⁶ Cf. Polnar, *Vývoj a proměny*.

was the Circle of Czechoslovak Military History, which, for a while, included Moravec.¹³⁷ In the second half of the 1930s, military preparedness and military preparedness propaganda became the most acute problem of the Czechoslovak state in the face of Nazi aggression.¹³⁸ The VÚV rose to the challenge of organising these cultural defensive efforts.¹³⁹ After its reorganisation in 1936, the VÚV created the Writers' Club and the Czechoslovak Military Editors' Club (Klub spisovatelů and Klub československých vojenských redaktorů) to organise the cooperation of the military authorities with the civilian press, as well as the new medium of mass communication, radio.¹⁴⁰ Knowledge was power and, through individual active officers and various corporate associations, state institutions were more than prepared to mobilise it in defence of the Czechoslovak Republic against Adolf Hitler's Germany.

Conclusion

The First Czechoslovak Republic was born from the war and perished under the shadow of war in late September 1938. War was always with it, despite its multinational population's unwillingness to contemplate it before 1933. This study illuminated the structures and possibilities of disseminating military knowledge in its interwar era and how these contributions went beyond technical details and the art of war to encompass broader sociopolitical narratives that shaped both military thought and state loyalty.

Forms of military knowledge were numerous and ever-expanding. Writings delved into technical areas, armament (including modern weaponry) and military history, emphasising "useful" knowledge gleaned from World War I. This emphasis on practical military

¹³⁷ Pernes, *Až na dno*, 92.

¹³⁸ Straka, *Souvislosti vědy*, 72.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 72–85.

knowledge was intertwined with efforts to build a nationalistic history, distancing the young republic from its Austro-Hungarian past. State loyalty and military preparedness were of utmost importance but were limited by the simple fact that the officer corps, with its officer-writers, was dominated by Czechs, as Czechoslovakia itself was. But these texts helped justify the armed forces' role in an often-antagonistic society, projecting a democratic and progressive ideology that showed that the new army was supposed to be different from its predecessor.

How did knowledge circulate? Czechoslovakia had a booming newspaper and book publishing culture, but most of the military topics were dealt with under the umbrella of official and semi-official organisations. One such body was the Ministry of National Defence and its numerous military institutes, which produced periodicals and brochures later distributed to military and civilian libraries as well as other subscribers. Various civil society associations and corporations, most notably the Association of Czechoslovak Officers and the Military Scientific Institute, contributed greatly to creating a military *písemnictví*, facilitating the controlled Czechoslovak debates about military problematics and its popularisation to a wider, civilian public. From the 1930s onwards, there was a concerted effort to mobilise society for the anticipated struggle, projecting the strength of the army both domestically and internationally. This involved widespread military preparedness initiatives, propaganda and civil defence efforts, which were enhanced by this wide array of institutions and their publications.

However, institutions were not the only knowledge actors. There were, of course, the military officers. Debate about the problematics of military science was becoming a part of the military profession. However, in Czechoslovakia, the officers' writings also reflected the changed military culture. The Czechoslovak army proclaimed a democratic, enlightened ideology and many officers could supplement their wages by publishing texts in their area of expertise, which also boosted their prestige. The dual control exercised by the military over officers' writings must be recognised. Through republication

censorship and potential disciplinary proceedings, it restricted the scope of possible debates, even in a purportedly democratic environment. But it never prevented them and often encouraged them.

In conclusion, the intellectual contributions of Czechoslovak military writers were instrumental in shaping both military debates and national identity during the interwar period. Their writings, produced in an open society, albeit under official supervision, played a crucial role in promoting military readiness and fostering a societal understanding of defence issues. This output not only reflected the internal state of the Czechoslovak First Republic but also offered valuable insights into the broader military cultures of interwar Europe. The legacy of these efforts underscores the enduring contemporary discussions of civil-military relations and the role of military knowledge.

Bibliography

Archival sources

Central Military Archive – Archive of Military History, Prague (Vojenský ústřední archiv – Vojenský historický archiv, Praha)

Fond MNO Kárne výbory

Fond MNO Prezídium

Fond Vojenská kancelář presidenta republiky

Fond Vojenské ústavy 1919–1939

The Institute of Military History – Military History Archive, Bratislava (Vojenský historický ústav – Vojenský historický archiv, Bratislava)

Fond Zemské vojenské veliteľstvo Košice

Published sources

A-I-1. Služební předpis. Praha: Fr. Borový, 1926.

A-II-5a. Seznam čs. vojenských služebních předpisů. Praha: Fr. Borový, 1924.

Cesta demokracie. I, Projevy, články, rozhovory 1918–1920. Edited by Vojtěch Fejlek and Richard Vašek. Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR: Praha, 2003.

Dvacet let československé armády v osvobozeném státě 1918–1938. Edited by Silvestr Bláha. Praha: Svaz československého důstojnictva, 1938.

- Kalhous, Rudolf. *Budování armády*. Praha: Melantrich, 1936.
- Moravec, Emanuel. *Obrana státu*. Praha: Svaz československých důstojnictva, 1935.
- Moravec, Emanuel. *The strategic importance of Czechoslovakia for Western Europe*. Prague: Orbis, 1936.
- Moravec, Emanuel. *Válečné možnosti ve střední Evropě a tažení v Habeši*. Praha: Svaz národního osvobození, 1935.
- Moravec, Emanuel. *Vojáci a doba*. Praha: Svaz československého důstojnictva, 1934.
- Nástin spolupráce politiky a strategie*. Edited by Silvestr Bláha and Rudolf Medek. Praha: Československý vědecký ústav vojenský, 1932.
- Věstník čs. ministerstva národní obrany*. Praha: Ministerstvo národní obrany, 1918–1925.
- Věcní věstník ministerstva národní obrany*. Praha: Ministerstvo národní obrany, 1926–1950.
- Yester, Stanislav. *Úkoly naší obrany*. Praha: Svaz československého důstojnictva, 1937.
- Zelinger, Jan. *Letectvo*. Praha: Svaz československého důstojnictva, 1938.

Periodicals

- Branná politika* list věnovaný branným otázkám doma i v cizině. Praha: VOK, 1938–1939.
- Bratrství*. Praha: Miloš Maixner, 1918–1927.
- CPO časopis civilní protiletecké ochrany*. Praha: VOK, 1936–1938.
- Československý legionář*. Praha: Kancelář čsl. legií, 1919–1938.
- Důstojnické listy*. Praha: Ústřední výbor Svazu československého důstojnictva, 1921–1939.
- Legionářský směr* orgán Československé obce legionářské. Praha: Československá obec legionářská, 1921–1924.
- Hlas národní obrany*. Praha: Ústřední svaz československých rotmistrů, 1919–1939.
- Národní osvobození*. Praha: Pokrok, 1924–1939.
- Naše vojsko*. Praha: Tiskárna MNO, 1927–1938.
- Obrana obyvatelstva ústřední orgán pro obranu a ochranu obyvatelstva proti leteckým útokům*, Praha: VOK, 1935–1939.
- Vojenská výchova* časopis věnovaný otázkám metodiky výcviku a výchovy československého vojska. Praha: Fr. Borový, Praha: Otakar Vaněk, 1924–1939.
- Vojenské intendační rozhledy*. Praha: Vojenská intendační škola, 1928–1934 / Vysoká intendační škola, 1934–1938.

Vojenské rozhledy. Revue militaire tchécoslovaque. Praha: Vojenský ústav vědecký, 1920–1939.

Vojenské zdravotnické listy. Vědecký orgán československých vojenských lékařů, zvěrolékařů a lékárníků, vydávaný vojenským zdravotnickým poradním sborem za podpory ministerstva národní obrany. Praha: Vojenský zdravotnický poradní sbor, 1925–1939.

Vojensko historický sborník. Praha: Památník osvobození, 1932–1938.

Vojensko-technické zprávy. Časopis věnovaný otázkám vojensko-technickým a vydávaný péčí Vojenského technického ústavu za účasti odborů M. N. O.: technického, dělostřeleckého a zbrojního a leteckého. Praha: Vojenský technický ústav, 1923–1938.

Vojenský svět. Praha: Otakar Vaněk, 1933–1938.

Výroční zpráva za Vojenský zeměpisný ústav. Praha: Vojenský zeměpisný ústav, 1923–1949.

Zprávy Vojenského archivu a musea. Praha: Vojenský archiv a vojenské museum RČS v Praze, 1926–1929.

Literature

Armáda a národ. Edited by Jan Malypetr, František Soukup and Jan Kapras. Praha: Národní rada československá v nakladatelství L. Mazáč, 1938.

Bakke, Elisabeth. “Conceptions of Czechoslovakism among Czech politicians in government inauguration debates 1918–1938”, *Czechoslovakism*, edited by Adam Hudek, Michal Kopeček and Jan Mervart, 149–171. London: Routledge, 2022.

Bohemia Docta. The Historical Roots of Science and Scholarship in the Czech Lands. Edited by Alena Míšková, Martin Franc and Antonín Kostlán. Praha: Academia, 2018.

Burke, Peter. *A Social History of Knowledge II: From the Encyclopaedia to Wikipedia.* Oxford: Polity, 2012.

Cáp, Michal. “Konštrukcia profesionálneho dôstojníka v dielach Emanuela Moravca”, *Vita trans historiam*, edited by Mária Molnárová and Viktória Rigová, 172–178. Nitra: Filozofická Fakulta Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, 2022.

Cáp, Michal. “Dôstojníci verzus kárne výbory – k (seba)reflexii stavovskej cti v medzivojnovom Československu”, *České, slovenské a československé dějiny 20. století XVIII*, edited by David Nykodým, Dominik Šípoš and Vít Zvěřina, 107–116. Hradec Králové: Univerzita Hradec Králové, 2024.

- Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge*. Edited by Johan Östling, Erling Sandmo, David Larsson Heidenblad, Anna Nilsson Hammar and Kari Nordberg. Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018.
- The Culture of military organizations*. Edited by Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Deák, István. *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848–1918*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Forms of Knowledge: Developing the History of Knowledge*. Edited by Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad and Anna Nilsson Hammar. Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2020.
- Gat, Azar. *Fascist and Liberal Visions of War: Fuller, Liddell Hart, Douhet, and Other Modernists*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.
- Heimann, Mary. *Czechoslovakia: The State That Failed*. Yale: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Klinkert, Wim. *Dutch Military Thought, 1919–1939. A Small Neutral State's Visions of Modern War*. Leiden: Brill, 2022.
- Knowledge Actors: Revisiting Agency in the History of Knowledge*. Edited by Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad and Anna Nilsson Hammar. Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2023.
- Koldinská, Marie and Šedivý, Ivan. *Válka a armáda v českých dějinách*. Praha: NLN – Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2008.
- Krapfl, James. "Sites of memory, sites of rejoicing. The Great War in Czech and Slovak Cultural History", *Remembrance and Solidarity. Studies in 20th Century European History*, no 2 (2014): 109–146.
- Maršálek, Zdenko. "The failure of Czechoslovakism as a state-civic concept: national minorities in the army, 1918–1945", *Czechoslovakism*, edited by Adam Hudek, Michal Kopeček and Jan Mervart, 231–252. London: Routledge, 2022.
- Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*. Edited by Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Orzoff, Andrea. *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914–1948*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Osvaldová, Barbora and Čenková, Jana. *Česká publicistika mezi dvěma světovými válkami*. Praha: Academia, 2017.
- Pape, Markus. *Sólo Jiřího Letova*. Praha: Triáda, 2019.
- Pernes, Jiří. *Až na dno zrady*. Praha: Themis, 1997.

- Polnar, Stanislav. *Vývoj a promeny československého strategického myšlení*. Brno: Univerzita obrany, 2023.
- Stegmann, Natali. *Kriegsdeutungen – Staatsgründungen – Sozialpolitik der Helden- und Opferdiskurs in der Tschechoslowakei 1918–1948*. München: Oldenbourg, 2010.
- Straka, Karel. “Památník osvobození (1929–1939) a jeho předchůdci”, *Historie a vojenství: časopis Vojenského historického ústavu* 58, no 3 (2009): 32–64.
- Straka, Karel. *Souvislosti vědy a výzkumu s obranou Československé republiky. Vojenský ústav vědecký v letech 1936–1938*. Praha: Ministerstvo obrany ČR, 2006.
- Šedivý, Ivan. “Gajdova aféra 1926–1928”, *Český časopis historický* 92, no 4 (1994): 732–758.
- Šimeček, Zdeněk and Trávníček, Jiří. *Knihy kupovati ... Dějiny knižního trhu v českých zemích*. Praha: Academia, 2013.
- Šmídrkal, Václav. “The Defeated in a Victorious State: Veterans of the Austro-Hungarian Army in the Bohemian Lands and Their (Re)mobilization in the 1930s”, *Zeitgeschichte* 47, no 1 (2020): 81–105.
- Zückert, Martin. *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität: Die tschechoslowakische Armee und ihre Nationalitätenpolitik 1918–1938*. Munich: Verlag Oldenbourg, 2006.

Unpublished sources

- Čáp, Michal. *Vojenská história v medzivojnovom Československu*. Master's thesis. Filozofická fakulta, Univerzita Karlova, Praha, 2019.
- Horejší, Michal. *Svaz československého důstojnictva, organizace, vývoj a činnost v letech 1920–1938*. Master's thesis. Filozofická fakulta, Univerzita Karlova, Praha, 2003.

Websites

- Tomek, Prokop. “Rudolf Smetánka”, *Kalendárium VHÚ*, 18 May 2018, <https://www.vhu.cz/rudolf-smetanka/>, 15 February 2024.
- Digitální studova Ministerstva obrany ČR, <https://digitalnistudovna.army.cz/>, 3 May 2025.