

Aleš BINAR*PhD, Associate Professor**University of Defence (Brno, Czech Republic)**ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8271-3730>**Email: ales.binar@unob.cz***CZECHOSLOVAK MOBILISATION OF 1938**

In 1938, due to threat from Nazi Germany that demanded territory of Czechoslovakia inhabited by Germans (Sudeten Germans), Czechoslovak government declared a mobilisation of military reserve. It was the largest call-up in the history of the state; more than 1,1 million men enlisted by that time into army (in country of 15 million inhabitants). These men came from all nationalities that comprises Czechoslovak population, thus their attitude toward Czechoslovak Armed Forces varied; while Czechs were supposed to be reliable soldiers, Germans (and Hungarians) were considered to be their opposite; between these two limits there were others – Slovaks, Ruthenians/Ukrainians and Poles and other minorities. Despite these differences, Czechoslovak mobilisation met all its requirements. Conscripted men properly enlisted into army, most of them just in hours after call-up on 23 September 1938. According to prepared plans of army high command, new units were formed and assumed their appointed positions close to borders to be prepared for repulsing the attack of German Wehrmacht. Success of Czechoslovak mobilisation was a result of systematic and long-time preparations that were commenced in fact in the moment the Czechoslovak Republic was created in 1918. Also, mobilisation was gradual process and conscription of more than 1,1 million men was extended in period of time. Despite the fact Czechoslovakia was prepared to defend itself – in extent that allowed its medium size. This, however, did not happen. Accepting the Munich Agreement, that forced Czechoslovakia to hand over its borderland to Germany, Czechoslovak Armed Forces never had a chance to prove its quality on battlefield. Disapproval of this decision became also the beginning of questioning of Czechoslovak capitulation, which resulted in discussion whether the Czechoslovak Republic should resist despite anticipated losses.

Keywords: mobilisation, Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovak Armed Forces, Czechoslovak (Munich) Crisis, Munich Agreement, 1938.

Introduction. Recent events, namely Russian aggression against Ukraine and war between Hamas and Israel proved an importance of mobilisation of recruits even in present days. Russian experience, nevertheless, demonstrated that its execution can encounter number of obstacles; in this context, failure could be also one of its results. That is why historical approach has its significance. The topic of this article is one such mobilisation that took place in the past; it was Czechoslovak mobilisation of 1938, the largest one in the history of state*.

This study aims to examine the course and circumstances of the mobilisation of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces (*Československá branná moc*) and their subsequent demobilisation. In doing so, the ar-

ticle makes use of established historical methods. Key documents pertaining to the topic are deposited in Czech military archives in Prague (*Vojenský ústřední archiv – Vojenský historický archiv; VÚA-VHA*). Most of them, nevertheless, were destroyed by planned burning and only a few escaped the annihilation. That is why an important value belongs to memoirs of Josef Fetka, Czech operational officer by the time of Munich Crisis (Fetka, J. 2015). An important part of all pieces of information also comes from literature, of which there is number of articles and publications (see: Anger, J. 1989; Emmert, F. 2015; Hamák, B. & Vondrovský, I. 2010; John, M. 1997b; Sander, R. 1995; Straka, K. 2007), especially from author Pavel Šrámek (Šrámek, P. 1998; Šrámek, P., 2008; Šrámek, P. 2020a), devoted to the mobilisation as well as demobilisation of the Czechoslovak army.

Text of this study is divided into seven chapters arranged in chronological order. The first three are

* In the history of the Czechoslovak state, the mobilisation of the armed forces was announced twice. For the first time it was in autumn of 1921, within the context of the Habsburgs' efforts to regain the Hungarian throne (Fiala, J. 1993, pp. 36–67).



descriptions of the circumstances under which the mobilisation of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces was announced, the following two describe the course and result of the mobilisation, while the chapter on the Munich Agreement and its consequences is followed by a text that sheds light on the termination of the military measures.

International Political Situation of Czechoslovakia in 1930s. Simple glance on the map of Czechoslovakia in interwar period testifies that the security of the state, especially because of its ludicrously long borders, depended on international relations. Naturally, army command thoroughly observed surrounding states. At first, Czechoslovakia considered its “arch-rival” to be Hungary. This was due to the unflagging efforts of Hungarian politicians to achieve a revision of the borders, i.e. to regain the territories of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia that lost in favour of Czechoslovakia by Treaty of Trianon (1920), and the repeated attempts of the Habsburgs to regain the Hungarian throne.

On the other hand, Germany was not considered a threat for a long time*. After all, the Czechoslovak Armed Forces, even in peacetime numbers, were noticeably stronger than the German ones until the mid-1930s**, and the possible “march to Berlin”, which, for example, Polish generals flaunted, would have only been a matter of will and not of means.

The situation changed fundamentally at the beginning of the 1930s when a marginal political party – the National Socialist Party (Nazis) – rose to power. The German political scene became radicalised, and the demonstrative withdrawal of Berlin diplomats from the Geneva Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments was testimony of their growing self-confidence. Its failure and the parallel “Machtergreifung” of the Nazi Party in January 1933 meant that Czechoslovakia gained an open adversary in Germany. This, however, revealed the weakness of Czechoslovakia’s existing diplomatic and military security provisions, which were com-

* To be precise, it is need to specify that the French Military Mission of French generals and officers that was active in Czechoslovakia, tried to switch the focus of Czechoslovak doctrine against Germany – but only in case of war between France (together with the United Kingdom) and Germany (Kozílek, R. 1996, pp. 84–92).

** Peacetime strength of Czechoslovak army in interwar period was around 150 000 men, while forces of “Weimar Republic” were limited to 100 000 men of regular army; except this, German army was entirely lacking, among others, heavy artillery or tanks (John, M. 1997, pp. 17–18)

pletely dependent on France and the anti-Hungarian treaty called “Little Entente” – which comprises Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania.

The attempt to secure a more favourable international position for Czechoslovakia did not deliver a clear result, as the only success was the conclusion of the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty on 16 May 1935, a problematic agreement with at least a troublesome power (Pfaff, I. 2002, pp. 25–38). Moreover, the deterioration in relations with Germany was not balanced by an improvement in relations with either Poland or Hungary; Czechoslovakia thus de facto found itself in a situation where its neighbours were exclusively hostile countries or states with which it had strained relations (See, e.g.: Dejmek, J. 2002). Under this constellation, the army remained the only guarantor of state sovereignty.

Reorganisation and Modernisation of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces. The years 1932 to 1935 represent the period when the institutional and personnel foundations for the last reorganisation and modernisation of the Czechoslovak army were laid. At the turn of 1932 and 1933, as an anticipation of German threat, governmental advisory board, the Supreme Council for the Defence of the State (*Nejvyšší rada obrany státu*), was established; in 1934, the Czechoslovak Defence Act (*Branný zákon*) was amended, and finally, in 1935, the Directorate of Fortification Works (*Ředitelství opevňovacích prací*) and the Fortification Council (*Rada pro opevňování*) were established. Symbolically, these changes are linked to the accession of Army General Ludvík Krejčí to the post of Chief of the Main (General; *Hlavní štáb*) Staff in December 1933 (Fidler, J. 1998, pp. 153–166).

In this composition, the supreme command of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces began to act. The reorganisation proposal was embodied in the document “Army in the Field” (*Armáda v poli*), which was approved in May 1933. This was a regulation of fundamental importance. In addition to the general increase in numbers, the organisation of the divisions changed. Instead of having four infantry regiments in two brigades, they were to have only three regiments in their composition. This measure greatly simplified the work of the command, which included the abolition of the brigade level, and improved the operational capability of the division as a whole. Moreover, some services were detached from the division and placed under the corps headquarters established for this purpose. The document simultaneously proclaimed the need to reorganise and rearm the rapid deployment units to increase their mobility and combat value. The entire armed forces were si-

multaneously divided according to purpose into the securing and manoeuvring parts, making it easier to determine which units and formations should be re-armed with new weapons and equipment as a matter of priority.

The “Army in the Field” regulation was approved in 1933 but was not enacted until 15 May 1935. The postponement was due to the international situation, especially the efforts to prevent Czechoslovakia from being perceived as a potential aggressor from behind the borders. This does not mean, however, that individual provisions were not continuously fulfilled; after all, from 1933 onwards the army placed its first orders for tank equipment, and in 1934 the first engineer group headquarters began to operate, which was responsible for organising the construction of Czechoslovak fortifications. Fortification lines should have been built in first place alongside borders of Czech lands but building plans were set to be finished by 1951. That is why their construction was not complete by 1938, nevertheless, the result was impressive; together there were built nearly 10,000 out of 15,000 planned pillboxes and more than 200 fortresses, including five artillery fortresses (Emmert, F. 2015, pp. 13–115; John, M. 1997b, pp. 276–372; Straka, K. 2007, pp. 28–45; 54–83).

There is also one aspect that needs to be stressed. Czechoslovak army, since adoption of National Defence Act in 1920, was formed as a conscript army with active duty. At the beginning, the service was set to last 24, then 18 and finally 14 months. By the end of 1934, as a reaction to worsening international situation, a new legislation prolonged the compulsory service to two years. Number of soldiers in peace time, thus, gradually grew, from ca. 140,000 by 1932 to nearly 200,000 by the end of 1937. At the same time increased figures for commissioned officers reached nearly 12,000 (from previous ca. 9,500) (R. Sander. 1995, pp. 25–26). All these also meant that by 1938 Czechoslovak army had large reserves; nearly all grown men disposed of some form of military training.

Czechoslovak Crisis. Although the reorganisation and modernisation of the Czechoslovak army and the construction of the fortress belt proceeded at a hasty pace, political developments unfolded even faster. In November 1937, the German leader and Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler set out to destroy the Czechoslovak state, already in the course of 1938. In that, he relied on the Sudeten German Party (*Sudetendeutsche Partei*), the most influential German political party in Czechoslovakia, which in the meantime had “nazified” itself – which meant that influ-

ence over the party gained politicians who demanded strict orientation to Nazi Germany.

Upon instructions from Germany, the Sudeten German Party adopted a strategy of confrontation with the Czechoslovak government, which was implemented through a constant escalation of their demands. These were embodied in the eight-point Carlsbad Programme that the party adopted at its congress on 24 April 1938. In it, they demanded their own autonomous territory where the Nazi regime would be established. If the possible creation of a Sudeten German self-government had its rationale and support in national and international law, establishing a dictatorship in part of a democratic state would not only be unconstitutional but, above all, unrealistic.

New tactics of Sudeten German Party led to crisis in relations with Czechoslovak Republic and later into international crisis; in Czech historiography, this situation is referred to as a “Munich Crisis”, outside of Czechoslovakia was coined the term “Czechoslovak Crisis”. The decisive moment in its development was the so-called partial mobilisation on 20 May 1938. The mobilisation, or more precisely “extraordinary measures”, was a response to the findings by the Military Intelligence Service that German troops were approaching the Czechoslovak borders. Although selected groups of conscripts obediently enlisted, demonstrating Czechoslovakia’s determination and ability to defend itself, development among world power was different – and decisive. Given all the international ties, there was a danger that a possible armed conflict between Czechoslovakia and Germany could escalate into a European war. That is why an independent commission was set up after the crisis subsided to investigate the incident. However, the commission concluded that Germany had not carried out any manoeuvres in the vicinity of the Czechoslovak borders and that the mobilisation was therefore unjustified. This meant that Czechoslovakia began to be seen as the aggressor, a fact diligently fed by Nazi propaganda (Kokoška, S. 2000, pp. 99–114; Lukeš, I. 1995, pp. 79–97).

The long-term consequences of the May mobilisation therefore turned out to be to Czechoslovakia’s disadvantage, as the willingness of Western countries to engage in its favour declined sharply. This fact was particularly sensitive because, at the same time, Adolf Hitler finally pushed through his intentions with the German generals, namely the final version of “Case Green” (*Fall Grün*); it set the deadline for the attack on Czechoslovakia as 1 October 1938 (Kniha “O”. 1946, pp. 83–88).



In the summer of 1938, the Czechoslovak crisis shifted to the level of bilateral negotiations between the Czechoslovak government and representatives of the Sudeten German Party. However, Lord Walter Runciman, whom Czechoslovakia had accepted as the mediator of the talks, improperly interfered in the situation. During the summer months, the Sudeten German Party successively rejected three Czechoslovak proposals on how to solve the situation. Finally, on 5 September 1938, the Czechoslovak government submitted their “Fourth Plan”, accepting all the demands of Carlsbad Programme. This put the Sudeten German Party in a difficult situation. If it intended to continue its strategy of escalating its demands, it could not accept the plan. Still, at the same time, it could not simply reject it, for that would discredit it in the eyes of the Czechoslovak as well as foreign public.

The Sudeten German Party therefore made use of so-called Ostrava Incident, during which their representatives were insulted by Czechoslovak policeman*, as an excuse to end negotiations with the government. A few days of tension followed, with no indication of what would come next. At the Nuremberg Nazi rally on 12 September 1938, Hitler broke the situation. In his speech, he assaulted Czechoslovakia and President Edvard Beneš in particular. In response, an uprising of Germans burst out in the Czech borderlands. However, the government and the army reacted immediately and suppressed it swiftly within two days.

After the defeat of the uprising, the top leaders of the Sudeten German Party fled to Germany. Their plan had failed, with the Sudeten-German problem coming to a standstill as a result. At this point, the Nazi regime intervened in developments once more, this time fatally. On 15 September 1938, during a meeting with British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, which took place at his residence in Berchtesgaden, Adolf Hitler raised a demand for Czechoslovakian territory inhabited by Germans.

This fundamentally changed the content of the Czechoslovak Crisis. It was no longer a matter of the relationship between Czechoslovakia and the German minority, but an international dispute between Czechoslovakia and Germany.

Based on the demands from Berchtesgaden, on 19 September 1938, the diplomats of the United Kingdom, together with the French, handed over a note to the Czechoslovak government calling on it

* Whole incident, in fact, was just provocation of Sudeten German Party (Kvaček, R. 1987, pp. 229–236).

to surrender the borderlands. On behalf of President Edvard Beneš, the government initially refused to do so. Still, after further pressure from envoys Basil Newton and Léopold de Lacroix, they decided to comply with these demands.

The acceptance of the Berchtesgaden requirements caused a violent social crisis. Large-scale demonstrations broke out in Czechoslovakia, forcing the government to resign. It was therefore obvious that the Czechoslovak public would not allow any “carving up” of the state and would rather face the risk of war. The newly established government of Army General Jan Syrový (Fidler, J. 1999, pp. 256–274) – who was viewed as a hero of the First World War – subsequently declared mobilisation on 23 September 1938. It was just in time. Couple of days later, Adolf Hitler, declared that demands a territory of Czechoslovakia inhabited by Germans otherwise he is ready to use a force. He even set a term to commence the military engagement – on 28 September 1938, 2.00 p.m. (Celovsky, B. 1958, pp. 173–382).

Mobilisation of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces. The declaration of mobilisation represented the culmination of the military-political measures adopted gradually during September 1938. In response to the uprising of the Sudeten Germans, during the night of 13 to 14 September 1938, the army high command decided to implement “Plan C”. Under this plan, specialists were called up for a special military exercise, with several other measures also put in place. At this point, the size of the Czechoslovak army grew to about 360,000 men.

However, the situation during September 1938 changed very quickly. Only four days later, on 17 September 1938, the youngest reservists were called up. On 21 September 1938, the generals in reserve were reactivated. Finally, one day later, full combat readiness of the National Defence Guard (*Stráž obrany státu*)* was declared under “Plan O” (Czech for “Ostraha Hranic”; English “Border Defence”) and simultaneously placed under the military command. As a result, the overall strength of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces reached about 500,000 members.

The final decision to carry out the mobilisation was made on 23 September 1938 at 10.15 p.m., with the population informed by radio during the night. Although the first mobilisation day was set for 25 September 1938, the Czechoslovak conscripts be-

* National Defence Guard was formed in 1936 by merging three existing security bodies – gendarmerie, border guard (*Finanční stráž*) and state police – into one (Lášek, R. 2006, pp. 7–23; 86–299).

gan to leave for their units as early as the night of 23 to 24 September 1938. This fact, on the one hand, complicated the smoothness and arrangement of the mobilisation. On the other hand, it accelerated it, although the enlistment of men into service was prolonged for several days and lasted effectively until 4 October 1938. All members of the first reserve, i.e. men up to 40 years of age, and selected specialists from so-called second reserve, i.e. persons between 41 and 50 years of age, were called up. On the day the mobilisation was announced, Czechoslovakia simultaneously entered a state of defence emergency (Straka, K. 2007, pp. 104–120).

The range of people allowed to serve in the armed forces expanded the following day, 24 September 1938, when the recruitment of volunteers was permitted. It concerned men between the ages of 17 and 50 years, i.e. those who had not yet completed compulsory military service, for example, because of their age or studies, or who belonged to the second reserve.

Czechoslovakia was multinational state of 15 million inhabitants. According to census of 1930, Czechs comprised only 50,2 % of population; then there were Slovaks, approximately 15,8 %, who – together with Czechs – were supposed to be Czechoslovaks; but the reality was more complicated, and number of Slovaks did not identify themselves with Czechoslovak state. The largest minority were Germans with 22,3 % share in populations, Hungarians with 4,8 %, Ruthenians (Rusyns)/Ukrainians with 3,8 %, and Poles with 0,6 % (Srb, V. 1998, pp. 460–461).

Attitude of nations towards military service varied. From the point of view of military representatives, Czechs were supposed to be reliable soldiers. That is why they became more often officers and also took up decisive positions. The Czechoslovak Armed Forces had no special or elite units. To a certain extent this status belonged to the border regiments. Since they were to defend fortresses of the Czechoslovak fortifications and fight on the front line in exposed sections, selecting their members was particularly demanding. In addition to physical requirements, candidates for service had to meet state and national reliability criteria; that is why vast majority of them were Czechs¹. Other Slavic nations, Slovaks, Ruthenians/Ukrainians and Poles, were considered less reliable, but eligible for officer careers and position in combat units. On the other hand, there were Germans and Hungarians who generally opposed

Czechoslovak state; it had also its military consequences. For example, among active Czechoslovak officers there were only 7,0 % Germans and 0,2 % Hungarians (Sander, R. 1995, pp. 34–43).

Position of respective nations towards Czechoslovak Armed Forces manifested itself also during mobilisation call. That is why all Czechs commenced their military service, while important part of Germans disobeyed and even left for Germany; nevertheless, some half or two thirds of all Germans reported themselves to assigned unit. It is estimated that in total 126 500 men disobeyed the call-up, i.e. some 10,1 % of all mobilized men (see below) (Anger, J. 1989, p. 50).

Volunteers from abroad also offered their help in arms to Czechoslovakia. For a total of about 3 000 of these candidates, who mainly came from Yugoslavia, Romania, Poland and the Baltic countries, a headquarters for foreign volunteers was formed on 27 September 1938.

From the moment the mobilisation was announced, the Czechoslovak Armed Forces began the transition to wartime organisation, with completion set for 30 September 1938. This wartime organization derived from piece structure of armed forces. In strategic and operational level, the headquarters were renamed and reshaped to field commands. This meant, first of all, that Main Staff became Main (High) Command; also, Army General Ludvík Krejčí was appointed as the Commander-in-Chief of the Czechoslovak forces. The entire Main Command moved from Prague; first to Klánovice, small village ca. 15 km east of the capital, and then finally to Račice Castle near Vyškov in southern Moravia. The latter was chosen due to its suitable location; Czechoslovak commanders expected that German army would attack in two direction, both from Austria to north and from Silesia to south, making the Račice Castle to be close to both main battlefields. Naturally, the whole command did not reside in one building but in number of surrounding villages. Whole command had nearly 1 000 men and was supported by number of units, especially of air force and air defence (Šrámek, P. 2020a, pp. 68–77).

Pertaining to the army level, the situation was similar. Piece-time so-called provincial commands (*zemské velitelství*) – there were four of them – were reorganized into army commands; thus, the Prague command formed the headquarters of I Army, the Brno command became the II Army, which withdrew to northern Moravia and Silesia, the Bratislava command in Slovakia was reshaped into the III Army, and finally, the Košice command in eastern Slova-

¹ VÚA-VHA, fund (f.) Velitelství hraničářského pluku 4 [Command of Regiment Border No. 4] – chronicle.



kia and Carpathian Ruthenia was converted into IV Army and moved to southern Moravia.

The defining element of the mobilisation was not only the call-up of soldiers from the reserve, but above all the formation of new units. Each military formation of corps-level and below was therefore charged with forming so-called “mobilisation twin”, technically unit “B”. Its basis formed staff personnel that was split up into two groups, i.e. headquarters of two units; thus, for example, deputy commander became commander of newly formed troop. In its result, field army had fourteen army corps instead of seven in peace. Six of these corps were designed as “border zones” (*hraniční pásma*) with numbers XI to XVI.

By the 1938, Czechoslovak army had seventeen infantry divisions. By applying the same principle, after reorganization, there were 34 divisions in total. However, twelve of these divisions were designed as “border areas” (*hraniční oblast*) with numbers 31 to 42. In contrast to division, “border area” was equipped with additional units, especially of tanks and tankettes and air defence companies, due to fact that they represented a first-echelon on the battlefield (John, M. 1997b, pp. 34–35). Together with four “rapid divisions” – formations that comprised tanks and motorized units – there were 38 divisions.

Additionally, three more units were formed – two so-called “groups” (*skupina*) 1 and 2, and “district Prague” (*okrsek*); despite their strange designation they had similar organization to divisions. To sum up, Czechoslovakia built up 41 divisions together. However, there were not set, in contrast to other armed forces, a strict organization for each division. Most of them were formed of three infantry regiments and one artillery regiment, but some had instead of regiment one battalion and instead of artillery regiment only artillery battalion etc. Then, each division had one reconnaissance, one engineer and one signal battalion. With slight exaggeration, it can be said that it was impossible to find two units at the divisional level with identical compositions. Their strength also corresponded to this, varying from ten to twenty thousand men (Fetka, J. 2015, pp. 226–230; Straka, K. 2007, pp. 100–127).

Organisation and Combat Value of the Mobilised Army. After 25 September 1938, the Czechoslovak army took its positions on the borders, according to Assemble Plan VII, or its XIII variant (John, M. 1997b, pp. 392–415; Šrámek, P. 2020b, pp. 73–80)². Although in the following days the deployment of

² See also: VÚA-VHA, f. Velitelství Palacký [Command “Palacký” (i.e. Main Command)], box 1.

Figure 1

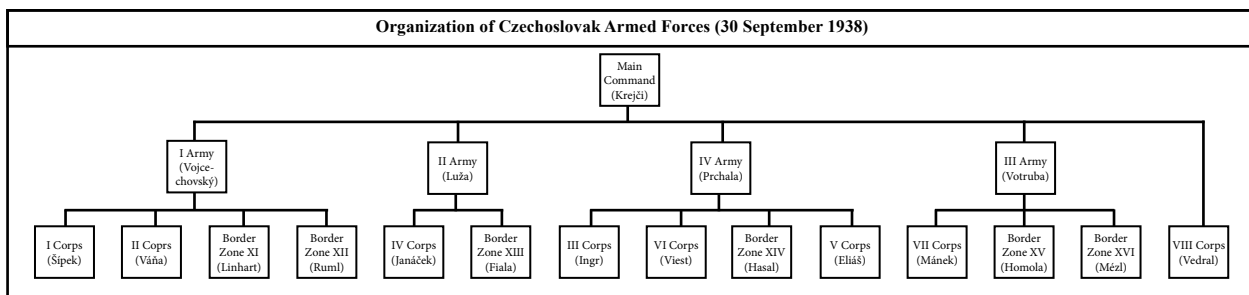
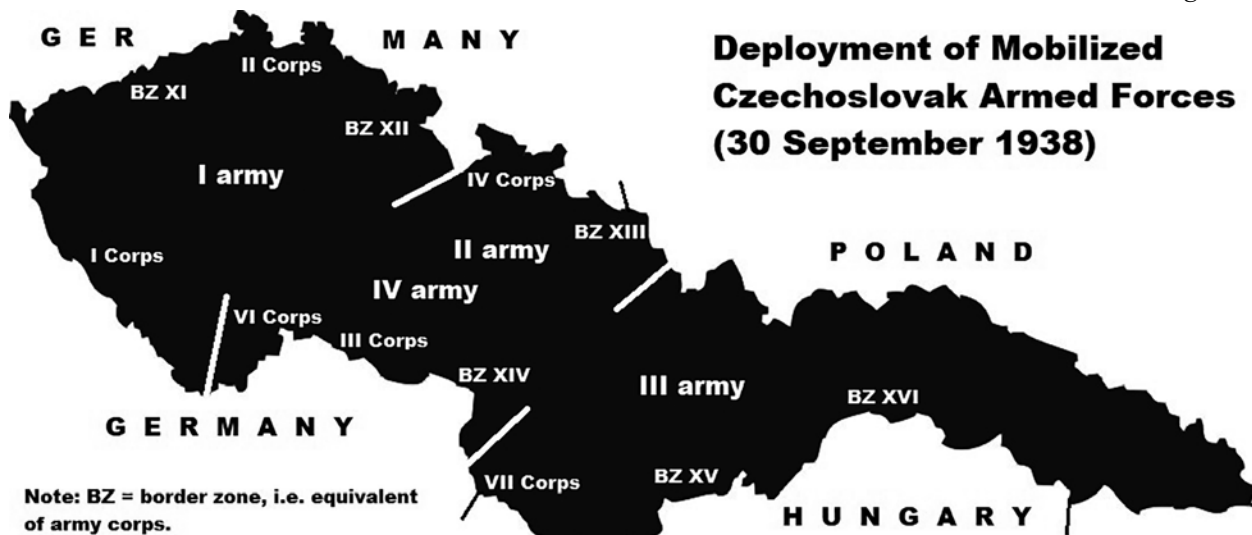


Figure 2



some volumes changed, its combat formation was as follows (Figure 1; Figure 2).

The territory of Bohemia was defended by the I Army of Army General Sergej Vojcechovský*; its headquarters was located in Kutná Hora east of Prague and it consisted of about 265 000 members. It was made up of the I and II Corps and Border Zones XI and XII, which included ten divisional units, with the 18th Division in reserve.

The II Army was stationed in the north of Moravia and in Silesia; it disposed of 135 000 men commanded from Olomouc by Divisional General Vojtěch Luža. It consisted of the IV Corps and Border Zone XIII, with three divisions in total, and the 8th Division as a reserve.

The IV Army was deployed in southern Moravia, with headquarters in Brno; Army General Lev Prchala had 140 000 men under his command. It consisted of the III and VI Corps and Border Zone XIX of six divisions, including the 4th Rapid Division. The army also had extensive reserves, which included the 2nd Rapid Division and the V Corps with two divisions.

The task of the III Army was to defend the territory of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia with about 117 000 men; its command headed by Army General Josef Votruba was based in Kremnica in central Slovakia. It included the VII Corps and Border Zones XV and XVI, which had four divisions in total, and the 3rd Rapid Division, with the 10th and 11th Divisions in reserve (for detailed number of respective armies, see: Anger, J. 1989, p. 59).

The Main Command reserves supplemented the already relatively numerous reserves of the armies; they were deployed for the most part in central Moravia, i.e. in the geographical centre of Czechoslovakia, from where they could effectively intervene according to the actual development of the situation. They consisted of the VIII Corps of three divisions and six other divisions, including the 1st Rapid Division, and together consisted of about 500 000 men.

Air force formations were divided into small units and subordinated to army commanders. For example, the I Army obtained three squadrons (*perut'*) of fighter and bomber planes and nine flights of reconnaissance and signal planes. Under direct

command of Army General Ludvík Krejčí there were two bomber air regiments and eight flights of fight and reconnaissance planes.

The mobilized Czechoslovak army was the largest fighting force in the history of the Czech/Czechoslovak states. At the end of September 1938, there were 1 131 000 members in its ranks, including 48 000 officers and 9 000 staff sergeants, and 3 000 foreign volunteers. These numbers are, however, only indicative, as they varied virtually from day to day.

The armament figures are also impressive. The defence force consisted of 484 armoured vehicles, 3 320 guns, 1 350 machine guns, 750 000 rifles and 905 combat aircraft. It also had 26 000 motorised vehicles and 217 000 horses at its disposal (Emmert, F. 2015, p. 89; Fetka, J. 2015, pp. 226–230; Hamák, B. & Vondrovský, I. 2010, pp. 37–173; John, M. 1997b, pp. 416–556; Straka, K. 2007, pp. 140–145)³. It meant that there was enough armament for all enlisted men. However, there were also some setbacks; first of all, artillery regiments that had large share of Germans – who partially avoided their duties – were not in full strength; moreover, Czechoslovak army was not able to fulfil its numbers of motorized vehicles, mostly cargo lorries, and thus lacked means of mobility (John, M. 1997b, pp. 175–211).

The armoured vehicles and aircraft in particular are worth a closer look. The most common type of tanks was the Model 34 (Czech designation *Lt vz. 34*), of which there were 298. In addition, there were fifty Model 35 tanks (*Lt vz. 35*), then seventy tankettes of Model 33 and sixty-six armoured vehicles of types Model 30 and Model 27*. As for the air force, fighter aircraft were of fundamental importance for the defensive war. These were represented by fighter Avia B-534, of which there were 350, including gun versions. Bomber aircraft, of which there were a total of 185, were divided into light, represented by Aero Ab-101 and Avia B-71, and heavy, consisting of Aero MB-200 and Avia F-X. Most of them, more specifically 370, were reconnaissance aircraft; among them were Letov Š-328, Letov Š-528 and Avia A-100 (Emmert, F. 2015, p. 127). All mentioned Czechoslovak pieces of machinery were of domestic production and, in comparison, belonged

³ See also: VÚA-VHA, f. Velitelství Palacký, box 1 and box 6, f. Velitelství Tyl [Command "Tyl" (i.e. 5th Department of Main Command)], box 2.

* Additionally, Czechoslovak army had in its disposal number of vehicles out of service due to their obsolescence or status of prototype; including them, there were 508 armoured vehicles in total (Francev, V. & Kliment, C. K. 2004, p. 199).

* *Sergej Vojcechovský* (Czech version of his name) was of Russian origin, but left his country during revolution; he was born in 1883 in Vitebsk as Sergey Nikolajevich Voytsekhovskiy and later, despite being Czechoslovak citizen, was kidnapped by NKVD (Soviet ministry of interior and secret police) and killed in 1951 (Fidler, J. 1999, pp. 329–349).



to the above-average. It evident by their later combat history. Despite major technological advances during the years of the Second World War, they remained in the arsenal of many countries until the end of the war. Most of them were incorporated into the German armed forces. For example, Model 35 tanks took part in campaigns against Poland, to the West and against the Soviet Union (see, e.g.: Binar, A. 2022), and B-534 fighters served as training machines for the German Luftwaffe.

Munich Agreement and its Consequences. The Czechoslovak army was ready and determined to defend the independence and integrity of the state. However, it never got the chance to prove its qualities in battle. On 29 September 1938, representatives of four powers, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and France, met in so-called Fuhrer's Building in Munich. In short time, they came to a conclusion that Czechoslovakia should fulfil Hitler's demands, i.e. to give up its borderland to Germany, otherwise it would be blamed for all following causes. Moreover, Czechoslovak diplomats were not allowed to take a part in negotiation, they were simply informed about results.

Next day, 30 September 1938, was very vivid day, especially for members of government and for President Edvard Beneš in Kolowrat Palace and in Prague Castle. Discussions were heated and sometimes angry, but there were not many options; Czechoslovak cabinet could decline the Munich agreement – and risk the war with Germany with no support from France – or accept it and cripple the Czechoslovakia. Finally, in early afternoon, Czechoslovak government agreed with conditions of agreement. According to the deal, Czechoslovakia was obliged to hand over all its territory with German majority (more than 50 % of inhabitants) and to settle its territorial disputes with Poland and Hungary – resulting in further loss of its territory (among other titles to the topic, see: Celovsky, B. 1958; Douglas, R. 1977, pp. 67–77; Grochalski, S. M & Lis, M. 2009, pp. 11–30; Taylor, T. 1979, pp. 681–977).

The army, obeying orders, fully accepted the decision of the highest constitutional representatives and began to withdraw in an orderly manner, albeit with clenched fists (Binar, A. 2018, pp. 71–84; Šrámek, P. 2004, pp. 56–87).

On the basis of the Munich Agreement, adopted by the Czechoslovak government on 30 September 1938, the clearing the Czechoslovak border regions began. The agreement itself was accompanied by a map marking the four occupation zones. The first one, located in southern Bohemia, was to be occu-

pled on 1 and 2 October, and the second one, which included the northern part of Bohemia, on 2 and 3 October. Territorially, the most extensive was the third zone in western Bohemia, which was to be occupied between 3 and 5 October 1938. The last, fourth zone, located in northern Moravia and western Silesia was occupied by the German armed forces on 6 and 7 October 1938.

However, these four areas represented only the undisputed minimum requirements of Germany. The delimitation of the last and most extensive area, the fifth zone, was to be the subject of discussions by an international committee. The Czechoslovaks were also represented there, with a delegation led by Vojtěch Mastný, the Czechoslovak envoy in Berlin, and Divisional General Karel Husárek (Straka, K. 2008).

Although the Czechoslovak delegates did everything in their power to enforce the Czechoslovak demands, the shape of the new state borders had already been decided in principle. Their efforts only postponed the beginning of the occupation by a few hours and, in the case of the course of the borders, led to minor adjustments of a local nature (Biman, S. 1998, pp. 72–137).

Including the border changes that took place a little later in Slovakia and in Carpathian Ruthenia, Czechoslovak Republic had lost a third of its territory and population*. The fact that it remained an inorganic entity is evidenced by the length of the state borders, which remained almost unchanged; from the original 4 192 km, it was shortened by a negligible 28 km; this means that for every kilometre of the border there was a territory of only 20 km²; and if the whole state was nearly 1 100 km long, its narrowest point in Moravia had only 70 km in width⁴.

By surrendering its borderland, Czechoslovakia in fact lost most of its defence potential. Crucial was the fact that fortification lines against Germany were situated almost entirely on ceded territory. This, together with unfit geographical situation, meant that any possibilities of military defence were no longer possible.

The new national borders were the most visible consequence of the Munich Agreement. However, its implications were much more profound. After all, the period following its adoption on 30 Sep-

⁴ VÚA-VHA, f. Ministerstvo národní obrany – Hlavní štáb – 3. oddělení [Ministry of National Defence – Main Staff – 3rd Department] – box 246.

* Czechoslovakia lost 41 596 km² out of its 140 508 km² (i.e. 29,6 %) and 4 922 440 of its 14 729 536 inhabitants (census 1930; i.e. 33,4 %) (Myšák, K. 1947, p. 15).

tember 1938 is referred to as the Second Republic, which significantly distinguishes it from the previous epoch. The events after “Munich” caused social trauma that soon began to be reflected in publicly shared values and the constitutional and political systems.

The resignation of Edvard Beneš on 5 October 1938 was not only a symbolic gesture, but also had far-reaching constitutional consequences. Society began to look for the culprit of the national tragedy, which was seen both in his person and in the rampant party system. At the same time, the system of separation of powers between the various constitutional bodies was significantly disrupted. The cabinet of Rudolf Beran pushed through laws that “empowered” the government to issue regulations having the force of law while granting the president the right to change the constitution’s wording. This removed the parliament as an entity of power from the political game and concentrated state authority exclusively in the hands of the executive power.

In Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia, power-political development proceeded at a more dynamic pace, with a more pronounced departure from democratic principles. It was due to fact that both lands gained autonomy during October 1938, with political events often taking place independently of developments in Prague. It is therefore clear that even politically, the Second Republic was not a homogeneous entity (among number of titles see: Gebhart, J. & Kuklík, J. 2004, pp. 50–122).

The constitutional and political changes also had an impact on the Czechoslovak Armed Forces. The efforts of Slovaks and Ruthenians to divide it into three national units became a very hot topic. However, the Prague headquarters managed to prevent this, with the Czechoslovak army remaining one of the few bearers of the idea of state unity in the reality of the Second Republic.

Demobilisation of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces. Adopting the Munich Agreement did not mean that the threat of war between Czechoslovakia and Nazi Germany automatically dissipated, but with each passing day, it did become lower and lower. At the beginning of October 1938, the clashes on the Czechoslovak-German border also stopped simultaneously. Incidents only occurred occasionally, for example, in Český Krumlov in southern Bohemia on 2 October 1938. It was therefore evident that the security situation had changed and that the reasons for maintaining a field army were losing traction.

Firstly, all Czechoslovak unit of first echelon left borderland, as mentioned above, and retreated to un-

disputed territory, so-called Czech “inland” (Straka, K. 2008, pp. 133–160). Then, the reduction of army began; firstly, by granting of short-term leave to those soldiers who resided in the border areas. This concerned Germans, who became citizens of the German Reich and were therefore excluded from conscription⁵. In the case of Czech soldiers from the borderland, its purpose was to allow them to move their property to an unoccupied part of Czechoslovakia.

Another measure followed on 4 October 1938, when the call-up of conscripts from reserves was terminated. Even so, during the following days, new soldiers kept arriving, but were no longer sent to their assigned units, which in the meantime took a holding position in their assemble area. On the same day, the battalions of the National Defence Guard were removed from subordination to the military command.

The actual decision to begin demobilisation was taken by the government on 6 October 1938 in the presence of top Czechoslovak commanders. Besides Army General Jan Syrový, who held the position of Prime Minister, the meeting was attended by Divisional General Karel Husárek of the Directorate of Fortification Works, Brigadier General Vladimír Kajdoš, Chief of Main Staff, and Army General Ludvík Krejčí, Commander-in-Chief of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces. At the same time, it was decided that conscripts would be sent home in stages. The decision to spread demobilisation over a longer period of time aroused disapproval and a wave of criticism among soldiers, especially those who were to be the last to remain; they were often worried about their jobs, namely that they would be taken by previously discharged conscripts. However, the army command argued that for a number of reasons, demobilisation could not be carried out overnight. First of all, because international tensions remained high and threatened to escalate into an armed conflict, this time with Hungary. Moreover, many commanders feared that the Germans would not respect the demarcation line and would start advancing into the interior of the Czech lands. There were also purely technical reasons. Apart from the measures already taken in terms of accommodation and catering for the soldiers, the transport capacity of the Czechoslovak railway and road network had to be taken into account (Emmert, F. 2015, pp. 160–167).

⁵ The same principle was applied to officers and soldiers of Hungarian and Polish nationality. VÚA-VHA, f. Velitelství 4. sboru [Command of 4th Corps] – box 10.



Since Czechoslovakia lost vast of its fortification there was no need to maintain units that were designated for their defence, so-called “border regiments”; in total, there were five of them. Their dissolution proceeded rapidly, with all of them having to be disbanded by 30 November 1938 (Stehlík, E. 1997, pp. 20–57)⁶.

The demobilisation of the armed forces initially concerned the Czech lands exclusively. The first phase took place on 9 and 10 October 1938, with the second phase starting a day later, both to be completed by mid-October. During the course of these phases, the members of the auxiliary and rear formations, mostly from the reserve of the Main Command, were also discharged. The purpose of this measure was to preserve the fighting strength of the Czechoslovak army.

The third phase of demobilisation took place between 17 and 19 October 1938 and ended a week later on 26 October 1938. It applied to all reservists who served in the ranks of the I, II and IV Army; III Army that was located in Slovakia were still in alert and prepared to repulse possible military attack from Hungary. The only exception was the last year of reservists who were called up on 17 September 1938. The final phase, which extended from 23 October to 16 November 1938, saw the remaining conscripts, including the youngest year, finally sent home. By 2 December 1938, the strength of Czechoslovak Armed Forces decreased to 220 000 men. Final arrangement, cancellation of state of defence emergency, came into force on 28 February 1939 (Emmert, F. 2015, pp. 160–167); three weeks later, Czechoslovakia was occupied by Nazis and ceased to exist. That is why since this moment discussion, both among historians and broader society – whether Czechoslovakia should have defence itself – began (selectively to the topic e.g.: Kural, V. & Anger, J. & Müller, K.-J. 1992; Šrámek, P. 2005, pp. 128–139).

⁶ An exception was made for the Border Regiment No. 4 in Hlučín in Silesia because it was the only completed unit and was at full strength; its deadline was set for 15 December 1938. VÚA-VHA, f. Velitelství hraničářského pluku 4 – chronicle.

Conclusion. The September mobilisation of 1938 was a test in which the Czechoslovak Armed Forces came through with flying colours by managing it organisationally and building a powerful fighting force at the borders. Czechoslovak society also passed muster when it resolutely obeyed the call-up and prepared for defence. The country’s army was prepared to the maximum extent possible for a medium-sized state like Czechoslovakia, especially considering its economic and human resources available. These were also used much more effectively than in its opponent’s case, which deserves to be noted.

Success of Czechoslovak mobilisation, and this needs to be strongly stressed, was a result of systematic and long-time preparations that were commenced in fact in the moment the Czechoslovak Republic was created in 1918. Also, mobilisation was gradual process and draft of more than 1.1 million men was extended in period of time of some three weeks; crucial, however, were two or three days that followed call-up on 23 September 1938.

However, all the military-political measures taken perished the very moment when, on behalf of President Edvard Beneš, the Czechoslovak government accepted the Munich Agreement and therefore undertook to hand over part of its territory to Nazi Germany, and later on to Poland and to Hungary. Immediately after that, demobilisation was initiated. This took place in phases and lasted, in fact, until the demise of the state. Shortly after its completion, the Czech lands were occupied by Nazi Germany, Carpathian Ruthenia by Hungary and Slovakia declared independence, so the Czechoslovak state de facto ceased to exist. However, the agitated emotions of the men, who as soldiers had shown their willingness to lay down their lives for their country, did not allow them to accept the situation passively. This explains the rapid organisational formation of anti-Nazi resistance, its initially considerable scope, and the later establishment of Czechoslovak military forces in exile.

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МОБІЛІЗАЦІЯ У ЧЕХОСЛОВАЧЧИНІ 1938 РОКУ

У 1938 р. через загрозу з боку нацистської Німеччини, яка вимагала території Чехословащини, населені німцями (судетськими німцями), чехословацький уряд оголосив мобілізацію військового резерву. Це був найбільший призов в історії держави – на той час до армії було зараховано понад 1,1 млн чоловіків (у країні з 15 млн населенням). Призовані чоловіки походили з усіх національностей, що склали населення Чехословащини, тому їхнє ставлення до чехословацьких збройних сил різнилося. Якщо чехів вважали надійними солдатами, то німців (та угорців) – їхньою протилежністю. Серед них були й інші національні меншини – словаки, русини/українці, поляки. Незважаючи на ці відмінності, чехословацька мобілізація відповідала всім її вимогам. Призовників належним чином зарахували до армії, більшість із них лише за кілька годин після призову 23 вересня 1938 року. Згідно з підготовленими планами вищого командування армії, були сформовані нові частини, що зайняли призначені позиції поблизу кордонів, щоб бути готовими до відбиття німецького нападу.

Успіх чехословацької мобілізації став результатом систематичної та тривалої підготовки, що розпочалася фактично з моменту створення Чехословацької Республіки у 1918 році. Крім того, мобілізація була поступовим процесом, і набір понад 1,1 млн чоловіків був розтягнутий на певний період часу. Хоча Чехословацька армія й була готова захищатися, цього не сталося. Прийнявши Мюнхенську угоду, що змусила Чехословацьку Республіку передати свої прикордонні території Німеччині, чехословацькі збройні сили так і не мали можливості довести свою якість на полі бою. Несхвалення цього рішення також стало початком сумнівів щодо капітуляції Чехословацької Республіки, що призвело до дискусії щодо того, чи має Чехословацька Республіка чинити опір, незважаючи на очікувані втрати.

Ключові слова: мобілізація, Чехословацька Республіка, Чехословацькі збройні сили, Чехословацька (Мюнхенська) криза, Мюнхенська угода, 1938 рік.