

Women of the legion – unrecognised members of the first Czechoslovak army

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1 Introduction

This paper aims to look into the legislation which determined the position of female members of the foreign branch of the First Czechoslovak resistance¹ after their return home from the World War I and Russian Civil War.

As it is necessary for understanding this issue to have some insight into the history of the resistance and particularly its eastern military branch, the Czechoslovak legion in Russia, the first chapters will provide brief exposition concerning these topics.

Later chapters are going to be focused on the usual role of women in the Czechoslovak legion in Russia and legislation passed after the arrival of the legionaries home to Czechoslovakia in the 1919 and 1920, especially on the act no. 462/1919 Sb. and governmental regulation no. 151/1920 Sb., and resulting effect this had on the possibility of women being legally recognised as legionnaires. This will be done through examining those parts of these legal regulations, which are the most disputable from the examined point of view.

In the end I will try to apply the results of previous chapters on specific usual and unusual cases to demonstrate the way status of legionnaire in the end was or was not awarded and the reasons of this.

2 Road to the Czechoslovak revolution

2.1 Czechs and Slovaks in the Austro-Hungarian Empire

At the beginning of the 20th century, Bohemian crownlands were a part of Austrian half of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Cisleithania), while Slovakia was under the Hungarian half (Transleithania).

For nations in Cisleithania it was possible to develop their own culture, language and even a limited autonomy was guaranteed. For Czechs, this was a result of so-called national revival in the 19th century, which led to a rise of the Czech language, establishing of Czech political parties and associations (most importantly Sokol, an association aimed on development of physical education in combination with national self-

¹ It is common to refer to Czech and Slovak resistance against Austro-Hungarian rule as “the First resistance”. “The Second resistance” refers to anti-German resistance during World War II and “the Third resistance” to the anti-communist one. All of them are further divided to domestic and foreign and military and political.

awareness), and generally to renewal of national consciousness. A logical consequence to this was an effort to gain autonomy for the lands of the former Czech kingdom, which was historically amongst the main constituents of the Empire and in the second half of the 19th century it became the most industrialised part of the whole monarchy. This call for autonomy was even amplified by the change from centralised Austrian empire to dualised Austro-Hungarian empire.²

Despite of what came after, at this time the Czech fight was purely political, and the nation was considered loyal. The central government tried to make concessions several times, but these efforts were regularly blocked by considerable German minority living in the territory of the Czech crownlands, who feared this would lead to them losing their privileges.³ This led to a growth of already tense relationship between Czechs and Germans, which culminated later in the late 1930s⁴ and after the World War II.

Until the beginning of the First World War, The Great War, as it used to be called at the time, there was no considerable movement proclaiming an idea of independent Czech (let alone Czechoslovak) state. The outbreak of war was generally accepted amongst the population, even though with lack of enthusiasm springing from the sympathies felt to Serbia and Russia, fellow Slavic nations that were suddenly deemed enemies.⁵

It was not until the suspension of democratic institutions and national rights in the Empire in the month following the declaration of war, that the discontent started to grow amongst the population.⁶

For Slovaks, the time was much different. While Transleithania was democratic, same as Cisleithania, the national policies were much tougher since hegemony of Hungarians was considered the official policy.⁷

For this reason, Slovak national consciousness was systematically reduced⁸ and even Slovak national revival, similar to the one experienced by Czechs, could not stop

² MOJŽÍŠ, Milan a kol. *Československé legie 1914-1920 [Czechoslovak legions 1914-1920]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2017. s. 6-7.

³ McNAMARA, Kevin J. *Dreams of a great small nation: The Mutinous Army that Threatened a Revolution, Destroyed an Empire, Founded a Republic, and Remade the Map of Europe*. 1st edition. New York: PublicAffairs, 2016. p. 33 and 38-39.

⁴ BOUVERIE, Tim. *Appeasing Hitler: Chamberlain, Churchill and the Road to War*. 2nd edition. London: Vintage, 2020. p. 231-257.

⁵ RAK, Michal (ed.). *Boj s rakouskou hydrou: Deník legionáře Čeňka Klose [The struggle with Austrian hydra: Diary of a legionnaire Čeněk Klos]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Československá obec legionářská, 2016. s. 13.

⁶ McNAMARA, Kevin J. *Dreams of a great small nation: The Mutinous Army that Threatened a Revolution, Destroyed an Empire, Founded a Republic, and Remade the Map of Europe*. 1st edition. New York: PublicAffairs, 2016. p. 15-16.

⁷ Ibid. p. 37.

⁸ MOJŽÍŠ, Milan a kol. *Československé legie 1914-1920 [Czechoslovak legions 1914-1920]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2017. s. 6.

this decline. Thus, when the war came, a great part of inhabitants of nowadays Slovakia identified themselves as Hungarians.

This led to the fact that the major part Slovak resentment to the Habsburg rule did not come from the domestic population, but from the national diaspora in the USA.⁹

2.2 Declaring fight for independence

Despite of the aforementioned silent acceptance of the war amongst the Czechs and Slovaks, a small group of politically active figures almost immediately started to prepare a fight for independence. This group was centred around Czech philosopher, politician and university professor Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk,¹⁰ who left abroad to gain international support for the idea. In 1915, he was joined by his former student Edvard Beneš and a Slovak scientist, at the time serving in the French air force, Milan Rastislav Štefánik.¹¹

Masaryk, known in the academic circles abroad and speaking several languages, was in a good position to create an independence movement immediately, however it was not until arrest warrant was issued against him by the Austro-Hungarian officials for his pro-entente and anti-Austrian behaviour, when he officially declared the will of Czech nation to fight against the Habsburg rule during his speech in Geneva on the 6th July 1915 (on the occasion of 500th anniversary of the execution of Czech reformer priest Jan Hus).¹²

On the home front, the resistance found an illegal organisation called Maffie. Its main aim was to provide information for Masaryk and his movement abroad and to prepare coup d'état in case of Entente armies entering Bohemian lands. This organisation was led by important Czech figures of the time, namely politicians Edvard Beneš (head of the organisation until his emigration), Přemysl Šámal (2nd head of the organisation), Karel Kramář and Alois Rašín, as well as the president of Sokol, Josef Scheiner.¹³

As for Masaryk, he began rallying anti-Austrian forces all across the world – especially Czech and Slovak communities in the USA, France and Russia – while also visiting important politicians of the time to convince them that his idea of dividing the Habsburg Empire into smaller national states would bring stability into Central Europe and the Balkans. Among these politicians were members of French and Russian governments

⁹ Ibid. s. 328.

¹⁰ McNAMARA, Kevin J. *Dreams of a great small nation: The Mutinous Army that Threatened a Revolution, Destroyed an Empire, Founded a Republic, and Remade the Map of Europe*. 1st edition. New York: PublicAffairs, 2016. p. 18-23.

¹¹ MOJŽIŠ, Milan a kol. *Československé legie 1914-1920 [Czechoslovak legions 1914-1920]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2017. s. 370.

¹² Ibid. s. 28.

¹³ Ibid. s. 380.

and even American president Woodrow Wilson, all of whom he eventually persuaded. By the end of the war, Štefánik was able to gain support of Italy as well.¹⁴

On the other hand, the British have never shown much interest in this dissolution.¹⁵ Their voice was however left unheard, as other branch of the Czech and Slovak resistance gained international prestige and thus wide support of the public across the Entente powers – the Czechoslovak legions.

3 Czechoslovak legions

Before the resistance established Maffie, even before Masaryk left his homeland to start his mission, there were groups of Czech and Slovak exiles who saw the war as an opportunity to gain wider autonomy or hopefully even independence for their respective homes (Lands of the Bohemian Crown and Slovakia). They began rallying in the Entente countries and demanded the right to fight against the central powers.¹⁶

From these efforts rose first units of (at the time mostly Czech) volunteers in France (Rota Nazdar – 341 Czechs, 2 Slovaks),¹⁷ Russia (Česká družina – 744 Czechs, 266 Russians)¹⁸ and Serbia (several smaller units).¹⁹ Except for the Serbian unit, these grew in numbers and in 1917, after seeing their successes (especially on the eastern front), even the Italian government backed and allowed Czechoslovaks to create volunteer units in their army, the numbers of Czechoslovak army reached almost one hundred thousand men.²⁰

Another thirty thousand Czechs and Slovaks joined the American army and one thousand British and Canadian army, but as these were not separate Czechoslovak units,

¹⁴ Úmluva mezi italskou vládou a Československou národní radou o uznání samostatné čs. armády v Itálii, Řím, 21. dubna 1918 [Convention between the Italian Government and the Czechoslovak National Council on the Recognition of the Independent Czechoslovak Army in Italy, Rome, 21st April 1918]. [online] In: Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky, 2018. [cit. 2. 8. 2020]

¹⁵ McNAMARA, Kevin J. *Dreams of a great small nation: The Mutinous Army that Threatened a Revolution, Destroyed an Empire, Founded a Republic, and Remade the Map of Europe*. 1st edition. New York: PublicAffairs, 2016. p. 169.

¹⁶ ORIÁN, Edmund a kol. *Československá legie v Rusku: Díl I. [Czechoslovak legion in Russia: Part I]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství EPOQUE 1900 a NAŠE VOJSKO, 2014. s. 12-13.

¹⁷ STRAKA, Karel. *Rota Nazdar: nejen o památném boji z 9. května 1915 [Company Nazdar: Not only about the memorable fight of 9th May 1915]*. [online] In: Vojenský historický ústav Praha, 2013. [cit. 31. 7. 2020]

¹⁸ MOJŽIŠ, Milan a kol. *Československé legie 1914-1920 [Czechoslovak legions 1914-1920]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2017. s. 46.

¹⁹ JAKL, Tomáš. *Čeští dobrovolníci ve Srbské armádě za první světové války [Czech volunteers in the Serbian Army during World War I]*. [online] In: Vojenský historický ústav Praha, 2016. [cit. 31. 7. 2020]

²⁰ MOJŽIŠ, Milan a kol. *Československé legie 1914-1920 [Czechoslovak legions 1914-1920]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2017. s. 7.

their members were not called 'legionaries' during the war (even though they received legal legionnaire status after the war).²¹

3.1 Czechoslovak volunteers in Serbia

Even though not strong in numbers (around 1500 people), Czech community in Serbia was very active, establishing many cultural societies (Lumír, Havlíček) and even local branch of the aforementioned Sokol.²²

With the assassination of archduke Franz-Ferdinand and the subsequent imminence of war, smaller part of the community left for Austria-Hungary, to be ready to serve in the army, while larger part has shown its sympathies for Serbia and willingness to help Serbia in case of defensive war (e.g. the property of Czech societies was donated to the Serbian Red cross).

Czech volunteers rallied under a Serbian organisation called Narodna Odbrana and were allowed to enter the army, but no explicitly Czech unit was created. Instead these soldiers were assigned in small numbers to existing Serbian units.²³

Drafting soldiers of the Czech nationality (Slovaks were not considered at this point) from the POW camps was very limited, since Serbia, fighting for its very survival, did not have the capacity to work out the plan for their recruitment.²⁴

This situation changed after the fall of Serbia and recreation of the Serbian army on the eastern front. At that moment, Serbians were willing to accept Czech volunteers even from prisoner camps. Even though it was possible for those to join Czech units in the Russian army, this was heavily obstructed by the Russian government until the battle of Zborov, while volunteering to Serbian army in exile was way easier. Thus, most of the Czech POWs willing to join the fight for Entente on the eastern front went to this army and were reassigned to Czechoslovak legion in Russia later.²⁵ These soldiers were then considered an elite and while some of them remained in Russia and took part in the legion's fight through Siberia, others were transferred to France and later to Italy to form the core of the Legions in these countries, while serving for some time in all four Czechoslovak legions of the WWI.²⁶

²¹ Ibid. s. 300, 306 and 338.

²² Ibid. s. 194.

²³ Ibid. s. 194 and 198.

²⁴ JAKL, Tomáš. *Čeští dobrovolníci ve Srbské armádě za první světové války [Czech volunteers in the Serbian Army during World War I]*. [online] In: Vojenský historický ústav Praha, 2016. [cit. 31. 7. 2020]

²⁵ ORIÁN, Edmund a kol. *Československá legie v Rusku: Díl I. [Czechoslovak legion in Russia: Part I]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství EPOQUE 1900 a NAŠE VOJSKO, 2014. s. 21-22.

²⁶ One such example is later general and Minister of National Defence in exile during the Second World War Jan Sergěj Ingr. See his page in legionnaire database: <http://vuapraha.cz/soldier/19138948>

3.2 Czechoslovak legion in Russia

The story of legion in Russia is both the most interesting and most important for the topic of this paper as it was in Russian civil war, where the Czech volunteers had to fight in the worst conditions and against the worst odds, which led them to use all resources as effectively as possible, including human resources. Because of this it will be analysed more in detail in comparison with legions in other countries and on other fronts.

3.2.1 Česká družina

Unlike Serbia, Russia was one of the two target nations for Czech and Slovak people moving abroad (the second one was the USA).²⁷ This brought great potential for forming volunteer units. At the same time, local Czech community in Russia was afraid of persecution due to its members being subjects of an enemy nation and thus needed to convincingly show allegiance to Russia and the Russian tsar.²⁸

This caused Czech compatriot associations to encourage volunteers to join Russian army. As a result, on the 11th October 1914 (28th September by the Julian calendar used in Russian empire at the time) a unit of 720 soldiers took an oath creating so called Česká družina (“Czech company”), unit consisting almost entirely of Czechs.

However, due to their low numbers at the time, Družina was not used as a standard fighting unit. Instead, thanks to their knowledge of languages spoken in the enemy armies (German, Czech etc.) its members were used for reconnaissance, diversion, spreading pro-desertion propaganda amongst Slavs in the Austro-Hungarian army and as translators.²⁹ This had not changed for some time, since the recruitment from the ranks of Czech and Slovak POWs, although since 1915 allowed, was strongly limited.³⁰

This practice was typical for Czech units in Russia up to the February revolution in 1917 and the end of monarchist regime. The new government suffered from demoralisation of the exhausted Russian army and was willing to use volunteer units more effec-

²⁷ VÁCHA, Dalibor. *Bratrstvo: Všední a dramatické dny československých legií v Rusku [Brotherhood: Everyday and dramatic days of Czechoslovak legions in Russia]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2015. s. 16.

²⁸ Ibid. s. 18-21.

²⁹ ORIÁN, Edmund a kol. *Československá legie v Rusku: Díl I. [Czechoslovak legion in Russia: Part I]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství EPOQUE 1900 a NAŠE VOJSKO, 2014. s. 15.

³⁰ BRÁDLEROVÁ, Daniela. *Vojáci nebo podnikatelé? Hospodářské a finanční activity československých legií během jejich anabáze v Rusku a na Sibiři [Soldiers or businessmen? Economic and financial activities of the Czechoslovak legions during their anabasis in Russia and Siberia]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Academia a Masarykův úřad a Archiv AV ČR, 2019. s. 24.

tively, as their will to fight was at much higher levels.³¹ This led to the first appearance of Czechoslovak riflemen brigade in Russia as a single unit in battle – the battle of Zborov.

3.2.2 From battle of Zborov to battle of Bachmač [Bakhmach]

The Provisional government of Russia attempted to restore rapidly falling morale of the army by launching a new offensive in the beginning of summer 1917 – so called July or Kerensky offensive (by the name of the contemporary prime minister Alexander Kerensky).³²

Due to the mentioned low morale, units that volunteered were used in the first place during the offensive. One of such was also the Czechoslovak rifle brigade, which succeeded Česká družina and at the time already counted more than 3500 members. Since its fighting capabilities were not yet certain, it was supposed to lead only relieving attack near the village of Zborov.³³

Czech and Slovak soldiers, used for unconventional reconnaissance tactics to cross the no man's land, proved themselves useful when they despite the command's expectations broke through three lines of trenches and defeated numerically and in equipment superior enemy.³⁴

This limited success could not save the disastrous offensive, but brought the legions to international recognition both in the Entente and Central Powers countries – the following investigation in the Austro-Hungarian army (its command suspected Czech units of retreating from legionnaires intentionally) inadvertently pointed out the existence of Czechoslovak legions to the population back in Bohemian lands.³⁵ As a result, Russian government lifted all restrictions from recruitment into legion and international community started to support the idea of independent Czech or Czechoslovak state, which was invaluable for the political branch of the resistance.³⁶

³¹ McNAMARA, Kevin J. *Dreams of a great small nation: The Mutinous Army that Threatened a Revolution, Destroyed an Empire, Founded a Republic, and Remade the Map of Europe*. 1st edition. New York: PublicAffairs, 2016. p. 130-131.

³² Ibid.

³³ ORIÁN, Edmund a kol. *Československá legie v Rusku: Díl I. [Czechoslovak legion in Russia: Part I]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství EPOQUE 1900 a NAŠE VOJSKO, 2014. s. 24.

³⁴ MOJŽIŠ, Milan a kol. *Československé legie 1914-1920 [Czechoslovak legions 1914-1920]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2017. s. 62.

³⁵ *Výstava ke stému výročí bitvy u Zborova [Exhibition dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Zborov]*. [online] In: Vojenský historický ústav Praha, 2017. [cit. 1. 8. 2020]

³⁶ McNAMARA, Kevin J. *Dreams of a great small nation: The Mutinous Army that Threatened a Revolution, Destroyed an Empire, Founded a Republic, and Remade the Map of Europe*. 1st edition. New York: PublicAffairs, 2016. p. 133.

By the time Bolshevik revolution hit Russia and started the civil war, the legion already consisted of more than 40 000 members.

In the turbulent situation it was decided that the legion will be evacuated to France and continue its fight there and until then it will not get involved in the civil war. At first, a small number of soldiers left through Archangelsk,³⁷ but when the winter made that way impassable, the Czechoslovak national council negotiated with the Bolsheviks and secured safe transport through Siberia to Vladivostok, where legion was supposed to board ships and get to France around the world. The price for this was continuing neutrality of legion in the civil war and surrender of most weapons in Penza.³⁸

However, at that moment most of the legion was still situated in Ukraine. This was after the Bolshevik government signed the peace of Brest-Litovsk but before it came into effect. Because of this, Austro-German forces were still advancing into Russian territory and were threatening to encircle and capture the legion. They caught up with them near railway hub of Bachmač [Bakhmach].

Here, for the first and last larger battle, the legion joined forces with the Red Army and managed to hold enemy forces at bay long enough to safely evacuate the whole army corps.³⁹

Battle of Bachmač [Bakhmach] was supposed to be the final battle of the legion on the East, but the path of history was way different.

3.2.3 The war in Siberia and return home

After surrendering most of their weapons, the echalons carrying legion entered Siberia, but very soon, the army found itself stretched along the whole Trans-Siberian railway. Soon after, the transports have stopped.

This was mostly caused by the ongoing civil war in combination with the Bolshevik government being obliged to repatriate all of POWs of the Central Powers.⁴⁰

The delay, along with lack of supplies and constant presence of communist agitators trying to convince legionnaires to join the Bolshevik cause led to growing tension between the legion and the Red Army.⁴¹

³⁷ ORIÁN, Edmund a kol. *Československá legie v Rusku: Díl I. [Czechoslovak legion in Russia: Part I]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství EPOQUE 1900 a NAŠE VOJSKO, 2014. s. 25.

³⁸ MOJŽIŠ, Milan a kol. *Československé legie 1914-1920 [Czechoslovak legions 1914-1920]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2017. s. 82.

³⁹ ORIÁN, Edmund a kol. *Československá legie v Rusku: Díl I. [Czechoslovak legion in Russia: Part I]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství EPOQUE 1900 a NAŠE VOJSKO, 2014. s. 29.

⁴⁰ MOJŽIŠ, Milan a kol. *Československé legie 1914-1920 [Czechoslovak legions 1914-1920]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2017. s. 82.

The fragile relationship finally collapsed on the 14th May 1918 in what is called Chelyabinsk incident.⁴²

The Branch of Czechoslovak national council in Russia tried to calm the situation down, but the damage was done and on 23rd May People's Commissar of Army and Navy Affairs Leon Trotsky issued a telegram which ordered local soviets to either incorporate the legionnaires into the Red Army or arrest them and put them to use as a labour force.⁴³ This was considered an effective declaration of war by the legion and so it was decided that the road to Vladivostok shall be opened by force if needed.⁴⁴

In several weeks' time, the fragmented legion was able to join back together and control the whole railway from Volga river to Vladivostok. While the original plan was just to open the way and leave war torn Russia, the Entente had other plans – the legion was to become a vanguard of an international intervention force against the revolutionaries.⁴⁵

At this moment all the abilities of Czechoslovak army in Russia were to be tested. It was underequipped and its numbers, slowly growing to almost 60 000 members⁴⁶ were absolutely not comparable with the Red Army, even when joined with allied White armies. Also not only fighting skills were needed, as in the turmoil of civil war, the legion had to build its own economy, healthcare, repair facilities and many more non-military aspects that usually stand behind an army. Because of this it had to put all available forces to their best use – pre-war bankers and economists were put in charge banks or sent to Japan and China to trade, pre-war engineers in charge of Siberian factories and

⁴¹ BRÁDLEROVÁ, Daniela. *Vojáci nebo podnikatelé? Hospodářské a finanční aktivity československých legií během jejich anabáze v Rusku a na Sibiři [Soldiers or businessmen? Economic and financial activities of the Czechoslovak legions during their anabasis in Russia and Siberia]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Academia a Masarykův úřad a Archiv AV ČR, 2019. s. 35.

⁴² While part of the legion was waiting on the platform of Chelyabinsk railway station a piece of metal was thrown from passing train carrying Austro-Hungarian POWs. This hit rifleman (private) František Ducháček in the head, causing him to fall unconscious. The rest of legionnaires managed to stop the train and find the perpetrator, who has been executed. A delegation of Czechoslovaks then went to the local soviet to explain the situation but were immediately arrested. The same happened to an officer sent to negotiate their release. This led to a revolt, in which legionnaires occupied the armoury, city soviet and prison, released their comrades and then retreated back to the railway station. BRÁDLEROVÁ, Daniela. *Vojáci nebo podnikatelé? Hospodářské a finanční aktivity československých legií během jejich anabáze v Rusku a na Sibiři [Soldiers or businessmen? Economic and financial activities of the Czechoslovak legions during their anabasis in Russia and Siberia]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Academia a Masarykův úřad a Archiv AV ČR, 2019. s. 38-39.

⁴³ Ibid. s. 39.

⁴⁴ ORIÁN, Edmund a kol. *Československá legie v Rusku: Díl I. [Czechoslovak legion in Russia: Part I]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství EPOQUE 1900 a NAŠE VOJSKO, 2014. s. 31.

⁴⁵ MOJŽIŠ, Milan a kol. *Československé legie 1914-1920 [Czechoslovak legions 1914-1920]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2017. s. 94.

⁴⁶ JAKL, Tomáš. *Evakuace československých vojáků z Vladivostoku [The evacuation of Czechoslovak soldiers from Vladivostok]*. [online] In: Vojenský historický ústav Praha, 2013. [cit. 3. 8. 2020]

mines etc.⁴⁷ And because of small numbers, this is also the first time we see the activity of women in the Czechoslovak army. Although they were still mostly in positions of support staff, e. g. merciful sisters (contemporary name for nurses), we can find exceptions.⁴⁸

Surprisingly the legion was able to hold the gained territory for several months, and even expanding it up to the city of Kazan for a time.⁴⁹ This success proved crucial even for the war in Europe, as hundreds of thousands of POWs who were supposed to return to Central Powers states were delayed and thus could not join the fighting before the end of the war.⁵⁰

However, the lack of promised help from the Entente, worsening conditions and witnessed atrocities started to undermine morale and general reluctance to fight the Bolsheviks was soon spreading through the legion. The legionnaires did not see the Russian civil war as their own and did not wish to risk their lives in it,⁵¹ especially since they volunteered to fight for establishing independent Czechoslovakia, which was done on the 28th October 1918.

This in combination with the collapse of anti-Bolshevik front on the border of Siberia led to the final decision to evacuate the legion back to Europe. This was done from 1919 to late 1920 through Vladivostok with the last transport arriving to Europe in the November 1920, two years after the ceasefire in the Great War.⁵²

3.3 Czechoslovak legions in France and Italy

While the legion in Russia was by far the most important for Czechoslovak resistance, nor it nor the Serbian one was the first one created. It was in France, where members of local Czech community volunteered and, as citizens of another country,

⁴⁷ This complicated topic analyses the already mentioned book: BRÁDLEROVÁ, Daniela. *Vojáci nebo podnikatelé? Hospodářské a finanční activity československých legií během jejich anabáze v Rusku a na Sibiři [Soldiers or businessmen? Economic and financial activities of the Czechoslovak legions during their anabasis in Russia and Siberia]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Academia a Masarykův úřad a Archiv AV ČR, 2019. 430 s.

⁴⁸ Such as Božena Seidlová, who gathered intelligence about positions and strength of both Bolshevik army and Czechoslovak corps and forwarded it to various groups of Czechoslovak Legion, effectively acting as both intelligence agent and messenger. More on her story in: SEIDLOVÁ HOLEČKOVÁ, Božena. *Přes bolševické fronty [Across the Bolshevik fronts]*. 4. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Památníku odboje, 1923. 140 s.

⁴⁹ ORIÁN, Edmund a kol. *Československá legie v Rusku: Díl I. [Czechoslovak legion in Russia: Part I]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství EPOQUE 1900 a NAŠE VOJSKO, 2014. s. 35-36.

⁵⁰ MOJŽIŠ, Milan a kol. *Československé legie 1914-1920 [Czechoslovak legions 1914-1920]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2017. s. 86.

⁵¹ Ibid. s. 102.

⁵² BRÁDLEROVÁ, Daniela. *Vojáci nebo podnikatelé? Hospodářské a finanční activity československých legií během jejich anabáze v Rusku a na Sibiři [Soldiers or businessmen? Economic and financial activities of the Czechoslovak legions during their anabasis in Russia and Siberia]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Academia a Masarykův úřad a Archiv AV ČR, 2019. s. 79-87.

entered the French foreign legion, within it creating almost exclusively Czech company called Rota Nazdar ("Nazdar" is traditional Czech hail used typically by members of Sokol movement). This unit however did not last long as it was destroyed in the battle of Arras between May and June 1915.⁵³

Since there were no Czech POWs in France (Austro-Hungarian units, with several insignificant exceptions, did not fight on the Western front) and the potential of Czech community here was exhausted, it was not until 1917 when the legion in France was recreated. This was because of arrival of volunteers from the USA and evacuation of a small part of the legion in Russia.⁵⁴ In the end it consisted of almost ten thousand Czech and Slovak soldiers and fought in battles at Terron and Vouzieurs.⁵⁵

The situation in Italy at the time was far more complicated. It might have seemed as the ideal place for forming Czechoslovak unit, as Italian kingdom fought against Austro-Hungarian units and thus there were large numbers of Czech and Slovak POWs in local camps. However, recognising Western Slavs right for independence would effectively mean recognising the same right for Southern Slavs, which would be in direct conflict with Italian territorial claims around Adriatic Sea.⁵⁶

This stance was reconsidered after the massive Italian defeat at Caporetto and successes of the legion on the Eastern front and so on the beginning of 1918 the legion in Italy was established.⁵⁷ Its core was made up of veteran soldiers evacuated from Russia (some of them even veterans of Serbian army) and the rest consisted of volunteers from the ranks of former POWs. By the end of the war it had around twenty thousand members.⁵⁸

While these two legions played an important part in the fight for Czechoslovak independence, their impact on the topic was minimal and so they will not be described further.

⁵³ STRAKA, Karel. *Rota Nazdar: nejen o památném boji z 9. května 1915* [Company Nazdar: Not only about the memorable fight of 9th May 1915]. [online] In: Vojenský historický ústav Praha, 2013. [cit. 31. 7. 2020]

⁵⁴ MOJŽIŠ, Milan a kol. *Československé legie 1914-1920* [Czechoslovak legions 1914-1920]. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2017. s. 154.

⁵⁵ Ibid. s. 166 a 172.

⁵⁶ *Úmluva mezi italskou vládou a Československou národní radou o uznání samostatné čs. armády v Itálii, Řím, 21. dubna 1918* [Convention between the Italian Government and the Czechoslovak National Council on the Recognition of the Independent Czechoslovak Army in Italy, Rome, 21st April 1918]. [online] In: Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky, 2018. [cit. 2. 8. 2020]

⁵⁷ MOJŽIŠ, Milan a kol. *Československé legie 1914-1920* [Czechoslovak legions 1914-1920]. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2017. s. 262.

⁵⁸ STRAKA, Karel. *Čs. Jednotky za první světové války v Itálii měly až 20 000 vojáků* [Czechoslovak units in Italy during the World War I had up to 20 000 soldiers]. [online] In: Vojenský historický ústav Praha, 2013. [cit. 7. 8. 2020]

3.4 The fate of legions

After their return, the legionnaires were praised as national heroes and thus gaining many benefits. They also formed the core of a new Czechoslovak army and fought in so called “wars of integrity” with Poland and Hungary.⁵⁹

During the period of the First Czechoslovak republic (1918-1938) legionnaires formed the core of a new Czechoslovak army and other security forces (gendarmerie, police etc.).

The fame of legions had ended with the First Czechoslovak Republic, as both the Nazi and the communist regimes were seeking to erase the legacy of legionary movement from Czech and Slovak history and the modern Czech and Slovak republics have only recently started to restore legionnaires to their place in history, with both benefits and damages their actions brought.

4 Women in the legion

It is very difficult to find out the exact number of women serving with the legion, since none of legionnaire databases allows search based on sex or any other way, to determine the sought number.⁶⁰ However, the Muzeum československých legií [Museum of Czechoslovak legions] attempted to get the number when it published a short memento dedicated to women serving with the legion in Russia on its Facebook profile.⁶¹ The final number found was 99, but this is probably underestimated, as I was able

⁵⁹ KYKAL, Tomáš. *Válka o Slovensko v roce 1919 [War for Slovakia in the year 1919]*. [online] In: Vojenský historický ústav Praha, 2019. [cit. 7. 8. 2020]

and JAKL, Tomáš; STRAKA, Karel. *Před sto lety: československo-polské boje o Těšínsko [Hundred years ago: Czechoslovak-Polish fights for Cieszyn region]*. [online] In: Vojenský historický ústav Praha, 2019. [cit. 7. 8. 2020]

⁶⁰ There are two official databases of legionnaires.

<http://www.vuapraha.cz/fallensoldierdatabase> - the first one is run by the Vojenský ústřední archiv [Central Military Archive]. It is older, not as nice as the second one and contains a bit less information, yet it is backed by a Ministry of Defence and thus it seems more valid from the outside.

<http://legie100.com/krev-legionare/> - the second one is run by the Československá obec legionářská [Organisation of Czechoslovak legionnaires]. Originally it contained the same information as the aforementioned one, but it is being constantly expanded, thus at the moment many entries contain photos or other details about the individuals described. On the other hand, it seemingly does not have an authority as strong backing it and it has its own flaws (e.g. extreme case sensitiveness).

⁶¹ See:

<https://www.facebook.com/Muzeumlegii/photos/a.2280923871993305/2773026466116374/?type=3&theater>

to find more only through random searching female first names in the database.⁶² Based on this search I assume that up to two hundred entries of women can be found there.

Even though Czech society was quite progressive in the area of rights of women (e.g. even the first Czechoslovak constitution, the Constitution of 1920, contained suffrage for women⁶³), the idea of women serving in the army directly was still too ahead of time,⁶⁴ but we can find records about them serving at least with the army (not as its integral part, with one exception, which will be described later) since the 1918.

Through exploring the database, I was able to confirm, that the absolute majority of women served as merciful sisters in field and later even full-fledged rear hospitals – since the revolt against the Bolsheviks, hospitals began to be established in the controlled cities, first of them being in Chelyabinsk and others being added soon after.

The need for them arose especially after the fall of monarchy, when the Russian medical staff, originally assigned to the Czechoslovak unit, fled.⁶⁵ Since 1918 we can find nurses serving with the legion, even wearing signs of Czechoslovak organisations on photographs,⁶⁶ although majority of merciful sisters were still formed by Russians or other allied nationalities (e.g. Japanese), who were only rarely considered part of Czechoslovakian units in Russia and thus there are not many entries about them in the archives.

Generally, the hospitals set up by Czechoslovaks, and their respective staff, including its female members, enjoyed respect of the soldiers, as opposed to the local Russian hospitals.⁶⁷

Next to women serving in the field of healthcare, we can come across several individuals, who by coincidence ended up doing specific tasks or serving the cause of the

⁶² Also, through contacting a representative of the museum I found out that their number was only approximate, based on looking up suffix -ová, which is typical for female surnames in Czech, but is not the only one possible, neither it does consider women with Russian or generally unconventional surnames (e.g. Věra Gatti - <http://legie100.com/krev-legionare/25616/>).

⁶³ “All citizens of the Czechoslovak Republic, regardless of gender, who have exceeded the age of 21 and meet the other conditions of the Rules of Election to the Chamber of Deputies have the right to vote in the Chamber of Deputies.” § 9 zákona č. 121/1920 Sb. kterým se uvozuje ústavní listina Československé republiky. In: Beck-online [právní informační system]. C. H. Beck [cit. 5. 8. 2020]

⁶⁴ This have changed during the World War II with creation of Czechoslovak Army in exile in the USSR.

⁶⁵ VÁCHA, Dalibor. *Ostrovky v bouři: Každodenní život československých legií v ruské občanské válce [Islands in the storm: Everyday life of Czechoslovak Legions in the Russian Civil War]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epocha, 2016. s. 211-213.

⁶⁶ E.g. ORIÁN, Edmund a kol. *Československá legie v Rusku: Díl I [Czechoslovak legion in Russia: Part I]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství EPOQUE 1900 a NAŠE VOJSKO, 2014. s. 292, obr. č. 537.

⁶⁷ VÁCHA, Dalibor. *Ostrovky v bouři: Každodenní život československých legií v ruské občanské válce [Islands in the storm: Everyday life of Czechoslovak Legions in the Russian Civil War]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epocha, 2016. s. 216.

Czechoslovak movement in unusual way. This includes females serving as reconnaissance, messengers⁶⁸ or serving virtually illegally.⁶⁹ Even though these formed only a minority, the abnormality of their cases makes them ideal for analysing the effect of the examined legislature.

5 Legal status of a legionnaire

After the establishment of free Czechoslovakia, a task arose to find a way to reward those, who risked their lives and honour for the idea of independence.⁷⁰

A system was soon adopted, by which legionnaires were to receive special pension as well as privileges in civil service. In practice, this meant that they were prioritised when applying for positions in the army, gendarmerie, police or other state controlled services, had priority in promotions and every year of service in legions counted as three years in civil service when it came to ranks and salary⁷¹ (from a certain point of view this could be seen as an injustice of a kind, as a thirty years old police officer serving for eight years was treated equally as twenty-three years old novice who served for three years in the legion).

At this point, it was necessary to legally distinguish who is a legionnaire and who is not, so that it would be possible to distribute the benefits effectively.⁷² In 1919 and 1920 an act no. 462/1919 Sb. and governmental regulation no. 151/1920 Sb. were issued, determining who is considered a legionnaire. This regulation strictly defined a legionnaire as a person, who applied to “join the Czechoslovak revolutionary army before 28th October 1918 and served until this date”⁷³ and who had done so “voluntarily,

⁶⁸ E. g. aforementioned Božena Seidlová - <http://legie100.com/krev-legionare/94020/>

⁶⁹ E. g. aforementioned Věra Gatti - <http://legie100.com/krev-legionare/25616/>

⁷⁰ MOJŽIŠ, Milan a kol. *Československé legie 1914-1920 [Czechoslovak legions 1914-1920]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2017. s. 448.

⁷¹ MICHL, Jan. *Legionáři v Československu [Legionnaires in Czechoslovakia]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství NAŠE VOJSKO, 2009. s. 30.

⁷² MOJŽIŠ, Milan a kol. *Československé legie 1914-1920 [Czechoslovak legions 1914-1920]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2017. s. 448.

⁷³ “**A legionnaire is any volunteer of the Czechoslovak Legionary (Revolutionary-Foreign) Army who was included in it on the basis of an application made to the competent authority or representative of the Czechoslovak National Council in Paris or one of its branches no later than October 28, 1918**, completely voluntarily, without any coercion, or an order of the Czechoslovak National Council or another Czechoslovak revolutionary body given the authority, and on the day of the coup, i.e. October 28, 1918, actually served in it according to his assignment - or who credibly proves that for reasons not depending on his power and will, could not be present on that day in the place of the relevant enlisting and assigning Czechoslovak military authority for assignment - or who was duly released from it.” § 2 zákona č. 462/1919 Sb. o propůjčování míst legionářům. In: Beck-online [právní informační systém]. C. H. Beck [cit. 30. 7. 2020]

immediately and unconditionally to serve wielding a weapon".⁷⁴ Though there were more conditions present and even some exceptions existed, these two are going to be the ones important for the topic of this paper. The first one as the most questionable from the contemporary point of view (since many who fought in Russia joined later and still considered themselves legionnaires) and the second one as the piece of legislation, which indirectly excluded women from gaining legionnaire status.

There were several exceptions from both rules. Joining before 28th October 1918 could be bypassed by proving, that the applying person wanted to join the legion, but was unable to do so because of reasons beyond their means.⁷⁵ Leaving before the specified date was excusable if the person was duly released prior.⁷⁶ As for serving with a weapon, it was obvious that some members of the legion would not be able fulfil this condition because of their service as doctors, teachers, propagandists etc. Because of this, the governmental regulation no. 151/1920 Sb. included article 5 drafted specifically for these situations. This article stated that some kinds of service, explicitly marked as such by the competent authorities, are considered equal to the service in arms (with a weapon), but only if a person applied for service with a weapon first.⁷⁷

These two conditions are an understandable reaction of the legislator on the difficult situation, which occurred after the war - many POWs, especially in Italy, have applied for the Czechoslovak army after establishing of the republic, as this was the fastest way to leave Italian prisoner camps and get home to fight in wars for integrity (these soldiers were later called "Militia battalions" so that they can be distinguished from Italian legionnaires),⁷⁸ that there existed many labour battalions, members of which how-

⁷⁴ **"Service in the legions begins, if there is a written application, by which one voluntarily undertook immediately and unconditionally with a weapon in hand to fight for the liberation of the Czechoslovak nation, the date of this application;** the application is substituted by a written confirmation from the authorities accepting applications entitled that the legionnaire duly registered with them." Čl. 2 vládního nařízení č. 151/1920 Sb., jímž se provádí zákon ze dne 24. Července 1919 č. 462 Sb. z. a n., o propůjčování míst legionářům. In: Beck-online [právní informační systém]. C. H. Beck [cit. 30. 7. 2020]

⁷⁵ "... or who credibly proves that for reasons not depending on his power and will, could not be present on that day in the place of the relevant enlisting and assigning Czechoslovak military authority for assignment - or who was duly released from it." § 2 zákona č. 462/1919 Sb. o propůjčování míst legionářům. In: Beck-online [právní informační systém]. C. H. Beck [cit. 30. 7. 2020]

⁷⁶ "... or who credibly proves that for reasons not depending on his power and will, could not be present on that day in the place of the relevant enlisting and assigning Czechoslovak military authority for assignment - or who was duly released from it." § 2 zákona č. 462/1919 Sb. o propůjčování míst legionářům. In: Beck-online [právní informační systém]. C. H. Beck [cit. 30. 7. 2020]

⁷⁷ "The service in arms is equated with political, promotional, defence service, teaching, etc., if an explicit provision of the competent authorities of the foreign movement (i.e. the Czechoslovak National Council in Paris and its branches and offices in Russia, Italy, America and England) declared it as such, **but only if the person concerned applied for service in arms within the meaning of Article 2 of this Regulation.**" Čl. 5 vládního nařízení č. 151/1920 Sb., jímž se provádí zákon ze dne 24. Července 1919 č. 462 Sb. z. a n., o propůjčování míst legionářům. In: Beck-online [právní informační systém]. C. H. Beck [cit. 30. 7. 2020]

⁷⁸ MOJŽIŠ, Milan a kol. *Československé legie 1914-1920 [Czechoslovak legions 1914-1920]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Epoque, 2017. s. 284.

ever did not take the risk of being marked traitors and that desertions from the legion, which occurred especially in Russia (soldiers defecting to the Red Army)⁷⁹ should be somehow punished, or at least not rewarded.

In the end, however, these regulations created a situation, where many of those, who served in the legion, were not considered legionnaires (generally this meant members of the legion in Russia volunteering after the 28th October 1918) and on the other hand many receiving legionnaire status despite not serving in the legion (usually Czechs and Slovaks serving in other Entente armies, especially the US army). Even though there was no dispute about granting the status to soldiers fighting in other Entente armies, although not directly under the legion, there were voices objecting against the fact, that men who fought for almost two years against the Red Army were excluded from gaining the status,⁸⁰ even though they took part in gaining bargaining advantage to the Czechoslovak delegation at the Versailles peace conference.⁸¹

This dispute largely overshadowed the fact that the law indirectly discriminated women, taking any chance to apply for the legionnaire status and benefits from them (although truth be told, many of the benefits were not even suited for women – e.g. posts in the army).

This was caused by the fact that women were not even considered for the service with a weapon and thus it was not possible for them to join the legion the way article 2 of the regulation no. 151/1920 Sb. expected legionnaires to, thus their status was officially suspended.⁸² It was not even possible to use the art. 5 of this regulation, because it still required enlistment to fight with a weapon based on the condition in art. 2 and this kind of service was still by default out of reach for women. The fact, that women are not considered legionnaires from the legal point of view due to the construction of this legislation and the contemporary law is a logical deduction based on the aforementioned information. I was originally intending to use this as a result of my research, but recently this was proven to me through the fact, that several women have this explicitly

⁷⁹ MICHL, Jan. *Legionáři v Československu [Legionnaires in Czechoslovakia]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství NAŠE VOJSKO, 2009. s. 16.

⁸⁰ MICHL, Jan. *Legionáři v Československu [Legionnaires in Czechoslovakia]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství NAŠE VOJSKO, 2009. s. 16.

⁸¹ BRÁDLEROVÁ, Daniela. *Vojáci nebo podnikatelé? Hospodářské a finanční activity československých legií během jejich anabáze v Rusku a na Sibiři [Soldiers or businessmen? Economic and financial activities of the Czechoslovak legions during their anabasis in Russia and Siberia]*. 1. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Academia a Masarykův úřad a Archiv AV ČR, 2019. s. 67-68.

⁸² They were declared "Not a legionnaire according to act no. 462/1919 Sb. z. a n." the same way as soldiers entering service after 28th October 1918. Cf. documents of First Class Sergeant Josef Střebovský and merciful sister Anežka Kašparová.

written in their entries in the database as a reason for not being considered a legionnaire.⁸³

I was not able to find any reports about women objecting against the legislation and thus I assume that they either did not try to change this and accepted it as a fact or the objections were not effective enough for any records to have been preserved.

In the end, due to general passivity and absence of any associating organisation, the women serving with the legion were sidelined and out of the official or public concern.

6 Demonstrative and specific cases

6.1 Merciful sister Anežka Kašparová,⁸⁴ the general example

With merciful sister Anežka Kašparová we can see a typical case of a Czech woman serving in the legion even before 28th October 1918, thus before the limiting date which states act no 462/1919 Sb.

From her entry in the database we can find out that her service was not long, but officials back home still considered it important to look into her records and determine if she is to receive status of a legionnaire and if not, why. Because of this we can see explicitly stated, that she was not eligible because of lack of service “with weapon”, thus the aforementioned art. 2 of regulation no. 151/1920 Sb. came into effect here.

Therefore, in her case we see general answer of official resolution of the issue of women serving with the legion.

6.2 Božena Seidlová,⁸⁵ the messenger

Božena Seidlová was born in Prague in 1897, but in 1918 she lived in Chisinau in Moldavia. Here she was tasked by a Czechoslovak officer, cut off from the rest of the legion by the Red Army, to deliver a message to the Czechoslovak forces and find out their exact location.

He was expecting this to be a relatively simple journey by train, as he thought that the legion is to be found around Penza.⁸⁶

⁸³ E. g. Anežka Kašparová - <http://www.legie100.com/krev-legionare/37569/>

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ SEIDLOVÁ HOLEČKOVÁ, Božena. *Přes bolševické fronty [Across the Bolshevik fronts]*. 4. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Památníku odboje, 1923. 140 s. - book version of Seidlová's diary.

Also entry in the database: <http://legie100.com/krev-legionare/94020/>

⁸⁶ SEIDLOVÁ HOLEČKOVÁ, Božena. *Přes bolševické fronty [Across the Bolshevik fronts]*. 4. vyd. Praha: Nakladatelství Památníku odboje, 1923. s. 12.

From her published diary I mentioned before in the notes, we know that she had to travel up to Stavropol (near Samara, more than 300 kilometres east from Penza) to find the Czechoslovak army.⁸⁷ There, after delivering the message and a few days of rest, she has volunteered to go back with a reply⁸⁸ and was able not only to get back to Chisinau, but also turn around and find the legion again, this time at Abdulin.⁸⁹

After that, it was decided that the fourth journey would be too dangerous and so she travelled to Czechoslovakia with the rest of the army through Vladivostok.

From memories of Czechoslovak soldiers in the legion who mention her in written memories, we can see that she was popular and respected amongst them – *She is a true sister coming to her brothers. We all loved sister Boženka.*⁹⁰ This text, a part of preface written by a legionnaire František Langer for a book release of her diary, not only shows the positive feelings the soldiers had for her, but also points out an important detail of how the soldiers perceived her. The legionnaires were used to call each other brother, a custom inherited from the Sokol movement. Call someone openly “a sister” meant that she was considered one of them, member of the legion and their social group.

Nevertheless, even this woman has her documents marked by an austere stamp “Not a legionnaire...”.⁹¹ Since most of her documents were stolen from the archive in 1946,⁹² the reason for this is not confirmable at the moment, but given the fact she is fulfilling all the other conditions, it makes sense to assume, that it was again because of the lack of service with a weapon (art. 2 of regulation no. 151/1920 Sb.).

6.3 Věra Gatti,⁹³ the rifleman merciful sister

Věra Gatti, a Russian student of philosophy, joined the legion as a volunteer on 5th September 1918 after completing three months long merciful sister course. It is essential to point out that her joining was illegal – she has joined the 1st rifleman regiment of the legion directly, being allowed to do so by the commander of the regiment. Since recruiting merciful sisters was not within his authority, she joined as a “rifleman merciful

⁸⁷ Ibid. s. 37.

⁸⁸ Ibid. s. 47.

⁸⁹ Ibid. s. 139.

⁹⁰ Ibid. s. 3.

⁹¹ VUA Praha, fond Kancelář československých legií, kartotéka – K [Documents from the Central military archive, Prague]

⁹² Legionnaire database - <http://legie100.com/krev-legionare/94020/>

⁹³ Legionnaire database - <http://legie100.com/krev-legionare/25616/>

sister” (rifleman is contemporary name for nowadays rank of private), thus being officially considered a soldier.⁹⁴

This conduct sparked a dispute between the commander of the 1st rifleman regiment and medical chief of the army, who considered this as interference with his authority. The situation was resolved by rifleman Gatti joining the legion again on 13th June 1919, this time officially and correctly, i.e. only as a nurse and with permission of the medical chief.⁹⁵

From her other documentation we can find out that on 27th July 1919 she received praise from the commander for “heroic medical aid in battle” and also that she was discharged from the legion on her own request on 21st December 1919.⁹⁶ I was not able to find out anything about her after leaving the army, but as interesting as it could have been, it is not as important for the purpose of this paper as her theoretical legal position.

Her documents are remarkable in one more aspect, that being she is not marked “Not a legionnaire...” in them.⁹⁷ This could be just a mistake of a clerk, but given the thoroughness which the other women are marked with and her specific way of joining the legion, it is more likely that from the legal point of view this was actually impossible, as she met the requirements of receiving the status of legionnaire – she had joined the legion before 28th October 1918, did not leave before this date and through the improvised way she was recruited she actually on paper volunteered to serve with a weapon, thus even receiving a military rank. By this, she fulfilled the conditions expected from the exception offered by the art. 5 of regulation no. 151/1920 – although she did not serve with a weapon in the end, she volunteered to do so (at least from the official point of view) and thus there was no reason not to use this legal instrument.

Because of this coincidence, Věra Gatti may be the only officially recognised female legionnaire, though it is unknown (and highly improbable) that she has ever drawn any of the benefits arising from this status.

Conclusion

Although I have been able to determine the main legal requirements for women to receive status of a legionnaire, these have turned to be indirectly discriminatory to the point, that it was practically impossible for a common female serving with the Czechoslovak legion in Russia to fulfil them.

⁹⁴ VUA Praha, fond Kancelář československých legií, kartotéka – K

⁹⁵ VUA Praha, fond Kancelář československých legií, kartotéka – K

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

With this in mind, I was able to briefly describe the position of women serving the Czechoslovak cause during the World War I on the Eastern front and especially during the Russian civil war. This was due to the legislation, specifically an act no. 462/1919 Sb. and a governmental regulation no. 151/1920 Sb., which introduced legal status of a legionnaire under conditions, which were not reachable for women under normal circumstances – they were required to apply to join the legion serving with a weapon, which was not possible for women at the time. I was also able to identify several specific cases, to demonstrate both the general and unordinary service of women with this army. During this I was also able to identify a merciful sister, who is due to concurrence of circumstances probably actually the only legally recognised Czechoslovak legionnaire.

This paper aimed to offer basic insight into this yet unexplored topic and open field for its further research, which, by my opinion should be aimed on exploring the individual cases more in detail, especially the unusual ones, such as are those of Božena Seidlová and Věra Gatti.

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