

**Charles University in Prague**

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Zdenko M a r š á l e k

ABSTRACT OF THE PhD THESIS

**„Česká“, nebo „československá“ armáda?**

**Národnostní složení československých vojenských jednotek  
v zahraničí v letech 1939–1945**

**“Czech”, or “Czechoslovak” Army?**

**The ethnic and nationality composition  
of the Czechoslovak military units-in-exile in 1939-1945**

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# ABSTRACT

## General background

One of the most important phenomena, which is important especially in current and future Europe, is the problem of the personal self-identification of individuals in the multinational and multicultural environment of higher (e.g., political) units, in particular national self-identification. For research about the problems connected with this phenomenon, the sample of the Czechoslovak units-in-exile during the World War II is an almost ideal historical model. The Czechoslovak units were, by far, the most diverse armed forces among the all exile-armies; yet this issue has not attracted the attention it deserves, neither in terms of different nationalities, nor from the perspective of ethnic issues in the units as a whole.

The issue of the nationality in the resistance-in-exile was determined by the needs of propaganda. A certain “picture of an ideal resistance fighter”, who was supposed to be a Czech or Slovak who decides to escape from the occupied homeland and to engage in armed struggle for the re-liberation of Czechoslovakia, was thus created already during the war. While this group included only a few thousand people, most soldiers recruited over time came from other recruitment sources, for example from compatriot communities, economic exiles or Czechoslovak citizens who were forced to serve in the German *Wehrmacht*, Slovak, and Hungarian Armies, or the so called Government Troops of the Protectorate. However, a large part of these men did not correspond to the above mentioned propagandistic picture for various reasons, such as their motivation to join the resistance, their fighting morale and also their ethnicity. The rise in their numbers was, to a significant extent, made possible by members of ethnic minorities or soldiers who did not correspond to the propagandistic picture of the “ideal resistance fighter”. It was not politically desirable to emphasize these facts in any of the ensuing decades.

## Methodology

The main subject of the work became the question if and to what extent it could be useful to apply the statistical processing methods to a historical research and what particular results we could expect from such an approach. The objective of the work is not to present an exhaustive work on the topic of the ethnic composition of the Czechoslovak exile units. To the contrary, it has essentially focused only on a single aspect - “mere” numerical representation. It is the plain numerical representation that is a very beneficial method for exploring this issue, too often burdened with emotional influences and personal value preferences.

The work is mainly based on the files of the personal evidence of the Czechoslovak units-in-exile. These data are compared with the unique electronic database of the members of the Czechoslovak units-in-exile, which allows for random cross-comparisons of selected criteria (e.g., mutual links of social origin, education or health, and their relationship with national characteristics).

## **Objectives of the work**

**The main objective** is to determine the possibilities of using basic statistical methods in historical research. **The second objective** is to capture the development of the ethnic structure in the exile units. The demonstration of the compatibility problems between empirical research and the humanities for a particular case is a **secondary objective**.

## **Findings and conclusions**

The ethnic composition of the Czechoslovak exile units varied significantly across different territories as well as within any single territory over time. One of the important findings is the effort of the exile authorities to divide evenly the number of members of individual nationalities in the units in the West, including the lowest levels of their organizational hierarchy.

The study has confirmed one of the initial hypotheses, i.e. the impossibility of using statistical methods to explore the issue of ethnic structure. Most of all, it has been demonstrated that it is not possible to exactly determine the ethnicity of individual persons based on the available personal data. The hypothesis about the problematic nature of definitions of individual national categories has thus been confirmed.

Apparent political influences were demonstrated in the initial part of the study, dedicated to the historical circumstances of the origin of criteria for statistical determination of the nationalistic structure in Czechoslovakia. These influences affected the seemingly purely technical process of the statistical census.

## **Characteristics**

The thesis shows the noteworthy potential offered by quantitative approach methods, provided their real possibilities are understood. The study demonstrates significant limits for using statistical methods in the discipline of history. On the other hand, it shows how much exact sciences are, from their very nature, based on the virtual reality of a given artificial environment, thus being too theoretical to be useful in the social sciences.

However, most of all, the study maps the development of and changes in the ethnic composition of Czechoslovak exile units during World War II. It thus provides a new insight into the question of mutual coexistence of nations and individual ethnic groups within a single state and into the problems that the members of individual minorities faced in Czechoslovakia during the interwar period and in the resistance abroad during World War II.