

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to outline the share of airmen from the Czech lands in the formation, organizational and personnel construction, technical development and operational deployment of the Austro-Hungarian Air Force in the pre-war period and especially during World War 1. Simultaneously, this work will also try to determine their percentage share in the entire Austro-Hungarian Army and Naval Air Forces.

The national (or provincial) origin of the personnel of the Austro-Hungarian Air Force has not yet been the subject of historical research in any of the successor states. The reason was the fact that this young weapon was not statistically monitored - unlike other weapons. For Austrian historiography, the ethnic composition of the Austro-Hungarian aviation was not a subject of adequate attention. In Czech and Czechoslovakian historiography, for a long time, it was stated that number of the Czech airmen in the Austro-Hungarian Air Force was "insignificant".

However, this age-old thesis, which has never been credibly proven, is subject to criticism in this work, leading to its re-evaluation. In particular, the reconstruction and analysis of statistically relevant samples of people revealed that in fact the representation of airmen from the Czech lands was above average and the Czechs had a solid representation in it. Nevertheless, it is not the one that would correspond to their ethnic representation throughout the monarchy. At the same time, the causes of this state, both objective and subjective, are outlined.

The work is divided into several parts. The first outlines the genesis and pre-war origins of the Austro-Hungarian military aviation, including its notable, often decisive, "Czech" connections - both ethnic and provincial. As was the case with other states, aviation was initially the domain of the civil sphere. The military sphere was penetrated only with difficulties, given by the overall industrial backwardness of the Habsburg monarchy, the fiscal policy of the state, and the conservative attitude of the army commanders.

This is followed by an outline of its organizational, personal and technical development and operational deployment on the WW 1 battlefields: in Russia, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Romania and especially in Italy, a largest and most challenging battlefield of the Austro-Hungarian Air Force.

Other chapters are devoted to the issue of the share of pilots from the Czech lands and methodological pitfalls in their discovery. Simultaneously, in this part, the representation of Czechs and Czech Germans is outlined by some selected units of the Austro-Hungarian Air Force - from the elite units to the most typical units. It will also give examples of units commanded by ethnic Czechs, from the lowest to the highest level of command.

In this context, the issue of the loyalty of the nationally diverse Austro-Hungarian Air Force is discussed with the emphasis on its Czech members. It analyzes its predominantly historical and psychological reasons. There is not forgotten the fact that some of the prisoners-of-war chose to enter the "enemy" troops and analyze the causes. Thus this work should simultaneously represent a contribution to the so-called discourse over the Czech soldier during the WW 1.

Extensive is the annex part of the work. Its widest part consists of detailed case studies of more than fifty airmen from the Czech lands. The final table part is dominated by the personnel composition of the command bodies of the various components of the Air Force, the lists of recipients of high honors and the most successful airmen's list.

Although it is a partial and specific issue, it is possible to trace and document certain general developmental trends not only in the Austro-Hungarian and, respectively, the Czechoslovak armed forces, but also in their national societies in the first decades of the 20th century.

Keywords

Austro-Hungarian Army, Austro-Hungarian Navy, Austro-Hungarian Air Force, World War 1, ethnical composition, Czech-German relations, history of aviation, aerial operations