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Johann Banér in Bohemia. The military implications of “Baner’s Blitzkrieg” to Bohemia¹

Keywords: Thirty Years’ War, Bohemia, Johann Banér, Battle of Preßnitz, military aspects, military logistics, Sweden, Ore Mountains

Abstract: The presented study deals with the period of the second half of the Thirty Years’ War in Bohemia that has not been closely observed so far. Nonetheless, it was a stage of the conflict, which had fatal consequences for the countries of the Czech Crown in the form of their great destruction and losses. The name of Johann Banér is well-known in Czech historiography, but only very little critically studied and evaluated.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present to the readers an overview of the developments in Bohemia in 1639–1641 when the area became of key importance to Jo-

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hann Banér's intention to move to the epicentre of the war. He wanted to be closer to Vienna and, specifically, to ensure his army's security in the fertile Elbe lowlands. However, this is anything but a complete overview as many details of this expedition took place in a large area of northwestern, northern and northeastern Bohemia. Rather, an effort has been made to evaluate the perception of the Swedish High Command's logistics and its view of the importance of the defined location. This has been done mainly by excerpting archival sources stored in the State Regional and State District Archives of the Czech Republic. These resources have been supplemented by copies of the available editions of sources and the mentioned secondary literature.

A closer look at the Czech historiography focusing on the period of the Thirty Years' War may surprise the readers with the breadth of professional interest in the topics. Virtually every generation since *the founding fathers* of the Czech historical school in the late 19th century has tried to comment on borderline situations and personalities. Terms like *the pre-White Mountain and the post-White Mountain period* (i.e. before and after the Battle of White Mountain) are regarded standard terms, which, however, must be further specified. From the point of view of religion, the year of 1609 was absolutely crucial as a time when, in the Czech Crown territory, Emperor Rudolf II issued Rudolf's Imperial Charter confirming the Czech confession. Events leading to the Third Prague Defenestration in May 1618 were closely connected with the document, specifically with its observance. At the same time, the time preceding the Battle of White Mountain was accompanied by economic development of towns and the nobility (it is referred to as *the golden age of the Estates*). Frequently, the beginning of this epoch is marked by the accession of Ferdinand I of Habsburg (1526–1564) and his centralization efforts, the defeat on White Mountain, the humiliation of the remaining points of resistance, especially the conquest of the Klodsko fortress (in German Glatz) in 1622. The nearly four (in fact only two years of the Czech Uprising of 1618–1620/1622) have become the subject of a huge number of publications and academic or popular outputs. It remains a subject of a heated discussion, especially that of the general public. However, the mainstream interest in this period ended with the execution of 27 representatives of the uprising, carried out on 21 June 1621.² It was renewed only during the study of Albrecht von

² It would be a mistake to assume that historical interest in this topic has been slight in recent years. At present, for example, groundbreaking biographies of individual actors of the uprisings and studies focused on economic changes before and after the Czech Estates uprising are being developed: M. Vařeka, *Lichtenštejnská panství na Moravě do Bílé hory*, Ostrava 2020; idem,

Wallenstein (1588–1634), especially the time of the Second Generalate (in the war with King Gustav II Adolph of Sweden [1594–1632]). His assassination in Cheb is one of historical mysteries as his alleged betrayal of Emperor Ferdinand II has not been established until the present day.

The processes and events in the following 20 to 25 years (until the so-called Iberian Peace of 1659) are of only marginal interest in the Czech historiography. With regard to the so-called Swedish phase of the Thirty Years' War,³ especially its direct influence on the Czech Crown territory in the 1640s, researchers' attention focuses more on local issues or extraordinary events (such as the Battle of Jankov or the siege of Brno in 1645) but often unrelated to the neighbouring countries and without any emphasis on the superpower policy of the Kingdom of Sweden. Nevertheless, the interest in the *stormakstiden* (1611–1721) has a long tradition dating back to František Beda Dudík (1815–1890), one of the first editors of sources on the Swedish operations in Bohemia and Moravia between 1640 and 1660.⁴ Ernst Denis, a French historian, undertook professional elaboration on the Czech history in the early modern period. Owing to a considerable distance, he managed to avoid a national bias of this complex period.⁵ However, it was not until Miroslav Hroch and his fundamental contribution, coupled with systematization of the Swedish archives from 1959, that systematic research work could commence.⁶ Miroslav Hroch dealt mainly with the northern European maritime trade and the general crisis of the early modern period.⁷ Josef Pekař also adopted an approach modern and unique for his time; however, to him the war was the cause of closely monitored changes in one estate in Bohemia from 1637 to the 19th century.⁸ Josef Polišenský, a leading Czech historian who dealt with European politics during the Thirty Years' War,

Vermögensbasis der Liechtensteiner in Mähren bis 1620, *Przegląd Historyczny* 101 (2010) 4, pp. 641–649.

³ This means the period from the landing of the Swedish army in northern Germany to the siege of Prague and the signing of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

⁴ B. Dudík, *Schweden in Böhmen und Mähren (1640–1660)*, Vienna 1879.

⁵ E. Denis, *Čechy po Bílé hoře*, Part 1, Book 1: *Vítězství církve*, Praha 1911 (the original French title: *La Bohême depuis la montagne blanche*, 1903).

⁶ M. Hroch, *Švédské archivy a jejich význam pro studium českých dějin*, *Sborník archivních prací* 9 (1959) 2, pp. 254–269.

⁷ Idem, *Handel und Politik im Ostseeraum während des Dreissigjährigen Krieges. Zur Rolle des Kaufmannskapitals in der aufkommenden allgemeinen Krise der Feudalgesellschaft in Europa*, Havlíčkův Brod 1976.

⁸ J. Pekař, *Kniha o Kosti*, Prague 1970.

to a large extent defined the perception of the conflict as a general societal crisis.⁹ Radek Fukala has long been studying the political relations between Scandinavia and Central Europe, confronting the impacts of international politics with regional cases, especially around the historical borders of Upper and Lower Silesia.¹⁰ Apart from domestic works,¹¹ monumental works written by Peter Englund¹² and Nils Ahnlund¹³ are available in translation into Czech.

The Swedes are coming

The weather in March 1641 suggested that winter did not say its last word yet. In the Ore Mountains which formed the border between the Czech Crown and the Saxon Electorate, the sun was weak and the wind strong.¹⁴ That year, grapevine froze in the

⁹ J. Polišenský, *Třicetiletá válka a evropské krize 17. století*, Prague 1970.

¹⁰ R. Fukala, *Silesia. The Society of Elites. Silesian Dukes and Estates (1437–1740)*, Hradec Králové–Ústí nad Orlicí 2008; idem, *Bitva u Lützensu 16.11.1632*, České Budějovice 2019; idem, *Silesia in the Power Plans of European States and Dynasties*, Prague Papers on the History of International Relations, Prague 2008, pp. 95–104.

¹¹ It is currently represented in particular by the following authors: R. Fukala, *Třicetiletá válka (1618–1648). Pod vítězným praporem habsburské moci*, vol. 1: (1618–1629), České Budějovice 2018; by the same author: *Třicetiletá válka (1618–1648). Pod taktovkou kardinála Richelieu*, vol. 2: (1630–1648), České Budějovice 2018 and: *Třicetiletá válka, nebo všeobecný konflikt 17. století?: otázky, úvahy a problémy*, České Budějovice 2013; J. Kilián, *Bitva o Prahu v roce 1648*, České Budějovice 2019; V. Matoušek, *Třebel 1647: A Battlefield of the Thirty Years' War from the Perspective of History, Archaeology, Art-history, Geoinformatics, and Ethnology*, Prague 2017; P. Balcárek, *Ve víru třicetileté války*, České Budějovice 2011. The latest state of Czech research was presented at an international conference “The Thirty Years' War in the Czech Lands. Time. Events. People. Culture”, held on 14–16 November 2018 in Pilsen. The papers were published in a collection *Bohemia Occidentalis Historica*, 1–2 (2019). The first critically prepared contribution to Johann Banér. Cf.: J. Öhman, *Johann Banér – Lennart Torstensson – Hans Christoph Königsmarck: Drei Feldherren in schwedischen Diensten*, *Bohemia Occidentalis Historica* 2 (2019), pp. 123–133. The contribution to the edition mentioned below is also significant: J. Hofman, *Banérova korespondence jako pramen k válečným událostem let 1639 a 1640*, [in:] *Mezi Martem a Memorií: prameny osobní povahy k vojenským dějinám 16.–19. století*, Pardubice 2011, pp. 53–66.

¹² P. Englund, *Nepokojná léta. Historie třicetileté války*, Praha 2000 (orig. Ofredsår. Om den svenska stormaktstiden och en man i dess mitt, 1993); idem, *Nepřemožitelný. Historie první severní války*, Praha 2004 (orig. Den Oövertinnerlinge, 2000).

¹³ N. Ahnlund, *Gustav Adolf král švédský*, Praha 1939 (original *Gustaf Adolf den store*, 1932).

¹⁴ *Kniha o bolesti a smutku. Výbor z moravských kronik XVII. století*, ed. J. Polišenský, Prague

Elbe valley as late as in May.¹⁵ In the immediate vicinity of the upper town and the royal estate of Přísečnice (Pressnitz), two armies began to form in battle lines on 27 March. The battle began; it was later included in *Theatrum Europaeum* while Peter Snayers, a Flemish artist, dedicated his famous painting. It was Johann Gustafsson Banér's¹⁶ last battle and an important victory for Ottavio Piccolomini in the upcoming campaign. While several works have been published on the Battle of Pressnitz/ Přísečnice¹⁷, on the following pages the battle will be presented in the context of the late 1630s and the early 1640s. The focus will be on the Swedish interests in Central Europe as it has not been sufficiently explored in Bohemia.

Towards the end of 1639 and the beginning of 1640, the main Swedish army entered Bohemia and created a forefield along the bank of the river Elbe to advance towards Vienna where Emperor Ferdinand III was headquartered. The Swedish army, under the command of Gustav Otto Steinbeck, first occupied Gorzów (Landsberg an der Warthe) and later on entered Lower Silesia.¹⁸ Major-general Torsten Stålhandske played a significant role, occupying Jelenia Góra (Hirschberg) with his own smaller troops. Simultaneously, Johann Banér's army advanced into Bohemia and had its first significant success after seizing Litoměřice (Leitmeritz) with no major casualties. Litoměřice, a logistics centre in northwestern Bohemia was so fearful that it would follow the cruelly besieged Pirna and Freiberg in Saxony that it chose to be at the mercy of the Swedes.¹⁹ Quite importantly, the defence of Bohemia did not rely on the fortified points on the river Elbe in the northwest. According to a military report from 24 May 1639, the defence was to retreat further inland, all the way to Hradec Králové.²⁰ Suddenly, the emerging new imperial army in Upper and

1948, p. 111; *Paměti krupského měšťana Michela Stüelera (1629–1649)*, ed. J. Kilián, Teplice–Dolní Břežany 2013 (German: Michel Stüelers Gedenkbuch [1629–1649, 2014], p. 429.

¹⁵ State District Archives (further referred to as SOkA) Litoměřice in Lovosice, The Litoměřice Municipal Archive (further referred to as AM), Inv. No. 71.

¹⁶ In this paper, I will continue to use the German and internationally accepted equivalent of the name. i.e. Johann Banér, as used in the signed documents.

¹⁷ In particular V. Matoušek, T. Klečková, *Rytina bitvy u Přísečnice 17. března 1641 in Theater Europaeu*, Archeologie ve středních Čechách, Prague 2009, pp. 509–516.

¹⁸ J. Maroń, *Wojna trzydziestoletnia na Śląsku. Aspekty militarne*, Wrocław–Racibórz 2008, p. 122.

¹⁹ SOkA Litoměřice in Lovosice, AM Litoměřice, Inv. No. 59, pp. 1–2.

²⁰ *Documenta bohémica bellum tricennale illustrantia*, vol. VI, ed. B. Baďura et al, Praha 1978 (further referred to as the DBBTI VI), No. 826, p. 309. The probable reason was the absence of the Commander-in-Chief Melchior Hatzfeld.

Lower Austria and Moravia was practically surrounded from the north by the Swedish troops with Torsten Stålhanski in command and, from the west, by approaching Johann Banér. After seizing Litoměřice, he focused on the town of Mělník, a strategic support point over the confluence of the Elbe and the Vltava, the two largest Czech rivers.²¹ Only a week after the order to withdraw the imperial troops from northwestern Bohemia, Johann Banér and his troops stood in Brandýs nad Labem, where he could (as his contemporaries noted) begin to lay siege to Prague in just one day.²² This rapid advance into the interior completely paralleled the sudden raid tactic in which Banér excelled. However, not everything went according to plan. For example, on the Saxon side of the Ore Mountains, the Swedish command still had problems with improving the soldiers' morale. It wanted to take advantage of the victory in the Battle of Chemnitz (14 April 1639) and pursue the enemy to Bohemia. That is why a strict ban on looting, violence and burning was imposed and thereupon severely punished. The Swedish field marshal wanted to enter the Crown territory as a liberator of the local population oppressed by the popes.²³ It comes as no surprise that the last thing he needed was a horde of soldiers on a rampage.

The occupation of Bohemia

However, unpleasant incidents occurred in the course of crossing the border. For example, when the royal city of Chomutov was seized in early May 1639, the Swedish troops looted the city to such an extent that it was the only city in northwestern Bohemia enjoying the emperor's exemption from contributions for nearly the rest of the war.²⁴ Contrary to the supposed *liberation*, however, Banér's army encountered open, sometimes desperate, resistance. The royal town of Most One put up fierce resistance; the local castle did not have a very strong garrison at the time. Nonetheless, it resisted the pressure of three cavalry divisions and subsequently received

²¹ This issue is mentioned in particular in J. Kilián, *Město ve válce, válka ve městě. Mělník 1618–1648*, České Budějovice 2008.

²² DBBTI VI, No. 831, p. 310.

²³ *Prameny k dějinám třicetileté války. Regesta fondu militare*, vol. 5, ed. V. Líva, Praha 1954 (further referred to as *Prameny V*), pp. 279–280.

²⁴ SOkA Most, AM Most. Sources agree on very harsh treatment of women. According to current research, rapes the beating of women were so common that reference to this violence in the documents indicates truly unprecedented cases.

recognition of the Czech governors.²⁵ Nevertheless, there were also cases of the local population collaborating with the Swedish army. One of Johann Banér's goals in Bohemia was to negotiate a *peace deal*.²⁶ Doctor Oswald, an unknown individual, was elected mediator of the negotiations and subsequently sent to Banér in October 1639. The Swedish general did not conceal his efforts to establish universal peace in the interests of all Evangelicals,²⁷ specifically in Bohemia, and expected the local nobility to support him. In addition, he was accompanied to Bohemia by exiles flooding from Bohemia after the establishment of the Renewed Land.²⁸ Later on they established a distinctive community in Pomeranian towns, especially in Elbląg (Elbing). Some of them found employment in the Swedish army. A case in point is Zdeněk of Hodice, a high-ranking officer in the Swedish army and a former commander of King Gustav II Adolph's personal unit.²⁹ His prime task was to keep peace in the operational area from the Elbe through Lusatia as far as Kłodzko. Nevertheless, he is also mentioned in the sources on his role of commander of the siege of Doubravská hora near Teplice. We have little information of the siege, only that it began on 17 May 1639. *The Swedish army of the Supreme Badnýr*, only after several unsuccessful attacks, capitulated to the man and was allowed to retreat honestly.³⁰

²⁵ Prameny V, pp. 283, 288.

²⁶ The State Regional Archives (further referred to as the SOA) Zámorsk, Family Archive (RA) Šlik, Inv. No. 157, Chapter 15.

²⁷ *Rikskansleren Axel Oxenstiernas. Skrifter och brevvevling VI. Johan Banérs bref 1624–1641*, P. Sondén (ed.), Stockholm 1883 (further referred to as the AOSOB VI), No. 248, p. 599. This is also mentioned in a letter to Queen Kristina after the victorious Battle of Chemnitz. See SE/RA/1133/1133.08/1 1623–1654 u.á.; 8. aprilis 1639. https://sok.riksarkivet.se/bildvisning/R0001366_00064 [accessed: 1 IX 2021].

²⁸ It was issued for Bohemia in 1627 and for Moravia in 1628. One of the points was the regulation on the only recognized religion, the Catholic faith. Lutherans and Calvinists had the option of converting to Catholicism or going into exile in the case of noblemen; their subjects did not have this choice.

²⁹ A complete description of the campaign was offered by the Swedish historian P. Englund, *Nepokojná léta*, pp. 184–190. From a Czech perspective: J. Hofman, *Banéřova korespondence*, pp. 53–66; idem, *Švédský vpád do Čech 1639/40 – různé aspekty soužití okupační armády a civilního sektoru na příkladě měst*, Olomouc 2009. Master Thesis. The Faculty of Arts of the Palacky University in Olomouc. He used the name Karel in Swedish service from 1628. He died in the Battle of Wolfenbüttel on 19 June 1641. Cf. *Otto's Dictionary of Education*, vol. 11, Prague 1897, pp. 429–431.

³⁰ SOKA Teplice, AM Teplice, Inv. No. 423, Stadtbuch Teplitz, p. 231; AM Krupka, Inv. No. 56, Book 1, p. 133.

There was more to Zdeněk of Hodice's increased interest in northwestern Bohemia than following orders.

Along with Albrecht of Wallenstein, Vilém Vchynský of Vchynice also died in Cheb and was, among other things, owner of large estates in Benešov nad Ploučnicí and Teplice, which he regarded the centre of his estates. He married Alžběta Magdalena, the daughter of Marie Magdalena Trčková. Following her husband's death, she married the aforementioned Zdeněk of Hodice and lodged claims for the local estate even though the entire Vchynskýs' property in northwestern Bohemia had been taken over by the Imperial Field Marshal Jan of Aldringen³¹ and, after his death in 1634, by other members of the family from the Thionville area, about 30 kilometers away from Luxembourg. Especially during the upheaval of Johann Banér's invasion of Bohemia and even the actual anarchy in some large estates. The same process took place on the Trčkovské farms in eastern Bohemia. Zdeněk of Hodice even tried to ensnare the town of Náchod, at that time owned by Ottavio Piccolomini. Ultimately, Hodický spent the winter in Opočno.³²

It has already been stated that the defence of Bohemia was to concentrate on the area between Hradec Králové and Pardubice. However, they could hardly serve as fortresses in a long run. With a few exceptions (Pernštejn castle in Pardubice), the state of the fortifications in Czech cities was deplorable. For almost the entire 16th century, there was no conflict in Bohemia, and therefore neither serf nor royal towns were interested in modernizing their fortresses and other defence mechanisms.³³

³¹ More details about this issue in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 1, p. 537; H. Hallwich, *Johann von Aldringen*, Leipzig 1885; R. Rebitsch, *Valdštejn. Životopis mocnáře*, České Budějovice 2014 (original Wallenstein. Biographie eines Machtmenschen, 2010), pp. 128–131.

³² R. Fukala, *Sen o odplatě. Dramata třicetileté války*, Praha 2005, p. 285. Zdeněk Hodický of Hodice died in 1641 as a result of injuries inflicted in the Battle of Wolfenbüttel. Another example of a successful career in the Swedish army is Wejkhart of Vřesovice, who became famous after the northern war with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the siege of Jasna Góra in Częstochowa. The Vřesovce family had been established in northwestern Bohemia since the famous Hussite governor Jakoubek of Vřesovice († 1456). Other individuals connected with the region included the sons of Jindřich Matyáš of Thurn (1567–1640), especially František Bernard Thurn (1595–1628). In the Czech historiography, however, these individuals are hardly covered. For more facts about Matyáš Thurn see especially M. Pojar, *Jindřich Matyáš Thurn. Muž činu*, Prague 1998.

³³ The plan of systematic defence of the Czech Crown, and especially Bohemia and Moravia, crystallized only after the end of the Thirty Years' War through the military reforms of Count Reimond Montecucoli, who compiled a list of cities that would be transformed into fortresses, including cities on the Elbe. Cf. for instance G. Schreiber, *Raimondo Montecucoli. Feldherr, Schriftsteller und Kavalier*, Graz–Vienna–Cologne 2000.

There was a need to prepare at least Prague³⁴ for a systematic siege. Desperate city councils were peppered with orders from the Czech governors, who in turn received orders from Emperor Ferdinand III and his war councils. In August, the Old Town of Prague hired approximately one thousand workers for six days, and the Jewish community there had to bring forth a similar duty.³⁵ The Swedish army approached Prague, and – perhaps symbolically – stopped at White Mountain. The enemy prepared a fortified camp there, but as Banér confirms in a letter to Queen Kristina, a long siege was not his intention. According to him, it would mean an unnecessary hazzard.³⁶ The advance came to a halt and the Swedish army began to look for winter quarters in northwestern, central and northern Bohemia.

The nature of the procedure employed in Bohemia during the so-called second Swedish invasion does not indicate that it was an unconditional conquest of the territory as it was the case of the inconsistent siege of Prague, or the effort not to get too involved in skirmishes with the soldiers from the fortresses and the remains of the deployed imperial units. An exception to the rule was the systematic effort to acquire provisions in the town of Hradec Králové. As already mentioned, the town was to become a base for a counterattack headed by Ottavio Piccolomini and Archduke Leopold Wilhelm. However, the weak defence did not bear witness to this status, and therefore, probably under the command of Freidrich Čabelický of Záběltice, a Czech immigrant, on 17 June 1639, Hradec Králové surrendered to the Swedes.³⁷ However, this can be considered a turning point for the entire campaign. Historian Robert Rebitsch referred to the actions of Commander-in-Chief Matthias Gallas as *prudent* yet able to withstand enemy pressure.³⁸ Together with Heinrich Schlick of Holíč and Pasoun, the imperial president of the War Office, Melchior von Hatzfeld prepared a counteroffensive with Piccolomini and the archduke.

³⁴ In the 17th century, Prague was a conurbation. Each city had its own council and its privileges. Although inaccurately, this conurbation will be referred to as an organizational unit.

³⁵ Prameny V, p. 352.

³⁶ Skrivelser till konungen SE/RA/1133/1133/1 (1623–1654, u.å.), bildid: R0001366_0080; https://sok.riksarkivet.se/bildvisning/R0001366_0080 [accessed: 13 VI 2021].

³⁷ J. Hofman, *Banérova korespondence*, p. 30; J. Hurt, *Kritická analýza rytiny obléhání Hradce Králové roku 1640*, Bachelor Thesis, Faculty of Arts, University of Hradec Králové, Hradec Králové 2017, pp. 21–22.

³⁸ R. Rebitsch, *Matyáš Gallas (1588–1647). Císařský generál a Valdštejnův „dědic“*, Praha 2013 (original Matthias Gallas [1588–1647]. *Generalleutnant des Kaisers zur Zeit des Dreißigjährigen Krieges: Eine militärische Biographie*, 2006), p. 133.

Excursion: the royal city of Kadaň and its Swedish garrison

Although in this article I focus mainly on northwestern Bohemia, Johann Banér did not give up on occupying the remaining parts of Bohemia. He sent Johann Eberhard von Billingshausen (1604–1655)³⁹ and four regiments from Bílá hora (White Mountain) to southwestern Bohemia, between České Budějovice and Plzeň. A defensive line was to be established there on the Vltava River with the support of the town of Tábor.⁴⁰ In contrast, the royal towns of Kadaň and Litoměřice in northwestern Bohemia became key to the subsequent organization of the advance from and to Bohemia from Saxony. Between 1639 and 1641, Kadaň was one of the locations most exposed to the Swedish pressure against the imperial army. This corresponds to the increase in damage accompanying the war. The accounts of the regional governors George Peter Kokorphanz of Kokorphanz (Jiří Petr Kokořovec of Kokořov) and Ferdinand Stampach of Stampach (Ferdinand Štampach of Štampach) in May 1640 mention the generals who set up their main tents in Kadan and carried out military operations from there.⁴¹ The number of soldiers recorded in the archived documents are impressive. Between December 1639 and January 1640, Hans Wachtmeister (1609–1652) lived there together with 1,500 soldiers. In addition to looting the suburbs, they arrested the deputies. Wachtmeister had all the supplies of the fertile region collected and moved to Litoměřice by land.⁴² The local archive holds a list of burghers who, in the form of contributions, collected over 60,000 gold coins and over 12,000 grain cans for its 12 companies in one month.⁴³ For that

³⁹ More details in *Bellingshausen* [*Bellinghausen, Bellingkhuse, Billingshausen, Billingshausen, Billinzhausen, Bülinckhausen*], *Johann Eberhardt von, Freiherr von Uelzen*, <http://www.30jaeh-rigerkrieg.de/bellingshausen-bellinghausen-bellingkhuse-billingshausen-billingshausen-billinzhausen-johann-eberhardt-von-freiherr-von-uelzen/> [accessed: 21 VII 2020].

⁴⁰ *Skrivelser till konungen, SE/RA/1133/1133.08/~1 (1623–1654, u.å.)*, bildid: R0001366_00078; https://sok.riksarkivet.se/bildvisning/R0001366_00078 [accessed: 1 IX 2020].

⁴¹ SOkA Chomutov in Kadaň, AM Kadaň, Inv. No. 1037 C IV. Document without further identification.

⁴² *Ibid.* Hans Wachtmeister is known for his harsh intervention against the inhabitants of the village of Hallesta near Lund, who fortified themselves and put up stiff resistance during the Torstensson Krieg in 1644. Cf. P. Englund, *Nepokojná léta*, p. 328. In the Czech edition, he is confused in the register with his son Admiral Johann (1641–1714).

⁴³ SOkA Chomutov in Kadaň, AM Kadaň, Inv. No. 1037 C IV, Specification of paid contributions.

period, there are records of major damage which leads to an assumption that it was the time when the bridge over the river Ohře was seriously damaged.⁴⁴

In early February, Hans Wachtmeister was replaced in Kadaň by Hans Christoff Königsmarck (1600–1663), with a part of the army made up of cavalry and infantry units. He established the command staff directly in the town. His approximately one-month-long stay of these troops seems uneventful.⁴⁵ At the end of the month, Erik Slang (1600–1642) paid a brief visit to the town, and on 26 February Johann Banér's main army (1596–1641) retreated from the line on the river Elbe in central and eastern Bohemia. He also advanced with his artillery and all the salvaged supplies. For about a month, Kadaň served as the headquarters of the army devoting all its efforts to an orderly retreat through the Ore Mountains, until early April when about 3,000 cavalymen and dragoons approached the city.⁴⁶ Thus, the Czechs freed themselves from the Swedish troops after almost a year, while the last three fortresses were defended for a few more weeks.⁴⁷

The events in Kadaň are merely an interlude to the complex struggle of super-powers over Central Europe. Nevertheless, it represents some of the leading representatives of this phase of the war in an area that was not chosen by chance. The system of medieval castles marked the land border; their location in the mountains allowed to control the movement on trade routes leading from Prague to Dresden or other upper towns like Freiberg or Chemnitz. The reason for the increased attention paid to the Ore Mountains and the Elbe river was the tactical advantage of the Swedish command on the Central European battlefield. Along with the occupation of Upper and Lower Silesia, this tactic resulted in forming some sort of a vice which put considerable pressure on Vienna. The flow of the Elbe and the Oder represented a natural connection with the northern German ports. In this situation, Johann Banér undoubtedly needed to coordinate the process with someone he could fully trust.

⁴⁴ SOKA Chomutov in Kadaň, AM Kadaň, Inv. No. 48. Dead dated July 24, 1642, by means of which Emperor Ferdinand III allowed the collection of bridge toll for the purpose of repairs.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Soldiers from the corps stayed in the city until the end of March and thus formed the rear guard of the retreating main army of Johann Banér.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Reference to this issue in L. Sláma, *Krušné hory ve švédském sevření*. They were Houska Castle, Děčín Castle and the fortress of Doubravská hora, all of them well-defensible places on the retreat route from Bohemia.

Johann Banér and his “Blitzkrieg”

The connection between Johann Banner and Torsten Stålhansk was remarkable. Their cooperation began during the wars fought by Adolf Gustav II. However, the clash at Wittstock became crucial in 1636. After the Battle of Nördlingen, the Swedish army was forced to leave its positions in central and southern Germany and to retreat to the north. A devastating defeat was avoided owing to Johann Banér’s proactive approach. He had to face several uprisings. As Herfried Münkler, a German historian wrote, Banér had to fight and win the Battle of Wittstock.⁴⁸ Stålhanske commanded the left flank of the cavalry, which crushed against the right flank of the imperial army.⁴⁹ Banér’s victory confirmed the changes made at the head of the Swedish army, and attention could be now paid to preparations for a new campaign. As already mentioned, Torsten Stålhanske was to occupy Upper and Lower Silesia, the then the neighbouring countries of the Bohemian Crown.⁵⁰ The changes were introduced during the siege of Mělník, a hereditary town of the Bohemian Queens above the confluence of the Elbe and the Vltava.⁵¹ The lesser-known stage of the occupation of the northern lands of St. Wenceslas Crown subsequently played an important role in Johann Banér’s winter campaign against Regensburg and the subsequent retreat through Bohemia.

Not much information has been provided about the course of this risky winter campaign. Efforts were made in early December 1640 to converge sections intended for the undoubtedly impressive advance of the Upper Palatinate with Erfurt, Thuringia, where high ransom was demanded in the cities.⁵² What is more,

⁴⁸ H. Münkler, *Der Dreissigjährige Krieg. Europäische katastrophe, Deutsches trauma 1618–1648*, Hamburg 2019, p. 675. The battle itself is referred to for instance by S. Eickhoff, F. Schopper (Hrsg.) – *1636 – ihre letzte Schlacht. Leben im Dreißigjährigen Krieg*, Branderburg an der Havel 2012.

⁴⁹ H. Münkler, *Der Dreissigjährige Krieg*, p. 676.

⁵⁰ On Silesia as part of the Bohemian Kingdom: R. Fukala, *Silesia in the Power Plans*.

⁵¹ This topic is referred to for instance by J. Kilián, *Město ve válce*, pp. 163–164.

⁵² *Prameny k dějinám třicetileté války. Regesta fondu militare*, vol. 6, ed. V. Líva, Prague 1955 (further referred to only as *Prameny VI*), p. 127. As many as 11 regiments came to Naumburg, and since the town fired at them several times, it had to pay after the occupation 200 imperial toltars for each shot.

Mauritius Freisenegger, the prior of the monastery in Andechs, Upper Bavaria,⁵³ also noticed that the Swedish soldiers were acting *indiscriminately because they were burning and plundering towns*. In his letter of 6 January 1640 to the Reich Chancellor Axel Oxenstiern,⁵⁴ written in Hof during the campaign, Banér informed about the presence of enemy troops near Amberk (Amberg). He thus turned his divisions in this direction and with *God Almighty he would overcome the enemy and gain victory*.⁵⁵ The unusual nature of this procedure is also evidenced by the unpreparedness of the imperial unit near Plavno (Plauen). Major-general Hans Christoph Königsmarck⁵⁶ captured 500 Imperial Musketeers almost without firing a single shot.⁵⁷ News of the enemy's very rapid march came to Regensburg only slightly delayed. As early as on 2 January, the *Einkommende Wöchentliche Zeintungen* urged its readers to look out for hostile operations. The inhabitants were to be even more careful because no one could estimate in which direction Jan Banér was headed.⁵⁸ However, there was a common view that the target was again to be the hereditary Habsburg lands, from which the main Swedish army had left only a few months prior. The informants did not doubt that the border would be crossed near Cheb and that the fortress was therefore in danger.⁵⁹ As days went by, more information came about the campaign and it became increasingly clear that Franconia faced a serious problem, specifically after Banér seized the town of Hof and, under the threat of *the destruction of the entire country*, Margrave Christian of Brandenburg demanded the strong fortress of Plassenburg, towering over the town of Kulmbach (Culmbach). By January 11, the Swedish troops had occupied Coburg and Cronach in addition to those already

⁵³ *Chronik von Erling und heiligenberg Andechs während der dreißigjährigen Krieges*, ed. F.M. Ferchl, 1833, pp. 62–63. Freisenegger states that this campaign was carried out in *the harsh winter*. Cf. *ibid.* p. 62. The monastery was used as the winter quarters of the imperial cavalry (specifically two horses and one rider) and perhaps a part of the artillery as well.

⁵⁴ According to the Gregorian calendar. In the report, however, Banér states December 29 (according to the Julian calendar) and wishes Oxenstiern all the best for the New Year.

⁵⁵ AOSOB VI, pp. 810–811. The date given is according to the old calendar used in Sweden with some variations until 1753. According to the Gregorian calendar, the date is 8 January 1641.

⁵⁶ According to *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, Bd. 12, p. 360.

⁵⁷ P. Englund, *Nepokojná léta*, p. 225.

⁵⁸ *Einkommende Wochentliche Zeitungen* 1641/3, p. 2. (further referred to as the EWZ) *Einkommende Wochentliche Zeitungen, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Bremen*, <http://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/zeitungen17/periodical/titleinfo/962231> [accessed: 9 VIII 2020].

⁵⁹ EWZ 1641/3, p. 3.

mentioned.⁶⁰ Coincidentally, there is a report from the same day by the mayor of Nový Bydžov, addressed to the Mělník town council, about the movements of the Swedish army and the imminent danger of an invasion of Bohemia.⁶¹ After an intermittent period of less than 400 years, we can say now that Johann Banér made an effort to confuse the enemy while keeping the imperial troops in the dark proved a great strategic advantage.

At the time of Banér's arrival in Hof, the people of Cheb, certain of a new attack on the Czech Crown,⁶² were afraid of the raid. If we can trust the records, even under very adverse weather conditions (i.e. heavy snow and frost),⁶³ the army was able to maintain a marching pace of 15 kilometres per day, which is compatible with the progress of summer campaigns.⁶⁴ What is more, Banér safeguarded himself against an unexpected attack by imperial troops stationed in western Bohemia by deploying General Arvid Wittenberg's soldiers who clearly indicated that an early entry into the country was possible. Some of them were undoubtedly spies with a task of monitoring the movement of the imperial army across the land border.⁶⁵ At the same time, it confirmed the highest imperial command in their belief that the attack would continue in western Bohemia, and thus preparations began for war events,⁶⁶ especially for the Pilsen Region. Leopold Vilhelm, the highest commander of the troops, ordered the infantry and cavalry to secure the cities of Pilsen and Cheb (the two most important fortresses in Western Bohemia) against the enemy's advance on Amberk (Amberg). What is more, locals had to devise coordination methods (e.g. make an abatis, special wooden traps for enemies) across the border with Fojtland and the Upper Palatinate. At this point, the town of Jihlava seemed to play a crucial role as the source of funds and the *Militärkleidung* for the complementary defence

⁶⁰ EWZ 1641/5, p. 1.

⁶¹ SOkA Mělník, AM Mělník, Militaria, kt. 3, M4350. Jan. 11, 1641.

⁶² Prameny VI, p. 140. That is why they asked for at least 200 more soldiers. Loket also asked for an increase in the army. Pilsen, on the other hand, did not want to supply Cheb precisely because there was a threat of losing the already limited stocks of rye. Cf. *ibid.* p. 141.

⁶³ Of which Banér reported Jan. 29, 1641 from Cham i.e. in Česká Kubice. AOSOB VI, p. 812. Specifically, he used the term *frostwelters*, i.e. *freezing weather*.

⁶⁴ The distance between Erfurt and Hof is approx. 110 km. The frozen roads undoubtedly made this progress possible.

⁶⁵ The people of Cheb even managed to capture several of them. Cf. Prameny VI, pp. 139–140.

⁶⁶ Prameny VI, p. 144. Ferdinand III assumed the transition of enemies in the area of Česká Kubice.

of Bohemia led by the Supreme Bruay.⁶⁷ Count Heřman Černín described this situation to Jaroslav Bořita of Martinice more poignantly: *Cheb, Plzeň and the border area must be safeguarded.*⁶⁸

The attentive author of the report from Franconia pointed out that the main target of the campaign was not Prague but that *he (Banér) wants to carry out a cavalcade against Regensburg.*⁶⁹ His opinion was based on the deployment of imperial troops near Cheb and Prague. On the contrary, the trip to Regensburg was only safeguarded by six infantry companies of the Regiment of Count Suys and five companies of Croats. Nearby, in Henneberg, maximum reinforcements were provided in the form of two regiments of the Imperial General-guardsman Gill de Haß. A large part of the vacated operational area was immediately occupied by Colonel Reinhold von Roßen, Count Bollweir und Herrenstein. He is associated with cooperation between the Swedish army and the surviving corps of Bernard of Saxony-Weimar in the early 1640s.⁷⁰ Roßen came from an ancient Livonian family whose roots can be traced back to the 13th century. As a young man, Reinhold chose a military career and, like Johann Banér, was close to King Adolf Gustav II and perhaps from the beginning served in the corps cavalry. After the Battle of Lützen, he became a senior officer in the army of Bernard of Saxony-Weimar and, after his death in 1638, Reinhold took command of a part of the Franco-Weimar army.⁷¹ During the operation against Regensburg, he and his cavalry covered the right flank of Banér's corps from the strong garrison of General-guard de Haß. Roßen faced de Haß's two regiments of three thousand men of light cavalry and one thousand dragoons,⁷² a force that had to be acknowledged.

As the main corps was heading towards Regensburg, Major General Torstenn Ståhlhanske, the commander of the Silesian Corps, approached the northwestern borders of Bohemia and occupied some important Saxon towns near the border

⁶⁷ DBBTI VI, p. 386, No. 1124. The writer even set aside 40,000 gold coins for the renewal of churches.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 387, No. 1126.

⁶⁹ EWZ 1641/5, p. 2.

⁷⁰ However, Bernard died of the plague in 1638.

⁷¹ Bernhard von Poten, *Rosen, Reinhold von*, Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie, Bd. 29, 1889, pp. 197–199. After the war, Reinhold von Rosen became a general in the French army and as such acquired land in Alsace.

⁷² EWZ 1641/5, p. 2. According to Wilson, French troops moved to Bavaria only to list new contributions. Cf. P.H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years' War: Europe's Tragedy*, 2010, p. 606.

with Bohemia. In the spring, after the occupation of Glogau (Hlohov, Głogów), Stáhlhanske was to attack northern Bohemia and turn the Elbe back into a fortress.⁷³ A strong garrison controlled the surroundings of Zittau and Görlitz and did not hesitate to cross the border several times and demand contributions near Česká Lípa. Such was the case of Štěpán Erbb, an official on the estate in Benešov nad Ploučnicí. Jakub Wenck, a Swedish officer, demanded a weekly contribution under threat of military execution.⁷⁴

The Reichstag was not dissolved during the first two weeks of January 1641, despite the imminent danger. Emperor Ferdinand III decided to stay in the city and manage the defence.⁷⁵ Within a few days, the small garrison expanded to several thousand men, with reinforcements consisting mainly of Bavarian soldiers.⁷⁶ When Banér drew to the city surrounded by a ring of bastions on 21 January, the defence was completed and the city ready for a siege.⁷⁷ While previously the progress was according to the plan and success was within reach, the situation changed overnight.

The heavy snow and frost turned into thaw. It was no longer possible to cross the Danube and attacking a fortified bridge would have inflicted unnecessary losses. Firing a few artillery salvoes and systematic raids of 1,000 cavalrymen, looting and praying on the inhabitants, were the only manifestations of the Swedish presence near Regensburg (Řezno).⁷⁸ Léon Bouthilier comte de Chavigny, a French diplomat, described the entire complex operation to diplomat D'Avaux in a short paragraph of a letter dated 9 February. The indefinite departure of the Swedes [...] to Bohemia or Nuremberg [...] was mentioned by de Chavigny only as trivia at the end of a letter of

⁷³ AOSOB VI, pp. 827–828. The Swedes also had their military forces in the area of the so-called Six Cities'Area, especially in Žhořelec (Görlitz). Therefore, the notified plan would not have been feasible under other circumstances. On their presence in Görlitz, e.g. Prameny VI, p. 162.

⁷⁴ Prameny VI, p. 162. It is an example of war reality ignoring land borders and law.

⁷⁵ L. Höbelt, *Ferdinand III. (1608–1657). Mírový císař proti vůli*, České Budějovice 2016, p. 194.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 194. Even Banér noticed the presence of Bavarian troops in the area. Cf. AOSOB VI, p. 813.

⁷⁷ The layout of the town referred to in M. Merian, M. Zeiler, *Topographia Bavariae...*, Frankfurt am Mein 1665, t. 29.

⁷⁸ H.O. von Assenheim, *Theatrum Europaenum... Vierte teil... seithero Anno 1638 biß Anno 1643, exclusive begeben haben*, Frankfurt am Mein 1692 (hereinafter *Theatrum Europaeum IV*), pp. 605–606; AOSOB VI, p. 812; P. Englund, *Nepokojná léta*, p. 226.

16 February.⁷⁹ Clearly disappointed, Banér summed up the situation by reporting that [...] *the enemy remained calm, fired only a few times, but did not cause any damage; only one lieutenant (Obristleutnant) Planting from the artillery was shot in the leg from a musket [...]*.⁸⁰ However, with the retreat of Banér's main corps, the race against time began for both sides. The Swedish army was headed for Šumava and had to unwillingly prepare for the approaching reinforcements of the imperial army. At the same time, Stállhans's corps from Silesia was deployed on the line between Chemnitz (Saská Kamenice) and Zittau (Žitava).⁸¹

For a long time, the imperial army led by Ottavio Piccolomini did not dare to confront Banér's troops. Therefore, throughout February and most of March 1641, the status quo prevailed despite a few local skirmishes.⁸² A full-scale offensive would not have been possible but for the connection between Piccolomini and the supplemented Bavarian Prince Elector troops under the command of General-marshal Francis of Mercy.⁸³ The first of the imperial successes was the occupation of Neunburg (Neunburg vorm Wald) in Germany, during which Erik Klarsn Slang, the Swedish commander of the Personal Guard was captured together with 200 infantrymen and four hundred service horses.⁸⁴ The fight took place on 22 March when Banér gradually began to move to Kouba, from where he wanted to move quickly to Bohemia and continue to transfer the battlefield. At the same time, he wanted to attract the French corps. However, its commander Guébriant did not accept the conditions of a further joint action and Banér had to do without the French. Banér must

⁷⁹ *Les papiers de Richelieu, Section politique extérieure, Correspondance et papiers d'Etat [sous-série] Empire allemand*, t. III: 1636–1642, ed. A.V. Hartmann, Paris 1999 (further referred to as the LPDR III), p. 457, No. 206; p. 460, No. 211.

⁸⁰ AOSOB VI, p. 812.

⁸¹ DBBTI VI, pp. 387–388, No. 1130.

⁸² DBBTI VI, p. 391, No. 1150.

⁸³ *Theatrum Europaeum* IV, p. 608. For more details about Franz of Mercy see H. Neuhaus, *Franz, Freiherr von Mercy*, [in:] *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (NDB) 17, Berlin 1994, p. 125, <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/gnd124365639.html#ndbcontent> [accessed: 14 VII 2017].

⁸⁴ *Theatrum Europaeum* IV, p. 608; *Prameny* VI, p. 168. Among the captives was as unspecified Obersten Herr Janislaus Kinsky or Banér's brother-in-law, Margrave of Durlach. Cf. AOSOB VI, p. 834. More details about the conquest of Neunburg in P. Englund, *Nepokojná léta*, p. 227. The name occurs also in SOkA Nymburk in Lysá nad Labem, AM Nymburk, Spisy předmagistrát-ního období, sign. 266. List of POWs after siege of Neunburg.

have been surprised by the presence of the imperial army in the immediate vicinity.⁸⁵ Only the fortress of Neunburg vorm Wald was between him and Piccolomini.

According to Peter Englund, to Banér the defence of Neunburg meant “biting the leg of a trapped animal”: a necessary loss to save the rest of the army. Erik Slang put up strong resistance to the defence of the city. Even before the siege, he gathered scattered troops around the surrounding towns. For example, Janisslaus Kinsky withdrew from the city of Nabburg, had the crew of 40 dragoons withdrawn from Burglegenfeld Castle, and so on.⁸⁶ Slang managed to get the necessary military forces when the joined corps of the imperial army (led by Ottavio Piccolomini) and the Bavarian army under the command of Franz von Mercy came to town. According to some reports, its defence was not entirely planned but the emperor’s soldiers managed to surround the town without the possibility of any further retreat.⁸⁷ It was in the interest of Piccolomini’s army to conquer the city as quickly as possible, as an enemy garrison of about 2,000 men would have posed a great danger. Therefore, he immediately had the artillery firing at the city walls, followed by several infantry attacks. Between 500 and 600 soldiers were killed or wounded in the process, including the officers.⁸⁸ However, the situation took a bigger toll on Erik Slang, exacerbated by the breaking of the walls. Slang and the entire Swedish crew capitulated.⁸⁹ Piccolomini and Mercy were able to calm down and have a rest after this important victory but now they faced another challenge: preparation for sudden raids, for the master of these raids, *the amazing Swede* Jan Banér.

The victory undoubtedly impacted Banér’s decision to invade Bohemia directly. He continued waiting for reinforcements from his allies from Northern Germany. However, they did not come, and because he could expect only *countless or extensive problems* from the approaching emperor’s forces, as Banér stated, he prepared, in case of extreme necessity,⁹⁰ a march to Klatovy, Rokycany, Rakovník and there across the Elbe towards Litoměřice. There was certainly an intention behind the approach.

During the siege of Neunburg, Stáhlhanske had already controlled most of Saxon cities on the Czech border. The defence of the hereditary lands was still in the pro-

⁸⁵ P. Englund, *Nepokojná léta*, pp. 226–227.

⁸⁶ *Theatrum Europaeum* IV, p. 607.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*; *DBBTI* VI, p. 398, No. 1176. There is no note in *Theatrum Europaeum* about the presence of military engineer Carl Cappi.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 607.

⁸⁹ *Theatrum Europaeum* IV, p. 608.

⁹⁰ *AOSOB* VI, pp. 826–827. Alternatively, he considered crossing the Elbe in Roudnice.

cess, it was necessary to summon Golč's reinforcements from Silesia, Moravia could offer 8 cavalry regiments, dragoons, a thousand musketeers and eight cannons.⁹¹ In addition to the easy crossing of the land borders by Swedish troops near Brod nad Lesy and Česká Kubice, a rather confusing situation at the border resulted from various orders for the main army to march in several places simultaneously, coupled with vague reports, for instance, on the occupation of cities or looting thereof.⁹²

The Battle of Přísečnice (Pressnitz)

Piccolomini's success at Neunburg was topped a few days later with a victory over a small church at Česká Kubice. At this point, however, the rest of the main Swedish army was penetrating the soggy Ore Mountains.⁹³ Meanwhile, in northwestern Bohemia, fear grew not only of the Swedes but also various groups of defectors.⁹⁴ Banér did not include Kadaň in his original plans. Nevertheless, he approached the town in mid-March with an imperial corps reinforced by several Saxon troops in the rear. Both formations had to cross the river Ohře because a number of bridges were destroyed in order to better defend the area. Piccolomini and Mercy crossed the river in Cheb, Banér used a pontoon bridge.⁹⁵ After a highly demanding, day-long march along the river Ohře, the Swedish Field Marshal entered Kadaň where his infantry was stationed. The cavalry and artillery remained in the suburbs of the town and its immediate vicinity.⁹⁶

Freedom of movement was criticized by Walter Leslie. The imperial Field Marshal and *author of Cheb's "execution"*⁹⁷ rebuked above all the fact that the enemy was allowed to "present the military skills", and that the enemy "did not meet any resistance, marched

⁹¹ DBBTI VI, p. 394, No. 1158.

⁹² The sharp shooting had taken place several times before. Some expeditions even threatened the monastery in Zbraslav. Cf. Prameny VI, p. 155. The Czech Viceroy Jan Greifenfels of Pilsen-burg, 15/02/1641. Due to the danger of crossing the river, the abbot had all the rafts removed.

⁹³ Prameny VI, p. 168. On 26/03/1641, Most. Englund called this situation as follows: *delivering blows to a fleeing snake's tail*. Cf. P. Englund, *Nepokojná léta*, p. 233.

⁹⁴ The cities were to catch runaway soldiers and inform the superior military authorities. See e.g. SOkA Most, AM Most, Inv. No. 1754, Chapter 15. Regulation of the Count of Colloredo of May 11, 1641.

⁹⁵ *Theatrum Europaeum* IV, p. 611.

⁹⁶ DBBTI VI, p. 399, No. 1181; Prameny VI, p. 169. Kadaň to Czech governors on March 29.

⁹⁷ J. Pekař, *Valdštejn 1630–1634. Dějiny valdštejnského spiknutí*, Praha 2008, p. 507, note 2.

where he wanted and used only the places he wanted to use".⁹⁸ Due to the already described preparations, especially in the Pilsen region, this fast and unobstructed passage could have been a great disappointment. However, that the hastily created army was deployed by Count Bruay in central and eastern Bohemia: too far away to move effectively. Furthermore, there were a maximum of several hundred professional soldiers in Cheb, which is a meaningful troop in defence but not an offensive.⁹⁹ Moreover, the combined corps of the Imperials, Bavarians and Saxons did not match the marching speed of the Swedes, allowing the enemy a several hours' rest.¹⁰⁰

A short but concise mention in another topographic work from the mid-17th century demonstrates the unique position of Přísečnice (Pressnitz) in a broader context: *Přísečnice. A fortress and a pass near the Bohemian Forest and near the Ohře river, between Ostrov and Kadaň, on the path to Cvikov (Zwickau) and two miles from the border of Fojtland*.¹⁰¹ In addition to the local mines, the site was famous for cattle breeding, as the terrain hardly allowed for a different way of farming. As one obedient servant wrote to the provincial court regarding the distances of the meadows, also the meadows from Arndorff's court are 1 mile away, and if the subjects had to drive here so far and over the great hills, it would be very difficult for them to come.¹⁰² According to the Revenue regulations, it was an area dependent primarily on cattle breeding and the operation of carrier's trade (carting).¹⁰³ The upper town and the royal estate of Přísečnice owed their significance to blast furnaces and smithies, where at the beginning of the long war cannonballs were produced for the imperial artillery¹⁰⁴ – and this is where the battle was to take place.

⁹⁸ DBBTI VI, p. 399, p. 1182.

⁹⁹ Which briefly changed only with the arrival of Piccolomini. See note 53.

¹⁰⁰ As of February, the Swedish army was able to walk about 20 km a day. In Kadaň, some military units could spend two days (March 24–26).

¹⁰¹ M. Merian, M. Zeiler, *Topographia Bohemiae, Moraviae et Silesiae*, Frankfurt am Mein 1650, p. 14.

¹⁰² National Archive (further referred to as the NA) Prague, Stará manipulace (SM) P 1/43 Přísečnice, městské hospodářství, sheet No. 11 of 26/08/1644.

¹⁰³ *Berní rula*, vol. 33/2, ed. M. Lišková, Prague 1954, pp. 31–37. Like other cities located close to the border, Přísečnice suffered great damage to property and population. E.g. NA Prague, SM P 1/43 Přísečnice, městská hospodářství, sheet No. 10. Report on damage after the battle of March 1641. The sheet was drawn on 19 June 1644.

¹⁰⁴ *Prameny k dějinám třicetileté války. Regesta fondu militare*, vol. 3, ed. V. Liva, Praha 1951 (further referred to as *Prameny III*), p. 114. Dated 03/01/1621. Among other things, this is one of the reasons why this area was so important to the remains of the Estates Army, especially for the part led by Arnošt Petr of Mansfeld. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 114. Dated 04/01/1621.

As this was a relatively short conflict, there are only a few period news and military reports available. Some have already been published in the above-cited editions and old publications; the most detailed are the reports published in the *Theatrum Europaeum*¹⁰⁵ and *Sources on the History of the Thirty Years' War*.¹⁰⁶ Among the records of the military leaders the report for the Reich Chancellor Axel Oxenstiern, elaborated by Jan Banér is worth mentioning. It was written five days later in Saxon Zwickau (Cvikov)¹⁰⁷. Ottavio Piccolomini wrote a report for an unknown addressee in Italian.¹⁰⁸ The battle was also evaluated by Zikmund Myslík of Hyršov;¹⁰⁹ numerous excerpts from Dudík's edition¹¹⁰ inform about the size and progress of the imperial corps. In addition to the military reports of specific participants, there is also an extensive description by the Ore Mountains chronicler, Christian Lehmann.¹¹¹ Some details also got into the period press, which brought the news of the encounter at Přísečnice almost immediately after its end.¹¹²

Let me focus on what the sources agree on: Banér absolutely needed to move to Annaberg and join the reserves around Cvikov. Piccolomini's corps lived in Ostrov, about a day's march from the temporary Swedish base in Kadaň.¹¹³ The very first Swedish troops arrived there on Palm Sunday, 24 March, with the task of attacking the advancing imperial troops. A day later, Banér himself arrived with the rest of the army, which was granted a full day of repose. However, he did not have time to lose: the bad weather significantly contributed to the slowing down of the progress of the artillery sent by Banér to the Přísečnice pass the day before the departure

¹⁰⁵ *Theatrum Europaeum* IV, pp. 611–612. The translation of these pages from the German language was provided by E. Kovalda. Cf. V. Matoušek, T. Klečková, *Rytina bitvy*, pp. 514–515.

¹⁰⁶ *Prameny* VI, p. 169. Kadaň to Czech governors on 29 March 1641.

¹⁰⁷ *AOSOB* VI, pp. 838–839. According to the old calendar on March 22.

¹⁰⁸ SOA Zámorsk, RA Piccolomini, Inv. No. 21 668; *DBBTI* VI, p. 399, No. 1180. There is also a report by Zikmund Myslíka addressed to Count Černín. See *ibid.*, No. 1181.

¹⁰⁹ *DBBTI* VI, p. 399, No. 1181.

¹¹⁰ B. Dudík, *Schweden in Böhmen*, pp. 10–12, No. 6–7.

¹¹¹ Christian Lehman. *Die Kriegschronik. Sachsen mit Erzgebirge*, Scheibenberg 1998 (further referred to as *Kriegschronik*), pp. 129–130.

¹¹² K tomu L. Sláma, *Bitva u Přísečnice v dobovém tisku*, Comotovia 2019, Chomutov 2020, pp. 124–132.

¹¹³ *AOSOB* VI, p. 838. For comparison purposes, Adam Jr. managed a similar route on horseback from Valdštejn (Wallenstein) in one day (Kadaň – Žatec – Postoloprty). Cf. *Deník rudolfínského dvořana. Adam ml. z Valdštejna (1603–1633)*, ed. M. Koldínská, P. Maťa, Prague 1997, p. 63. April 1603.

of the main part of his corps, i.e. Tuesday 26 March.¹¹⁴ The enemy was close, and Banér was very afraid of being completely cut off from the retreat route. Therefore, on the morning of Wednesday, 27 March 1641, he decided to leave Kadaň with the remaining military forces and head towards Přísečnice.¹¹⁵ He was followed by General Gottfried Geleen's cavalry, located only two hours' march away.¹¹⁶ The subject of almost all contemporary reports on the battle is the time distance between the two military bodies. Most of them inform about a maximum of one hour ahead of the Swedes, but more often there is half an hour between the rear of Banér's troops and the front units of Piccolomini.¹¹⁷

The Swedes used a very close advantage to quickly strengthen the local fortifications. In particular, they placed a small unit (perhaps dragoons) in the fortress and occupied the local field fortifications, created to protect the local trail. There is no specific mention but possibly, this role was played by the so-called imperial chance erected only recently, first mentioned in the spring of 1639. A total of 600 men were to be stationed in and around the town.¹¹⁸ The Swedish defence relied on elevated positions on the sides (where there were soldiers on both sides of *the three squadrons*, i.e. cavalry divisions),¹¹⁹ and around Hamer brook in front of the town. According to a report from Kadaň, Banér also *had a wagon wall created*.¹²⁰ Part of the cavalry and artillery was deployed by the Swedish commander-in-chief to the forest on a hill, and the rest of the designated took up nearby fighting positions.¹²¹

¹¹⁴ Prameny VI, p. 169. He also sent *bagáž* or luggage with the artillery. Cf. AOSOB VI, p. 834.

¹¹⁵ Prameny VI, p. 169; AOSOB VI, p. 838.

¹¹⁶ DBBTI VI, p. 399, No. 1181.

¹¹⁷ Kriegschronik, p. 129; EZW 1641/68, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ The chances are mentioned earlier. Cf. Prameny V, p. 217. Žatec, on March 9, 1639. The so-called Chronicle of Moses speaks of sending workers in this direction. See *Paměti města Luna v nich dobrá i zlá správa městská vypsána jest...Anno 1784*, Praha 1970, p. 125. Their exact location is a subject of further archaeological research. The number of soldiers is given in *Theatrum Europaeum IV*, p. 611.

¹¹⁹ *Theatrum Europaeum IV*, t. 30.

¹²⁰ In the lowland, water played a crucial role, among other things, in defence. Cf. J. Crkal, *Tvrz a zámek v Přísečnici*, [in:] *Hrady českého severozápadu*, ed. J. Kuljavceva Hlavová, O. Kotyza, M. Sýkora, Most 2012, pp. 9–37.

¹²¹ AOSOB VI, p. 838; *Theatrum Europaeum IV*, t. 30; DBBTI VI, p. 339, No. 1181. The rest of the cavalry and artillerymen were sent far beyond the town where they were ordered to carry out an abatis (a field fortification consisting of an obstacle formed of branches of trees arranged in a row, with the sharpened tops directed outwards, towards the enemy).

We do not know exactly what forces both opponents had at their disposal. On Banér's side stood a relatively strong artillery of about 60 cannons and five mortars. The Swedish army is supposed to have had up to 14,000 men on foot and on horseback, including the Finnish light cavalry. An integral part was said to have been a convoy of up to one thousand ammunition and carts.¹²² However, about 6,000 riders would be a more realistic number which means almost balanced forces of the opponents. Under the direct command of Ottavio Piccolomini, on the day of the battle there was also approximately the same number of cavalrymen.¹²³ This could have been topped with the support of Generals Geleen, Bruay and Bonnival, in total about one thousand cavalrymen.¹²⁴ However, less mention is made of infantry divisions, which, however, were not as effective during a retreat or in high snow and mud; it served more as support for creating the abatis. The advent of the imperial forces was hampered by the poor condition of the path, on which thousands of people and horses had walked just a few hours before. The attack was led mainly by the cavalry. Piccolomini with Mercy and Gele deployed *several dragoons, Bavarian cavalrymen and 400 cavalrymen of the new Piccolomini regiment* and attacked on the right side where the enemy stored the wagons with supplies.¹²⁵ Behind them, the advancing troops, deprived of cannons, left with some of the infantrymen on their way to Kadaň, slowly taking up fighting positions.¹²⁶ The Imperial forces were shelled not only by the cannons but also by the mentioned shooters on the opposite ridges.¹²⁷ A question arises as to how many infantry the Imperial Party could actually have had stationed in the field. It was certainly a unit not larger than a few hundred

¹²² *Kriegschronik*, p. 129. However, they were probably not of any large calibre, as Banér would have used them in the siege of Regensburg. According to another report, the total number was around 16,000 men. Cf. *Ordentliche Wochentliche Zeitungen* (hereafter OWZ) 1641/25, p. 4.

¹²³ *Ordentliche Wochentliche Post-Zeitung* (or *Frankfurter Post-Zeitung*) *Frankfurter Post-Zeitung. Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Bremen*, <http://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/zeitungen17/periodical/titleinfo/934741> [accessed: 9 VIII 2020] (further referred to as the OWPZ) 1641, No. XIII, p. 1. These are all very relative numbers that can but rather should not be trusted. Certainly not one of the recorders counted the soldiers. A clue is offered by the number of the sections, or, as in the case of medieval records, the numerical data can be understood as a synonym for the general "many".

¹²⁴ *Kriegschronik*, p. 129.

¹²⁵ *Theatrum Europaeum* IV, p. 611.

¹²⁶ The artillery was left somewhere near Ostrov (upon Ohře) with part of the infantry to defend the artillery. Cf. B. Dudík, *Schweden in Böhmen*, p. 11, No. 6.

¹²⁷ AOSOB VI, pp. 838–839.

men. According to *Theatrum Europaeum*, it was 300 professional soldiers recruited in Cheb.¹²⁸ Zikmund Myslík of Hyršov, a direct participant in the fighting, stated that *the Imperials had no infantry*.¹²⁹ Piccolomini was to set up a total of 12 cavalry regiments, 300 musketeers and one company of dragoons on the peaks of the Ore Mountains.¹³⁰

The deployment of Swedish shooters on two peaks above the main road to the city was a strategically sound move. The valley and the former town have been flooded but the two peaks, Holý vrch and Hájiště, are still accessible. At the same time, the villages of Rusová and Dolina, which disappeared at the same time as the town of Přísečnice, are now desolate.¹³¹ At the initial stage, the troops occupied the hills as well as the castle in the city centre where the fiercest fighting took place. This is indicated by a symbolic depiction of three imperial cavalry units besieging a small Swedish military unit. According to Cappi's plan of the battlefield, published in the fourth volume of *Theatrum Europaeum*, it appears that the Swedish army's retreat was covered by cannons. Unfortunately, not a single drawing of the battle contains a depiction of a wagon. In terms of the number of troops deployed, the sources are even more sparse than those describing the course of the battle. What is certain, however, is that only a small part of the soldiers operating in the area were affected. Jan Banér chose this place not to wage a major struggle but to allow the leading army to retreat from Bohemia to Saxony with the smallest possible casualties. At least, according to the statement that *with God's help and blessing with cavalry, infantrymen, pieces of ammunition and luggage – he came to Zwickau*, he succeeded and was satisfied with the outcome of the conflict.¹³² If he had left more troops near Přísečnice than he was willing to sacrifice, he certainly would not have commented

¹²⁸ *Theatrum Europaeum* IV, p. 611. There were supposed to be about 800 musketeers in Cheb, but only some of them were sent to the field. Cf. B. Dudík, *Schweden in Böhmen*, p. 11, n. 6.

¹²⁹ DBBTI VI, p. 399, No. 1181. See Z. Kalista, *Zdeněk Myslík z Hyršova*, Praha 1940. Sometimes Z. Myslík is considered the main commander of the operation. However, none of the sources mentions these facts, including F. Tischer, *Zikmund Myslík z Tyršova. Životopisný obraz z Třicetileté války*, Prague 1916, p. 14.

¹³⁰ *Kriegschronik*, p. 130.

¹³¹ They were located in the protective water zone of the tank. The construction of the reservoir took place in the 1970s and 1980s. It is referred to by M. Váňa, *Archeologický průzkum vesnic zaniklých z důvodu výstavby vodní nádrže Přísečnice*, *Dějiny staveb* 2015, pp. 83–88.

¹³² AOSOB VI, p. 839.

on his retreat with such enthusiasm.¹³³ The biggest number of victims of the conflict is stated by Zikmund Myslík, who only estimates the Swedish casualties at 4,000 (sic!).¹³⁴ Confronted with the fact that only 600 men (as mentioned above) were deployed in the fiercest battles of the city in this encounter, Myslík's report appears to be quite exaggerated.¹³⁵

As soon as the imperial cavalry managed to seize the city centre, skirmishes followed in the woods with the retreating Swedes.¹³⁶ The last defensive position was on the ridge where Swedish cannons were fired. A stream flowed around their positions and the waterlogged soil formed a swamp. Other divisions retreated to these places. The last scene of the battle of Přísečnice also took place there. Prisoners of war were taken and the loot counted. Among other things, the winners captured six guns and 500 trucks.¹³⁷ The Swedish army marched almost untouched to Cvikov (Zwickau) to rest there and prepare for the next campaign. Piccolomini and Mercy's cavalymen went back towards Kadaň.

Conclusion

The activities of Johann Banér in the Czech territory ended with this maneuver. He died on 10 May 1641 in Halberstadt and his remains were subsequently transferred to the Riddarholmkyrkan church in Stockholm. The war campaigns in Bohemia and Upper and Lower Silesia were not expected to end up with establishing the army in the relatively fertile Elbe valley and occupying important fortresses. They were meant to exert concentrated pressure on the imperial court in Vienna. As a result,

¹³³ On the contrary, he had to sacrifice 500 supply carts. Cf. *Theatrum Europaeum* IV, p. 611. *Prameny (Sources) VI* unfortunately do not give any more precise numbers.

¹³⁴ *DBBTI VI*, p. 399, No. 1181.

¹³⁵ Sometimes these losses are confused with 2,000 dead and 3,000 captured in the battle of Cham (Kouby). Cf. *Prameny VI*, p. 168. Bridge to the Czech governor, Feb. 26, 1641. Myslík of Hyršov himself lost about 300 men and horses in another battle, near Wolfenbüttel. Cf. Z. Kalista, *Zdeněk Myslík z Hyršova*, pp. 30–31.

¹³⁶ Probably this is where the legend of a lost cavalry unit comes from, which found death in the swamps near the town of Kovářská, about 10 km from Přísečnice. To this day, the local name Swedish Tomb – Peatland of Death has survived. Archaeological discoveries from the early 20th century confirmed that several horsemen actually drowned in these places. Their presence here may be related to the battle of Přísečnice.

¹³⁷ *Theatrum Europaeum* IV, p. 611; *ibid.* t. 30. Provisions collected, inter alia, in Chomutov on the previous days were stored in the wagons. Cf. *Prameny VI*, p. 169.

the imperial corps withdrew from Northern Germany where Jan Banér fought successful battles against the French and the hastily formed new corps recruited mainly from Hungarian fighters. We should not view the direct threat to Ferdinand III during the siege of Regensburg only as a reckless act but as seizing an opportunity to establish acceptable conditions for universal peace. In Bohemia, as well as in other parts of the Czech Crown and Germany, the events brought about misery and ruin. After about five years of reasonable peace, almost the whole of Bohemia experienced almost a year with the harsh Swedish contributions. However, between 1639 and 1641, they again became an important battlefield and as such witnessed decisive encounters like the Battle of Jankov (1645), the Battle of Trebel (1647) or the end of the war marked by the siege of the capital of the Kingdom of Prague (1648). It is interesting, however, that about a year after signing of the Peace of Westphalia, Swedish garrisons were still present in some castles and fortresses.

Summary

The presented study deals with the period of the second half of the Thirty Years' War in Bohemia that has not been closely observed so far. Nonetheless, it was a stage of the conflict, which had fatal consequences for the countries of the Czech Crown in the form of their great destruction and losses. The name of Johann Banér is well-known in Czech historiography, but only very little critically studied and evaluated. His two major incursions into the territory of Bohemia meant a serious disturbance of the balance of power on the European battlefield, yet by not bringing any stronger political results they did not become decisive campaigns. The first major campaign between 1639 and 1640 was even focused on reversing the previous victory of the Habsburgs in the lands of the Czech Crown, during which this military leader planned to overthrow the current government with the help of Czech exiles. Although Banér managed to occupy almost the whole of Bohemia, his efforts did not have any serious political consequences. The primary goal of the second campaign in 1641 was to occupy the Bavarian Regensburg, where the Imperial Diet (Reichstag) was in session. However, the occupation of the city and the pressure to negotiate a universal peace did not occur due to the lack of equipment of the army and bad weather. The campaign in Bohemia was rather forced on the Swedish corps and did not have the character of a war of conquest. In the Ore Mountains, around the no longer existing town of Přisečnice (in German Pressnitz/Preßnitz), the last battle in his life took place. This study aims to acquaint the reader with the course of both above-mentioned campaigns on the basis of archival materials and editions of sources, and thus bring closer the Czech realities of the early 1640s, when the Thirty Years' War entered the last stage for the Czech Crown, culminating in the Battle of Jankov (1645), the siege of Brno (1645) and the siege of Prague (1648).

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