

PROKOP TOMEK

Vojenský Historický Ústav

# Decline of Moral and Discipline in the Czechoslovak People's Army as a Sign of a Discrepancy between the Ideal of the socialist Soldier and Reality in the last two Decades of socialist Czechoslovakia

## ABSTRACT

This study is intended to map the state of morale in the Czechoslovak People's Army in the last two decades of its existence. Using Jacques van Doorn's methodological framework, the author compares the general demands of the military profession with the reality of the Czechoslovak People's Army. A significant finding is an overwhelming influence of military intervention in August 1968 on the subsequent morale of the army. Its members were no longer able to unite their interests within the organisation of the army.

## Research questions and methodology

The question of the real professional morale level in the Czechoslovak armed forces is still of interest today to scientists and witnesses. What actual effect did a communist ideology and persuasion have on the soldiers' morale? Can we assess the differences between the army before and after the military intervention of the Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968?

Basic research into this relatively recent history was, up to now, devoted mostly to the real structure and general development of the military in the last two decades of Czechoslovakia. Internal conditions were also studied, though to a lesser degree.<sup>1</sup> There is a lack of theoretical scientific works

---

<sup>1</sup> Prokop Tomek, *Československá armáda v čase Sametové revoluce. Proměny ozbrojených sil na přelomu osmdesátých a devadesátých let* (Cheb: Svět křídel, 2019); Igor Baka, Alex

focused on this special topic of morale and internal life of the Czechoslovak People's Army. Only recently have relevant new works emerged.<sup>2</sup> There is also an opportunity to compare the case of Czechoslovakia with the findings of research in other East European countries.<sup>3</sup> We can see many similarities, though the situation in the Czechoslovak People's Army was better than, for example in the Soviet army.<sup>4</sup>

For my own research, I was particularly inspired by the work of the historian Jacques van Doorn.<sup>5</sup> He examined an army as a distinct kind of organisation. He traced the transformations of armies in different political systems. He presented too several typical features of the socialist model of the army. Doorn's book is likely the only work suitable for this research.

Despite the ideological differences and the declared separation of the socialist army from its previous incarnation in the Czechoslovak democratic state, it is necessary to return to the original concept of the army and critically examine the path taken by the Czechoslovak People's Army (hereafter: CPA). The creators of the so-called socialist army assigned society an ambitious task. They wanted to create a new, completely different, socialist army and military collective consolidated around one ideology. They also had considerable educational ambitions. The socialist soldier would be a conscious builder of a socialist future as well. How successful could such a project be in reality? What resonance does it have with those involved today?

---

Maskalík, Matej Medvecký and Pavel Minařík, *Vojenské dejiny Slovenska*, vol. 7, 1968–1992 (Bratislava: Magnet Press; Slovakia: Vojenský historický ústav, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Jiří Hlaváček, ed., *Vzestup a pád ČSLA? Vojenská profese v kolektivní paměti důstojnického sboru (1960–1970)* (Praha: Karolinum, 2019); Hlaváček, ed., *Mezi pakárnou a službou vlasti. Základní vojenská služba (1968–2004) v aktéřské reflexi* (Praha: Academia, 2021); Tomek, „Mimořádné události v ČSLA,” *Historie a vojenství* no. 4 (2019): 24–41; Tomek, „Morálně-politický stav ČSLA na počátku normalizace,” *Historie a vojenství* no. 3 (2020): 30–43; Tomek, „Šikana, skrytý problém Československé lidové armády po roce 1969,” *Historie a vojenství* no. 2 (2012): 30–41.

<sup>3</sup> Marlena Niemiec, „Patologie w siłach zbrojnych – stan i perspektywy badań w świetle literatury przedmiotu,” *Pedagogika Rodziny* no. 5 (3) (2015): 69–80; Alena Maklak, „Dedovshchina on trial. Some evidence concerning the last Soviet generation of «sons» and «grandfathers»,” *Nationalities Papers* no. 5 (2015): 682–699, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2015.1048676>; Andrew Bickford, „The Militarization of Masculinity in the former German Democratic Republic,” in *Military Masculinities. Identity and the State*, eds. Nicolas Laham, Paul Highdate and Jeff Hearn (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 166–167; Christian Thomas Müller, „Die «EK-Bewegung» in den Kasernen der NVA. Eine Form von «sekundärer Anpassung» In «totalen Institutionen»,” in *Militär, Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR. Forschungsfelder, Ergebnisse, Perspektiven*, eds. Hans Ehler and Matthias Rogg (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2004), 559–584.

<sup>4</sup> Roger Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience. A History of the Soviet Army, 1917–1991* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Jacques van Doorn, *The Soldier and Social Change* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1975).

I have tried to support my conclusions with different sources from several perspectives. The official perspective could be represented by documents from the military-political command of the army. It should be the image of the army communicated within the army and presented to the political leadership of Czechoslovakia. The official documents were meant to confirm the correctness of the path taken. This perspective, therefore, requires an extremely critical historical approach. Relevant indicators of the state of morale are the summaries of discipline, judicial punishment and extraordinary events. These documents were official documents intended for internal use, i.e. less manipulated in terms of content.

There are also numerous findings of the work of the then-military sociologists. These individuals attempted to use professional methods to investigate the situation in the army during a given historical period. With the help of rigid ideological formulas, they tried to find ways of solving the problem of creating a cohesive military collective.

Another level is the perspective of the soldiers themselves. They returned to their impressions of military service thirty or more years later in interviews conducted as part of professionally made research using oral history methods. The only limitation of these testimonies is the distance of time and the evaluation of events from a different time and social situation.<sup>6</sup>

These perspectives are partly balanced from a foreign perspective. It is mediated by a unique set of reports by Western military observers on the CPA. This source is valuable because it comes from learned and experienced observers, assessing the situation on the base of their own professional methodology. On the other hand, their view was limited by the constraints at that time. Finally, there are the results of a my own historical research and previous works.

### **The army as a type of organisation – the great break of 1968**

Jacques van Doorn designated armies as the great organisations of modern times. Such organisations are praised for their uniting of numerous and different parts to achieve a common goal. Ideally, every individual participant should embrace this goal. „What he loses in personal liberty by participating in the collective effort, he regains by sharing in the collective results”.<sup>7</sup> Could this principle also be applied to the CPA?

---

<sup>6</sup> „Ga19-19311s – armáda jako nástroj socializace: reflexe fenoménu základní vojenské služby v českých zemích (1968–2004),” Informační systém výzkumu, vývoje a inovací, accessed October 23, 2022, <https://www.isvavai.cz/cep?s=jednoduche-vyhledavani&ss=detail&n=0&h=GA19-19311S>.

<sup>7</sup> Doorn, *Soldier*, 5.

Doorn pointed out that an organisation is firstly a reflection of a certain local social order, technological level and culture. Armies have evolved continuously in open societies. In totalitarian and developing countries, however, they had to cope with fundamental and rapid political changes. So-called socialist regimes emerged in countries with pre-existing political systems. Communist takeover pre-existing development. The communist government required the establishment of completely new political-military relations. However, military professionalism generally needs an army distant and independent from direct political control. The new communist political system controlled the armed forces by means of several instruments. Although it was an application of an essentially uniform pattern of organisation, the example of the CPA is understandably specific in particular regards.

The first instrument was a change in the rules of recruitment, promotion and dismissal of soldiers. A specific selection of individuals was possible to retain the most reliable professionals in service and to recruit new officers from the loyal strata of the society. Before the communist takeover, the Czechoslovak army was opened for the poor and the commoners citizens, but there were strict criteria for education and moral integrity. The communist takeover started a purposeful proletarianisation of the army. The level of education of individuals did not play a particularly important role. The lower professional standards negatively affected the overall level of the officer corps members and their morale. This fact had a negative impact on the reputation and prestige of the military profession in the 1950s.<sup>8</sup>

Intense political influence and education was intended to suppress the influence of the former political system. Indoctrination led to the full and open communist politicisation of the military. The professional soldiers, however, did not exercise real policy influence. They mostly became members of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (hereafter: CPC). By membership they formally expressed obedience and subordination. Party membership also constituted an important requirement for a professional career.

The last tool was the direct management of the armed forces by the communist leadership. In the lower level political officers served as deputy commanders. A more important instrument was the party's dominating influence on the seizing of important posts (*cadre nomenklatura*) and dependence on the political decisions of the CPC leadership.

Further developments contained a slow process of erosion. This led at end of the 1960s to a certain, of course very limited, restoration of the original, professional qualities of the officer corps. These officers increased military education and the degree of proletarianisation declined.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 65.

Regardless of the communist dictatorship, the CPA's career soldiers were actually able to discover a part of a common military and officer honor.<sup>10</sup> The Czechoslovak People's Army had undergone a fundamental change in personnel since the communist takeover in 1948, yet the career soldiers were still able to discover the patriotic nature of their profession.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the army remained one of the most politically conservative forces in the state. The space for expressing of new attitude only existed due to the changes in common political conditions during the Prague Spring.

A particularly interesting example of this personal development can be seen in senior army political leader, Lieutenant General Václav Prchlík. Since 1950 he held important positions in the army political apparatus. During 1955–1968 period Prchlík held the position of the head of the CPA's Main Political Directorate (a supreme body of the communist party in the army). In 1968, however, Prchlík became the head of the influential defence and security department of the Central Committee (hereafter: CC) of the CPC. This unit was a gear stick for the controlling of the army. General Prchlík in this position even prepared a plan of transparent defence and security policy. The most prolific moment of his career came on 15 July 1968. Prchlík called a press conference. He criticized the unequal relations in the Warsaw Pact and the slow leaving of Soviet troops from Czechoslovak territory after the unusual allied exercise „Šumava”. He also emphasized that there were no provisions for the arbitrarily deploying of troops on the territory of other Allied states. After an angry Soviet reaction, the First Secretary of the CC of the CPC, Alexander Dubček, dissolved Prchlík's department. In the autumn of 1969, Prchlík was expelled from the CC of the CPC, stripped of all his posts, demoted and dismissed from the army. In 1971, a military court sentenced Václav Prchlík to three years for disclosing military secrets. After his appealation, he was imprisoned for 22 months. After his release from prison, Prchlík moved into private civilian life and died quite soon.<sup>12</sup>

After January 1968, political developments in the army began to turn around relatively quickly. There were a few significant moments. The first was the defection of high-positioned Major General Jan Šejna to the USA. He was an important supporter of Antonín Novotný, the former First Secretary of the CPC. Šejna even planned political and military actions in favor of Novotný. Šejna also discredited himself for embezzling army money.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Marie Koldinská and Ivan Šedivý, *Válka a armáda v českých dějinách* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2008), 307–308.

<sup>11</sup> Doorn, *Soldier*, 65.

<sup>12</sup> Alex Maskalík, *Elita armády. Československá vojenská generalita 1918–1992* (Banská Bystrica: HWSK, 2012), 486.

<sup>13</sup> Antonín Benčík, Jaromír Navrátil and Jan Paulík, *Vojenské otázky československé reformy 1967–1970. Vojenská varianta řešení čs. krize (1967–1968)* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd; Brno: Doplněk, 1996), 144–161.

The whole army personnel expressed criticism of the earlier bureaucratic and authoritative methods of management. There was even a proposal for the own Czechoslovak military doctrine. Another issue was the continuing tension between the extensive demands of the Warsaw Pact and the Czechoslovak limited economic sources. The most significant acts were, first of all, the memorandum of thirty military scientists entitled „Formulating and Constituting Czechoslovak State Interests in the Military Field” dated 4 June 1968 and the „Action Programme of the CPA” issued on 11 June 1968.<sup>14</sup>

The open atmosphere of 1968 represented for many professional soldiers the turning point of their military careers. Until then, they had proven their loyalty. They believed that Czechoslovak and Soviet interests could be reconciled. They accepted the principle of army service on behalf of the socialist state and the homeland as well.

The clear rejection of military intervention in August 1968 can be regarded as proof of natural, professional honour. We can see an uneasy conflict between professionalism and long-standing political loyalty. For conscript soldiers, then, the rejection of the occupation was natural. They retained their civic identity first and foremost.

After August 1968, career soldiers lost their authentic conviction to serve their (socialist) country. They split into, firstly, a group of communist fanatics who were satisfied with the military intervention. The second group consisted of pragmatists and careerists who continued their service without conviction. The third group remained in service resignedly and submitted to the existing conditions despite their personal doubts. The last group of career soldiers could no longer serve in the army out of conviction and left for the reserves.<sup>15</sup>

The Armed Intervention Forces fulfilled primarily the political goal of securing Soviet influence in Czechoslovakia. Another objective of the military intervention in 1968 undoubtedly was the permanent deployment of Soviet troops. Until then, Czechoslovakia was the only Warsaw Pact country in contact with NATO countries without Soviet troops on its territory.<sup>16</sup>

The suppression of the reform movement in Czechoslovakia had a military dimension. The military intervention must have had an overwhelming impact on the moral and political state of the CPA. The soldiers could not fulfill their main role, to defend the country. The distance from the Allies

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 137–143, 162–176.

<sup>15</sup> Hlaváček, *Vzestup*, 175–187, 286–304.

<sup>16</sup> Koldinská and Šedivý, *Válka a armáda*, 307–308.

deepened. The main role of the army in the next period was to serve the occupiers and install political representation.<sup>17</sup>

### „Normalisation”

The military intervention of the Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968 had a great influence on the further internal state of the army. The following period of the development of the state and society is somewhat inaccurately referred to in Czech and Slovak historiography as „normalisation”.<sup>18</sup>

The main goal of the new political leadership was to gain firm political and power subordination of the army. Their first step was to enforce the domination of the CPC. This was clearly presented repeatedly by the political leadership itself: „Our army must be developed in the closest cooperation with the Soviet army, both within the framework of the Warsaw Pact and with the Soviet troops temporarily deployed on our territory” [transl. P.T.].<sup>19</sup> Or: „We must secure the cadre complementation and political consolidation at all levels of command, consolidate indivisible command authority on a party basis, and build a class-determined system of effective political-ideological education in the army” [transl. P.T.].<sup>20</sup>

The moral standard of the army, and especially its command corps, was based on coercion. Discipline had to be achieved at any price. Purges meant professional weakening. But it was a price that the political leadership was willing to pay. Restoring of order meant a violent process that did not lead to harmony and discipline.

The pursuit of harsh discipline was the pivotal point that determined the true level of conviction and loyalty in the army. It was a matter of restoring order and discipline but also a signal toward allies.

There are two examples of the „new army” creation in Czechoslovakia. The first took place after the *coup d'état* in 1948. A new people's army was built. In the period of „normalisation” after 1968, similar steps were taken. The communist leadership regarded military professionalism as a threat to the cohesion of the communist dictatorship. Therefore, certain measures

---

<sup>17</sup> Hlaváček, *Vzestup*, 175–187.

<sup>18</sup> The term was adopted on the initiative of the Soviet Party after August 1968 and was meant to signify a return to normality. For the reformist forces, it was meant to be a return to pre-August 1968 and to reform. For the Soviet Union, the „normal” was setting up a common centralized communist dictatorship. Some experts believe that this process of „normalization” ended in 1971 and was replaced by a period of stagnation for the nearly twenty years that followed.

<sup>19</sup> *KSČ o ozbrojených silách. Dokumenty 1918–1976* (Praha: Naše vojsko, 1976), 342.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

such as dismissals and changes of the rules of recruitment and promotion were carried out. Political and ideological indoctrination was also a key measure again. These steps were taken under the conditions of the Soviet occupation. Such forcible measures could not have any real influence on people's thinking. But the expression of obedience was sufficient.

The disciplinary process had a negative impact. The purges lead to a shortage of staff. In the army CPC organisation, 7807 career soldiers (6611 officers and 1196 warrant officers) lost their membership. 3033 career soldiers evaluated as „politically unsuitable” had to leave the army. 1178 career soldiers left the army formally for other reasons. Some officers in all positions approved by the CPC were reduced in rank.<sup>21</sup>

The XIVth Congress of the CPC was held in Prague from 25 to 29 May 1971. This key summit became a symbolic culmination of the process of restoring order in the army. First party secretary Gustáv Husák identified in his speech as the main goal in the future in the military sphere the strengthening of the position of the army in the society as well as strengthening the defence of the state. He claimed that the CPA recently „consolidated and improved both its political work and combat readiness”. He said, that after the purges and other measures, the army is ready to fulfil the expectations of the people.<sup>22</sup>

Minister of National Defence General Martin Dzúr expressed in a congressional address his full support for the CC's report. He fully accepted the critical assessment of the army in the key normalisation document „Lessons from the Crisis Development in the Party and Society after the XIIIth Congress of the CPC” and unreservedly welcomed the intervention of the Soviet Union and the Allies in August 1968. Dzúr claimed that thanks to the new political leadership and, of course, close cooperation with the Central Group of Soviet troops, the army performed „a difficult consolidation process”. The minister emphasised the cadre purges as the decisive tool. He promised that army had been replenished with „class-conscious, party-devoted, morally and characteristically firm cadres loyal to the principles of proletarian internationalism” [transl. P.T.].<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Národní archiv (The National Archive Prague, hereafter: NAP), Fond Předsednictvo Ústředního výboru KSČ (The Archival fund the Central Committee of the CPC) no. 02/1 (hereafter: Presidium of the CPC), file (hereafter: f.) 17, unit (hereafter: u.) 18, item (hereafter: i.) 2, Výsledky splnění úkolů ČSLA za rok 1971 a hlavní úkoly pro rok 1972, s. 1., 5 XI 1971, 23.

<sup>22</sup> „Ze zprávy o činnosti strany a vývoji společnosti od XIII. sjezdu KSČ a o dalších úkolech strany,” in *KSČ o ozbrojených silách*, 385–386.

<sup>23</sup> „Projev ministra národní obrany armádního generála ing. M. Dzúra na XIV. sjezdu KSČ,” in *ibid.*, 386–390.

These above points indicate the creation of a politically „new army”. The Congress of the CPC confirmed the renewal of the army’s rigid obedience to the Party and the Warsaw Pact Allies. In fact, the purges continued. The optimistic proclamation was especially targeted to the Allies and the CPC leadership as the report of successes in „restoring order”.

### Official image

The leadership of the Ministry of National Defence submitted annual reports regarding the results of the initial years following reforms to the Presidium of the CC of the CPC. The reports included a section devoted to political, moral, and discipline levels. These reviews should show the real and unembellished situation. However, the army’s command and political corps were primarily concerned with convincing the CPC leadership of the success of its work. The reports were therefore superficial and obscured the essential facts.

Even insinuations about training or economic difficulties appeared only furtively. The informational value of such „evaluations” is exemplified in the periodical report 1980–1981: „The firming of the leading role of the Party in the activities of the CPA, based on a solid and active army party organisation, the widely developed party political and ideological educational work, together with the united efforts of commanders, political bodies and party organisations, created permanent conditions for the successful completion of the line of the XVth Congress of the CPC. These factors motivated and mobilized the masses of soldiers to an all-round understanding and resolute approach to the implementation of the conclusions of the XVth Party Congress. Education and training were positively influenced by the gradual implementation of the resolutions adopted by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1981 on important issues of army life” [transl. P.T.].<sup>24</sup>

The language of the reports was a system of signs, not least to reassure that nothing alarming was happening and the situation in the army is under firm control. The basic parts of three such reports show the discourse of the political leadership and army management during two decades.

In 1971, the main objective was to ensure „the full application of the Leninist principles of the army’s development and activity, especially demand for the consistent application of the leading role of the Party, which is necessary for the achievement of the political-moral unity of the members of the army based

---

<sup>24</sup> NAP, Presidium of the CPC, f. 15, u. 22, i. 1, Zpráva o splnění úkolů ČSLA ve výcvikovém roce 1980–1981 a hlavních úkolech ČSLA pro výcvikový rok 1981–1982, Stanovisko oddělení státní administrativy ÚV KSČ, s.l., 23 X 1981, attachment no 2, 1.

on Marxism-Leninism, and for the consistent implementation of the military policy of the Communist Party" [transl. P.T.]. The author of the report admitted the weak consolidation of military discipline and the high number of serious accidents. But the cause was seemingly clear: „Many reserves lie in management and organizational work and the weak education of subordinates" [transl. P.T.]. The real system was untouchable.

Another cause of problems was unsocialist behaviour. The „influences of petty-bourgeois relics and morality" were to blame for the problematic relations between the rank and file, for cases of greed and bullying, and for the weak cohesion of the military collectives. These burdens were supposed to explain the cases of a „wrong attitude towards a common property and the economy" (thefts), the constant problem of drunkenness associated with disorderly behaviour, and a general passivity towards the prevailing shortcomings. Morale and discipline were also adversely affected by „the prevailing right-wing opportunistic illusions in our society and a non-class view on the capitalist world, its policies and aspirations" [transl. P.T.].<sup>25</sup>

How this was possible after more than 20 years of building socialism? The criticism was never directed at the system but exclusively at the weak performance of duty, superficiality, lack of concreteness, poor management and personal indifference. The responsible functionaries blamed the world outside the army. Their observations were often correct. But they stopped at the impassable limit of ideology.

Can any positive developments be found? Eight years later, the report on the fulfillment of the 1979–1980 training period looked like a success:

„In the consciousness of the overwhelming majority of the army members, the basic values of socialism have been grasped and the actual tasks of building and defending of the developed socialist society have been more deeply understood. Confidence in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, active relationship to its policies, responsibility and loyal approach to military duties were strengthened. [...] The study of the basic matters of the development of the Czechoslovak socialist state at the phase of the building of a developed socialist society enabled the command corps to understand more deeply the defence of the socialist homeland as an objective regularity of the construction of socialism in a class-divided world, the place and the role of the CPA in the fulfilment of its functions. The established themes contributed to the increase of responsibility of commanders, chiefs and political workers for combat and mobilization readiness, for improving the management of training and education of troops. Soldiers in basic service broadened their knowledge of internal

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., f. 17, u. 18, i. 2, Výsledky splnění úkolů ČSLA za rok 1971 a hlavní úkoly pro rok 1972, s.l., 5 XI 1971, 12.

political and international developments, especially the class nature and mission of the Warsaw Pact, its role in the struggle for peace and international security” [transl. P.T.].<sup>26</sup>

However, the same report also states that the number of tragic accidents has also increased significantly, especially the number of soldiers dead and seriously wounded.<sup>27</sup> The number of attempts to defect abroad, thefts of weapons and ammunition, detected cases of bullying, crimes of theft of socialist-owned property and violence against juniors soldiers on duty have also risen significantly. The number of crimes committed under the influence of alcohol rose. The participation of previously convicted offenders also increased. These recidivists accounted for forty percent of the newly sentenced in the army. „Some of the young people entering the army have poor habits of discipline and less ability to adapt to performing tasks in a military environment” [transl. P.T.]. The tools were consistent implementation of the new regulations, more responsible performance of functional duties, „greater personal exemplarity of the command staff, and more effective individual political work” [transl. P.T.].<sup>28</sup>

This result means that any efforts devoted to education did not have a major impact. The declared causes were still the same: bad habits brought from civilian life and weak performance of duty.

Finally, the report on the outcome of the 1988–1989 training period gives high marks to the level of morale and political condition: „An important factor that assisted in the accomplishment of educational and training tasks was the efforts of commanders, political bodies and Party organizations to consistently enforce the Party’s leadership and policy in the sections entrusted to them. The result was the cohesion of the decisive majority of the CPA members around the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, their responsibility, dedication and initiative in implementing the main guidelines of the Party’s defence policy”. However, the discipline remained still at a low level: „It was not possible to

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., f. 122, u. 122, i. 1, Splnění úkolů ČSLA ve výcvikovém roce 1978–1979 a úkoly na r. 1979–1980, s.l., 9 XI 1979, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Vojenský ústřední archiv – Vojenský historický archiv (The Central Military Archive Prague – the Military Historical Archive; hereafter: CMAP–MHA), Collection Vojenské předpisy po roce 1945, inv. j. 5661, kart. 369, Sběrka nařízení a směrnic FMNO č. 011 z 30 IX 1971, Směrnice pro sledování a vyhodnocování kázně, kázeňské praxe, mimořádných událostí a úrazovosti [The Directions for monitoring and evaluation of discipline, discipline practice, extraordinary events and injuries], s.l. The extraordinary events were: „events, activities or omissions, which consequences are threatening moral and political situation of the military unit, its combat readiness, fulfillment of combat tasks, relations between army and society, allied bonds with armies and states of the Warsaw Pact” [transl. P.T.].

<sup>28</sup> NAP, Presidium of the CPC, f. 122, u. 122, i. 1, Splnění úkolů ČSLA ve výcvikovém roce 1978–1979 a úkoly na r. 1979–1980, s.l., 9 XI 1979, 20.

achieve a more sustained increase in the effectiveness of educational and organisational work in strengthening conscious military discipline". The effects of the overall political crisis in the state were new: „The demands of illegal structures and initiatives to liquidate the leading role of the party, to dismantle socialism and to weaken the combat capability of the CPA were categorically rejected. The army is politically firm and consolidated. Some communists do not keep a clear relationship with the Party, as shown in 263 cases of termination of membership in the Communist Party, most of them at the own request of members. These are mainly young people – soldiers in basic service and young career soldiers, but also older civilian employees of the military administration, especially workers." But, „the intensive clarification of the vanguard role of the Communist Party in the modern history of Czechoslovakia, of socialist conveniences and further prospects for their development strengthened the class consciousness, socialist patriotism and internationalism of the members of the CPA, their resolution to take an active part in the building and defence of the homeland. The clarification of socialist legality, legal certainties and the need for increasing care for the population contributed to the consolidation of military discipline. The Marxist-Leninist training succeeded in unifying views and creating active attitudes of the command corps towards the policy of reconstruction. The political training of men and non-commissioned officers significantly shaped their political attitudes and attitude towards military service and the performance of tasks. However, it was not possible to more firmly increase the effectiveness of the ideological and educational influence of the Union of socialistic youth organization among military youth and to influence the level of military discipline and relations in military collectives by higher exemplarity of the trade unionists" [transl. P.T.].<sup>29</sup>

Thus, after 20 years of political work, the same problems kept appearing. A typical feature of the reports to the political leadership was a seamless depiction of the desired state of affairs. What was set out was accomplished. Yet the same problems persisted and the overall situation continued to deteriorate. For all the difficulties, the commanders had ideologically correct answers but not real solutions.

### **The actual level of discipline as an indicator of moral status**

Doorn points out that an organisation (the army) also brings together people who do not fit into the established organisational framework. These are distinctive individuals, but also people with complex social

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., f. P 134/89, i. 2, Zpráva o splnění úkolů ČSLA ve výcvikovém roce 1988–1989 a hlavních úkolech ČSLA pro výcvikový rok 1989–1990, hlavní vojenskopolitické dokumenty pro ČSLA ve výcvikovém roce 1989–1990, s.l., 13 X 1989, 7.

backgrounds, different levels of education and hostile ideological views. How significant was this factor in the CPA?

The extraordinary events had some permanent causes. Some of them were already above mentioned. A fundamental problem appears to have been the widespread consumption of alcohol in Czechoslovak society as a whole. Alcohol was the cause of more than half of emergencies, crimes and breaches of discipline in the army every year. Another important and long-standing cause of problems was the apparent complete unsuitability of a significant number of conscripts for basic military service. Some of these conscripts had questionable character and moral issues. They were court-martialled and even criminal repeat offenders in civil life. Others had health limitations. Some also had low educational and intellectual levels.<sup>30</sup>

According to a 1982 army report, between 10 and 20% of conscripts with a tendency towards heavy drinking of alcohol and 10% of those with previous judicial convictions joined the CPA. In 1980, there were 1294 conscripts twice or more judicially punished. They accounted for 1,1% of the total number of rank and file. Although this was seemingly not a high number, these soldiers had a significant negative impact on the overall level of discipline. 40% of the new court-martialled servicemen each year originated from those previously convicted in civilian life. Because of the rising shortage of human sources, such conscripts were also assigned to combat motorized rifle and tank units.

Conscripts with medical limitations represented 35,3% of the total personnel in the year 1970 and 41% in the year 1981. The health and physical fitness of the population were declining due to civilisation factors. Juxtaposing this, however, was the rising educational level. In 1970, 23,9% of the conscripts had a high school education and in the year 1981 already 38,2%. By contrast, 16,9% of the conscripts had not completed primary education in 1970 and 8,2% in 1981. From 1976 onwards, conscripts with incomplete education and, among them, conscripts of Roma origin in particular were assigned to separate companies with special education program. The overall quality of conscripts was lower in 35–40% of the conscripts for the all reasons mentioned above.<sup>31</sup>

This was a considerably high figure. The army was forced to draft clearly unsuitable conscripts. The Warsaw Pact command was pressing to fill the numbers of combat units. Some of the problematic men had access to weapons and heavy military equipment. And the problem was also coexistence with such individuals in closed military collectives. Many conscripts would undoubtedly

---

<sup>30</sup> Tomek, „Mimořádné události,” 24–41; Tomek, „Morálně-politický stav,” 30–43.

<sup>31</sup> NAP, Presidium of the CPC, f. 28, u. 33, i. for information 12, Informační zpráva o stavu a vývoji doplňování ozbrojených sil v 7. a 8. pětiletce vojáky v základní službě a vojáky v záloze za branné pohotovosti státu, s.l., 3 III 1982, 4–5.

not have passed the more demanding selection procedure for the professional military draft. Certainly, in a civilian environment, they would not have been able to get, for example, a firearms licence. Some of the unsuitable conscripts caused various incidents, disciplinary offences and criminal offences.

The measurable value of discipline was the number of convictions during military service. In the period 1976–1977, the number of convicted soldiers decreased by more than one hundred percent from 1970–1971. But it was consistently high. The authorities attributed this to the consolidation of military discipline. It was supposed to be „the result of increasingly purposeful and coordinated activities of all the bodies involved in the education of members of the CPA” [transl. P.T.]. The proportion of career soldiers in the number of convicts was 17,9%. A total of 58,8% were second-year basic service soldiers. This proportion was roughly constant. It is a particularly interesting statistic bearing in mind the concept of ideological education. Soldiers who had been under the influence of intensive indoctrination for more than a year committed more crimes than new recruits.<sup>32</sup>

Most of the offences were military crimes, followed by offences in traffic, property offences and offences of a violent and disorderly nature. The majority of offences (62,7%) occurred during off-duty and private time beyond of military barracks. Alcohol was indeed the most common cause of offences. 54,4% of the crimes and offences were committed while under the influence of alcohol. These were mostly related to traffic. There were also offences of a violent and disorderly nature and offences of a verbal nature. Of the total number of offences committed in the period 1976–1977, were 35,9% previously convicted in civil life.<sup>33</sup>

Preventive measures to reduce alcohol consumption and vague „effective measures” by commanders and political authorities were supposed to solve this situation. Military judges were to punish more acts committed under the influence of alcohol, impose the punishment of protective treatment, develop legal propaganda and legal education.

The problem of bullying continued to grow. In the early 1970s, such acts were practically non-existent, and the number of soldiers punished for committing acts of bullying was equally low. By the late 1980s, on the other hand, there were hundreds a year. For the 1983–1984 training year, 59 cases of bullying were recorded among the incidents and 43 a year later.

---

<sup>32</sup> Vojenský ústřední archiv – Odbor archivnictví a spisové služby ministerstva vnitra ČR (The Central Military Archive Prague – The Administration Archive of the Ministry of Defence), f. 1978, Správa vojenských soudů, kart. 336, Stav soudní trestnosti za zimní výcvikové období 1976–1977 v ČSLA, Vyšší vojenský soud Příbram, s.l., 31 I 1978, 2.

<sup>33</sup> NAP, presidium of the CPC, f. 3, u. 5, i. 3, Zpráva o stavu vojenské kázně a dalších úkolech zvyšování její úrovně v ČSLA, 5. schůze PÚV KSČ, s.l., 8 V 1981, 5–6.

But in the relatively short period of ten months from 1 October 1986 to 31 July 1987, as many as 265 soldiers were sanctioned for hazing! In 1986, military courts convicted a total of 304 soldiers for hazing. In addition, commanders imposed 1011 disciplinary penalties for bullying. Two-thirds of the hazing cases that year were physical assaults while under the influence of alcohol.<sup>34</sup> From October 1986 to October 1987, 263 soldiers were convicted of hazing and 3378 were disciplinarily punished. From October 1987 to August 1988, 229 soldiers were convicted of bullying and 3182 were disciplined.<sup>35</sup> Based on the available data, it can be said that despite all measures, the number of bullying cases was relatively high. It must be said, that many cases were not detected at all.<sup>36</sup>

Abuse of power had two main forms. The more general was shift of almost all and most physically hard duties onto junior soldiers and various exploitation consisting of forcing favours. The second form was open humiliation, forcing soldiers to take part in „entertainment” and rituals of a violent nature, leading sometimes to desertions or suicides. Career soldiers often quietly allowed the senior rank and file to organise life in units such way. The phenomenon was called in the CPA *mazáctví*.<sup>37</sup> The system of privileges was probably strengthened by the introduction of two regular call up dates at the end of the 1960s. The service was two years long (except for academy graduated, they served one year). The system of call up created not only two classes of soldiers, but four different groups with special privileges: new recruits, soldiers after six months of service, then soldiers in the middle of their service and oldest soldiers six months before going into reserve. Most of them were interested in letting the system run. This was the best way to survive their service.<sup>38</sup>

Hazing was a long-standing problem of all armies in the east block. Up to now research shows, that forms and development of bullying were generally very similar. In Poland it's called *fala* („wave”), in the Soviet army *dedovshchina* or in East Germany *EK-Bewegung*.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., f. P 46/87, i 1, Zpráva o splnění úkolů ČSLA ve výcvikovém roce 1986–1987 a hlavních úkolech ČSLA pro výcvikový rok 1987–1988, s.l., 7 X 1987, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., f. P 89/88, i. 1, Zpráva o splnění úkolů ČSLA ve výcvikovém roce 1987–1988 a hlavních úkolech ČSLA pro výcvikový rok 1988–1989, 14 X 1988, s.p.

<sup>36</sup> Tomek, „Šíkana,” 30–41.

<sup>37</sup> The origin of this term is uncertain. The term should originate from the fact, that in the nineteenth century newcomers in the army had got new boots made of row leather. At the end of their service their boots were shiny, after daily polishing (*mazat* – spreading them by a shoe polish).

<sup>38</sup> Hlaváček, *Mezi pakárnou*, 207.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.; Niemiec, „Patologie,” 69–80; Maklak, „Dedovshchina,” 682–699; Müller, „Die ‚EK-Bewegung,” 559–584.

The relatively high incidence of suicides and suicide attempts was alarming. Many of these acts were attributed to difficulties in adapting recruits to military service. In the training period 1970–1971, 63 suicides and suicide attempts accounted for 19% of the extraordinary events (out of 572).<sup>40</sup> This means a high number of 31,5 suicides per 100 000 persons. During the 1974–1975 training period, the Army recorded 47 completed suicides, out of a total of 157 soldier deaths. Ten years later, in the 1984–1985 training period, the number of completed suicides was reduced to 20, out of a total of 103 deaths.<sup>41</sup>

Army officials claimed that the most common cause of suicides were problems soldiers brought from civilian life. Homesickness or unresolved or newly developed emotional problems in prolonged separation from loved ones were undoubtedly significant. But it was military service and the new living conditions that created or precipitated the problem. A significant number of suicides and suicide attempts are clearly attributable to difficulties in adapting to military service and broad enlistment of unsuitable conscripts suffering some kind of psychiatric problems.

In May 1981 the Presidium of the CC of the CPC discussed the extremely unsatisfactory state of discipline in the CPA. The authors of the report found the reason for the poor level of discipline in the low ability to cope with the difficulties of military service. Soldiers in basic service were said to have become accustomed to a higher standard of living in the civilian environment than previous generations and then had difficulty restraining themselves in military service. The authors were careful to acknowledge that political education was apparently ineffective. In a plethora of ideological platitudes and general declarations, the conclusion was directed towards the traditional requirement of further political education and the consistent enforcement of compliance with basic orders: „Qualitative changes in the CPA are accompanied by a steady consolidation of the moral-political level. It is characterized by the active relationship of members of the army to the policy of the Communist Party, a deepening class, patriotic and international consciousness, pride in the socialist homeland and belonging to the countries of the socialist community, awareness of social obligations and personal responsibility for the defense of socialism” [transl. P.K.].<sup>42</sup>

In the 1980s, the biggest event in the army seems to be the change in the post of Minister of National Defence in January 1985. The available

---

<sup>40</sup> NAP, Presidium of the CPC, f. 17, u. 18, i. 2, Výsledky splnění úkolů ČSLA za rok 1971 a hlavní úkoly pro rok 1972, s.l., 5 XI 1971, 21–22.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., f. 149, u. 140, i. 1, Zpráva o splnění úkolů ČSLA ve výcvikovém roce 1984–1985 a hlavních úkolech ČSLA pro výcvikový rok 1985–1986, s.l., 16 X 1985, 9–10.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., f. 3, u. 5, i. 3, Zpráva o stavu vojenské kázně a dalších úkolech zvyšování její úrovně v ČSLA, 5. schůze PÚV KSČ dne 8 V 1981, s.l., 2.

data show that the parameters of discipline and emergencies deteriorated considerably in the last years of the service of the ailing and aging Minister, Army General Martin Dzur. His successor, Army General Milan Václavík, then issued a rare order to strengthen military discipline and order to further strengthen good relations between rank and file. He also tried to suppress alcoholism and bullying. His efforts were only partially successful.<sup>43</sup>

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, „tasks were consistently being carried out”, „results were coming in”, and „political unity and cohesion around the CPC were being strengthened”. At the same time, there were allegedly only minor problems „which were critically assessed and analysed” [transl. P.K.]. These were supposedly phenomena that could be eliminated without changing the essence of the system. What was really missing was a substantive, genuinely critical and unbiased exchange of views.

### Political action

The primary emphasis was put on education. However, its implementation consisted of a system of schematic and unreliable programmes. One need only compare the alleged results with reality.

The „educational” process was intense. At all levels, for example, seminars on Marxist-Leninist training or the study of current CPC documents were held for career soldiers. There was a well-known Evening university of Marxism-Leninism with programs in Marxist-Leninist philosophy, political economy, scientific communism, the history of the CPC, the experience of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the theory and practice of party building, and questions of party political work in the CPA. This was followed by extension courses and theoretical seminars on the problems of the Marxist-Leninist critique of contemporary ideology and the politics of anti-communism, the party school at the divisional level, etc. Courses on the basics of political knowledge were set up for candidates and young CPC members, and courses on the basics of economic knowledge and the party’s economic policy and current issues of the development of socialist society were set up for civil army employees. Basic military service was accompanied by the proverbial political training of the men. The army leadership even considered the mere completion of basic military service a contribution to the enrichment of society: „The service of young soldiers is a school of political and military education and martial mastery, moral and physical hardening” [transl. P.T.]. In the course of basic military service, soldiers generally underwent about 384 hours of political training for men, and thus supposedly received a comprehensive Marxist-Leninist

---

<sup>43</sup> Tomek, „Šikana,” 30–41.

education. Mastery of modern technology and weapons was supposed to contribute to raising their overall professional and technical level. The result should be an extremely „political conscious” army.<sup>44</sup>

The only political party allowed in the army was the CPC. There were no members of other legal political parties of the National Front among the careers soldiers. As a result of the purges at the beginning of normalisation, the number of the CPC members in the army also fell by 15,6% by September 1973. This deficit was quite quickly made up. In 1989, there were a total of 59 919 communists among all personnel, it means 66,4%. On the one hand, there was a remarkable difference in the political organization among officers with 82% communists while only 34,6% were among warrant officers. 73% of company and battery commanders were Party members but only 54% of platoon commanders. Pilots, on the other hand, reached even 81,5% of the organized membership in the CPC. Membership in the CPC was not obligatory but in fact a prerequisite for holding a higher position from commanding of a battalion and above. At the Ministry of National Defence highest level, membership reached nearly 100%, and at district and army headquarters around 95%. In the 1976–1979 period, only 4,17% of the conscripts were members of the CPC. In 1981, this figure was only 3,4%, but the number increased to about 6% at the end of their service.<sup>45</sup>

Political, ideological or philosophical views other than Marxism-Leninism were not tolerated in the army. But on reflection, the intended result of indoctrination was not convincing. For example, a three-year large-scale survey „Scientific Atheism and Overcoming Religious Survival in the Consciousness of Military Youth” conducted among 2000 soldiers of two divisions and three military schools in 1986–1989 showed poor results of long-term ideological indoctrination and in the consistent displacement of religion from the army. One-fifth of the respondents were expected to be tolerant of religion and to recognize the moral and spiritual potential of religion or to vacillate between religious and vigorously atheistic attitudes. Two-fifths were worldview-undecided. Only about half of the respondents said they were explicitly atheists.<sup>46</sup>

### The perspective of basic military service soldiers

The image of the military service in the current memory of formerly involved individuals is highly critical. It largely corrects official views on the

---

<sup>44</sup> NAP, Presidium of the CPC, f. 71, u. 76, i. 5, Opatření ke zvýšení úrovně branné propagandy a účinnější popularizace ČSLA ve společnosti, s.l., 28 IV 1978, 18–19.

<sup>45</sup> Tomek, *Československá armáda*, 32.

<sup>46</sup> *Vědecký ateismus a překonávání náboženských přežitků ve vědomí vojenské mládeže. Závěrečná výzkumná zpráva, vědeckovýzkumný úkol S4-VN-06* (Brno: Vojenská akademie Antonína Zápotockého, 1989).

performance of training years. According to the testimonies of former rank and file, training in the CPA was conducted formally and quite inadequately. Tactical exercises were allegedly rehearsed theatre. Soldiers on basic duty mostly felt that they would not get to do real military activities. Rather, they worked as servants. They did maintenance, cleaning, menial jobs, service and guard duty. Three-quarters of individuals even testify that they only fired live ammunition once or twice. Guard duty was, after all, the only experience with some combat deployment. Military equipment was largely outdated or obsolete. Its utility was also low due to its low production quality. About a third of the equipment did not work, so parts were covertly borrowed. Alarms were formal and usually known to the soldiers in advance. In some places the situation could have been better, but this was rather exceptional.<sup>47</sup>

Years later, former rank and file agree that basic military service was wasted time. Among the narrators, there is almost no one who has a positive attitude toward his military service conduct. A respondent serving in years 1982–1984 in a motorised rifle unit claims that nihilism reigned in the military. The main goal was to live to see civilian life again. The part of rank and file ensured the running of the military unit and did all the necessary overhead work. The other part was just biding its time until it was released to the reserves. There was bullying, humiliation and degradation in the army. Nobody trusted anything. The respondent describes military service as one of the greatest indictments of the past regime.<sup>48</sup>

The experience of bullying is virtually integral to all the testimonies. There was probably no type of military or unit where it was not present in some way.<sup>49</sup>

### Army research during the communist period

In the early 1970s, the CPA leadership strengthened a political and scientific support of indoctrination. The journal *Historie a vojenství* for example, was reorientated on social and political sciences since 1972. Problems of socialization, communist education, collectivism, and relations among soldiers were the subject of a number of lengthy articles. The authors used scientific methods and terminology. The professional but above all realistic

---

<sup>47</sup> Hlaváček, *Mezi pakárnou*, 301–318.

<sup>48</sup> „Armáda jako nástroj socializace: Reflexe fenoménu základní vojenské služby v českých zemích 1968–2004, výzkum podpořený Grantovou agenturou ČR,” č. 410/19-19311S, rozhovor ZVS-010, Daniel B. (A result of research – a transcription of an interview with a former conscript. A collection of interviews is saved at the Institut for contemporary history – the Academy of Science Czech Republic).

<sup>49</sup> Hlaváček, *Mezi pakárnou*, 207.

basis of their theoretical works was flawed. They were based on the assumption of the existence of conscious and positively oriented rank and file who had a positive attitude towards military service. Scientists assumed that in the army was a consciousness of a common positive goal. „The ideological foundations of socialist collectivism in the army are based on the Marxist-Leninist worldview and the socialist convictions of the soldiers, their devotion to the working people and the socialist motherland. This makes it possible to correctly understand the mission and meaning of military service as an honorable civic duty and creates the necessary precondition for the application of collectivism in military activity and the mutual relations between soldiers” [transl. P.T.].<sup>50</sup> Such an interpretation apparently contradicted the real situation in the army. Moreover, groups of career soldiers and rank and file had different goals.

Great importance was attached to the performance of basic military service. The communist education and socialisation of conscripts were part of the educational process of the whole society. „The qualities that a conscript acquires in the military are also important for the building of society; education in the military is the realization of the general goal of communist education” [transl. P.T.].<sup>51</sup>

Meanwhile, the publication output of military psychologists and sociologists in the 1970s and 1980s contained a number of interesting insights. In one study, the author drew attention to the fact that output in the military was not productive in nature and did not produce tangible results. Hence the feeling of wasted energy. Rank and file were not materially interested in the results of their work in the army, so this motivation was also absent. Yet the demands on them were much higher than in civilian life. At the same time, it was often impossible to meet these demands. Thus, if soldiers had any expectations when they joined the army, they soon lost them. „The military regime is also sometimes disproportionate in the intensity of the stimuli, especially in the initial adaptation phase. These are excessive demands which, because they are unreasonable and unbearable for the central nervous system, not only cannot be met (which has negative educational consequences), but can lead to physical and psychological disorders of varying degrees and severity” [transl. P.T.]. Soldiers should be convinced of the legitimacy of the demands made on them. They cannot be motivated when their experience convinces them daily that the demands placed on them are not reasonable. Education should reach a state where soldiers see the performance of military duties as a specific work activity

---

<sup>50</sup> František Knobloch, „Kolektivismus ve vztazích mezi vojáky,” *Historie a vojenství* no. 2 (1988): 76–91.

<sup>51</sup> Jaroslav Hromátka, „Některé psychologické problémy procesu socializace a komunistické výchovy v armádě,” *Historie a vojenství* no. 4–5 (1972): 558–580.

for which they bear the same responsibility as in civilian life. Military sociologists were also aware of the specific character of military units as social groups, created artificially and temporarily, and of course of internal relations.<sup>52</sup>

Despite a number of correct observations, military sociologists could not cope with the boundary of ideology. Their work was meant to support the official discourse. But the latter only allowed to talk about conscious and well-trained soldiers.

### Foreign perspective

The view of the internal state of the CPA is interestingly complemented by the observations of NATO military *attaches*. They had the opportunity, even if only from the outside, to observe CPA soldiers for an extended period.<sup>53</sup> In 1982, Colonel Jeremy Crispin Carter, the defence *attaché* of the British Embassy in Prague, assessed the CPA as a numerically strong and materially relatively well-equipped army. He described the soldiers as educated and bright men by Eastern European standards. However, he considered the non-military demeanour and apparent indifference to be a sign of low morale: „Discipline appears lax by Western Army standards and not, I suspect, just for egalitarian reasons. Troops shamble rather than march, officers and soldiers exchange salutes casually and apologetically and officers and soldiers smoke in uniform in public, the latter on sentry duty at that. Uniforms (possibly the scruffiest in the Warsaw Pact) are frequently crumpled and shoes unpolished and down at heel. Many older officers need haircuts. The Czechoslovak Peoples Army officers and soldiers do not present a martial appearance, at least in the areas of garrison towns and villages.” Colonel Carter noted that poor organisation of training was also behind the problems, as soldiers were not being used properly: „Out of garrison when the soldier is doing something useful and interesting on gets a more favourable impression. In particular traffic regulators are well turned out and convoy discipline is good with regulary spaced intervals and clean vehicles. Everyone looks a bit more business like and the young soldiers appear to enjoy field training.” Carter assessed the low motivation of the officer corps: „The quality is very difficult to asses. I have no doubt that there is an adequate supply of intelligent, well motivated, career officers but I am doubtful of standards at unit level in peacetime. I get the impression that most regular officers and senior noncommisinal officers regard the army as a safe job with pretty good prospects of promotion to Lt

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Tomek, „Jiný pohled. Zpráva přidělců obrany velvyslanectví Spojeného království v Praze za rok 1981,” *Historie a vojenství* no. 2 (2016): 60–72.

Col, a career to 55 and a good pension at the end always provided there is no stepping out of line. I suspect many are lazy as well which suits a system which doesn't encourage original thinking or initiative let alone dynamic leadership".<sup>54</sup> These independent but ideologically limited observations are generally consistent with other sources.

## Conclusions

As van Doorn pointed out, the military as an organisation does not produce material goods, but exclusively consumes them. This makes it harder to motivate soldiers to perform their tasks. The legitimacy of the army in communist or fascist totalitarian regimes does not reflect the national spirit but a political ideology with international overtones. The army is thus identified with a political myth.<sup>55</sup>

According to the official discourse, the agenda of the Czechoslovak People's Army was the defence of socialism, the defence of internationalism and the defence of the homeland. The first two values may not have been significant or, on the contrary, were even unacceptable to a part of the rank and file and, perhaps covertly, to a part of the career soldiers. But even the otherwise most shared values, such as the defence of the fatherland and defence of one's own family, became untenable under the circumstances. To some extent, the shared values of relief from natural disasters and work relief remained.

It is difficult to gauge the real level of loyalty to socialist society and the military. Objective surveys could not be taken. Citizens were not given the opportunity to make an objective statement under the circumstances. Today's oral history surveys, however, show that rank and file did not feel this shared loyalty. Nor did career soldiers, given the difficult conditions of service and the impact of the values crisis, display real loyalty.

The socialist man was supposed to become a conscious defender and builder without the burdens of the past. The army was indeed based on the past, on the European traditions of the military, its hierarchy, organisation and management system. At the same time, the CPA followed the Soviet model. This fact did not strengthen the consciousness of loyalty to the army as a defender of national interests. The attempt to define its own interests in the military sphere at the time of the Prague Spring was declared after as a counter-revolution, a betrayal perpetrated on ideology and loyalty to the Soviet Union.

---

<sup>54</sup> The National Archives London, f. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, sign. 28/5459, Czechoslovakia: Armed and Defence Forces, Service Attache Report 1982. 17 February 1983, Defence and Military Attache Colonel J. C. Carter, s.l., 7.

<sup>55</sup> Doorn, *Soldier*, 96.

One of the fundamental problems was the absence of a commonly shared idea of the army. There was a rift between the career soldiers and the rank and file. The professional soldiers were originally a group with a higher social status. After their proletarianisation, the character of the intellectual and educational elite was lost. Belonging to the group of career soldiers meant getting a secure job. One-time pride was lost. The unity of interest between rank and file and career soldiers was lost as well. Rank and file always represented the image of a socially, educationally, ethnically and culturally diverse society. They sought the easiest possible route for release into the reserve, to be again a „civilian”.

The enduring problem of the isolation of the military reality from the rest of society was due to the military's distinct function of preparing for war or, as the case may be, waging war. The isolation of the CPA should have been overcome by emphasising the social role of the army, a unity with ideology and the CPC, and the tasks of defending socialism, world peace, and ensuring the stability of the world order. The latter is still a recurring argument of former career soldiers. In the conditions of the „ordinary world”, the army prepares for a clash with a possible enemy whose identity and hostile intentions are, as a rule, not given in advance. In socialism, the enemy was clearly defined and ostentatiously hated. All war plans were prepared only for just such a clash. Society, the military and the world were permanently reassured that the enemy was only waiting for weakness, looking for an excuse and an opportunity to attack. It was a permanent mobilization.

The resolutions of the Presidium of the CC of the CPC constituted binding guidelines. These were argued during the annual assessments of the state of discipline in the CPA as part of the evaluation of the results of the training years. Yet they clearly did not represent any key to solving the serious problems. This is mainly due to an apparent disconnect of the power hub from reality. The political content was superior to a factual assessment of the problems and a truly impartial search for solutions.

In communist Czechoslovakia, rigid state management represented an unprofessional influence by permeating ideology and politicizing the military. It undermined the traditional ideological neutrality necessary for the professional output of the military. The proletarianisation of the army resulted in the loss of prestige of the status of career soldiers, who ceased to be a natural elite, lost respect and also internal ideological cohesion and respect for tradition. The career soldiers became the oppressor and the enemy of personnel. Politicians and political staff gained more influence than military professionals.

The mass armies of the totalitarian system are based on a political ideology with international overtones. The intense ideological influence was to be carried out as a process of indoctrination and the creation of a positive

relationship between soldiers and the ruling power and the state establishment. The Czechoslovak People's Army was a historical mix of the nationalist tradition of defence of the homeland inherited from the time of previous democratic system with the Marxist-Leninist principles of the Soviet totalitarian system.

Political and moral developments in the army after August 1968 mirrored development in the rest of society. It went from gradual broad opposition to crumbling attitudes, the growing influence of the new political leadership to resignation. The army, too, succumbed in this way. This process testifies, among other things, a relationship with the citizens and to the country as a whole, a patriotism and a positive attitude towards the values of the democratisation process of the Prague Spring. The occupation by the Warsaw Pact troops represented the biggest value shock in the army since February 1948. This frustration was soon compounded by consequences and moral challenge. Either to go into existential uncertainty or to submit.

Assumption of the erosion of the original rigid political-ideological conditions after 1969 almost failed. Although the impetus for a new policy came from the USSR with the Mikhail Gorbachev's taking up in 1985, the military leaders were virtually unresponsive to it. Only in 1989 mass demands emerged from basic service soldiers, including university students but also younger career soldiers. It should be remembered, that before 1989 many younger career soldiers started their successful professional way and later held important positions in the new Czechoslovak and Czech army or even in NATO. Just to name a few, we can mention Generals Jiří Šedivý, Aleš Opata or Petr Pavel.

The idea of a highly conscious communistic army was permanently undermined by the state of discipline. The main problem was certainly the low motivation of the all soldiers. Other problems were indifference on the part of professional soldiers, low levels of control and tolerance of misconduct. Alcohol was a persistent factor, playing a role in every second offence. Despite all measures, excessive alcohol consumption was not prevented. Instead of selecting soldiers with access to weapons, military equipment and the possibility of misusing them, the army was forced to call up apparently unsuitable conscripts, given the existing legislation and the high human resource needs. Due to the peculiar way of life in closed military collectives, the character of the men was a permanent risk factor. Nor was it possible to eliminate the commonly occurring bullying.

Considerable doubts can be expressed about the conclusions drawn by the relevant commanders and political staff as to the causes and then the proposals for improving the situation. The main remedy was to be the observance of discipline and regulations. No one analysed whether and how incidents could have been avoided under the circumstances. Also conspicuously absent was

any effort to systematically train conscripts to adopt a sensitive and psychologically sophisticated personal approach. This is not to say, of course, that many commanders failed to find, on their own initiative, a natural human approach to subordinates. On the contrary, there are many positive testimonies of this effect. The ideologically skewed approach to problems is indicated by the minimal occurrence of political emergencies, which, at the same time, were always pursued in the first place. The term „extraordinary events” contained such incommensurable phenomena as suicides or deaths on the one hand and, for example, the occurrence of insults and attacks on communists, of the Union of Socialistic Youth members or trade unionists or the dissemination of hostile propaganda, mass listening to hostile radio stations and other so-called political acts on the other hand.

An effective tool for limiting the risks of emergencies would have been a rational and responsible policy of replenishing the army in the first place. Following that, a substantive professional and politically undetermined discussion and follow-up. Under the circumstances, it was not possible to eliminate tragic events in the army altogether. It could only remedy a professionalisation, allowing the selection of persons entrusted with military material, equipment and weapons.

The experience of the Prague Spring showed that the soldiers’ attempts at political action eventually ran up against the political framework. The CPA was a fiction, it was a game. The actors played at taking seriously what was presented to them. In the real situation, they did what was necessary to fulfill their own needs. But it was not their choice. The memories of the rank and file are then completely at odds even with the official discourse.

The second half of the 1980s brought the need for a reduction in the production of heavy military equipment. There was increasing pressure to reduce the defence budget, to shorten and humanise military service. This was compounded by external factors, the Soviet policy of disarmament and partial unilateral reductions in troop and equipment numbers. These were all signs of a threat to the long-standing *status quo*.

The behaviour of the army personnel during the political and power changes in 1989 confirms that the claimed moral and political state of the army was only a myth. Behind the façade of alleged high consciousness was internal discord and indifference to the common cause. Career soldiers put up a *de facto* passive resistance to change. Some refused to sign the new oath and left the army. But the vast majority adapted to the new conditions. There was no proof of concern to defend socialism.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Author wants to express many thanks to Rhiannon Petteford for a language review of this study.

## Bibliography

### Archival sources

Národní archiv

Předsednictvo Ústředního výboru KSČ

The National Archives London

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Vojenský ústřední archiv – Odbor archivnictví a spisové služby ministerstva vnitra ČR

Fond 1978, Správa vojenských soudů

Vojenský ústřední archiv – Vojenský historický archiv

Vojenské předpisy po roce 1945

### Books and articles

Baka, Igor, Alex Maskalík, Matej Medvecký, and Pavel Minařík. *Vojenské dejiny Slovenska*. Vol. 7, 1968–1992. Bratislava: Magnet Press Slovakia; Vojenský historický ústav, 2016.

Benčík, Antonín, Jaromír Navrátil, and Jan Paulík. *Vojenské otázky československé reformy 1967–1970. Vojenská varianta řešení čs. krize (1967–1968)*. Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd; Brno: Doplněk, 1996.

Bickford, Andrew. „The Militarization of Masculinity in the former German Democratic Republic.” In *Military Masculinities. Identity and the State*. Eds. Nicolas Laham, Paul Highgate and Jeff Hearn, 166–167. Westport: Praeger, 2003.

Doorn, Jacques van. *The Soldier and Social Change*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1975.

Hlaváček, Jiří, ed. *Mezi pakárnou a službou vlasti. Základní vojenská služba (1968–2004) v aktéřské reflexi*. Praha: Academia, 2021.

Hlaváček, Jiří, ed. *Vzestup a pád ČSLA? Vojenská profese v kolektivní paměti důstojnického sboru (1960–1970)*. Praha: Karolinum, 2019.

Hromátka, Jaroslav. „Některé psychologické problémy procesu socializace a komunistické výchovy v armádě.” *Historie a vojenství* no. 4–5 (1972): 558–580.

Knobloch, František. „Kolektivismus ve vztazích mezi vojáky.” *Historie a vojenství* no. 2 (1976): 76–91.

Koldinská, Marie, and Ivan Šedivý. *Válka a armáda v českých dějinách*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2008.

KSČ o ozbrojených silách. *Dokumenty 1918–1976*. Praha: Naše vojsko, 1976.

Maklak, Alena. „Dedovshchina on trial. Some evidence concerning the last Soviet generation of «sons» and «grandfathers».” *Nationalities Papers* no. 5 (2015): 682–699. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2015.1048676>.

Maskalík, Alex. *Elita armády. Československá vojenská generalita 1918–1992*. Banská Bystrica: HWSK, 2012.

Müller, Christian Thomas. „Die «EK-Bewegung» in den Kasernen der NVA. Eine Form von «sekundärer Anpassung» in «totalen Institutionen».” In *Militär, Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR. Forschungsfelder, Ergebnisse, Perspektiven*. Eds. Ehlert Hans and Matthias Rogg, 559–584. Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2004.

Niemiec, Marlana. „Patologie w silach zbrojnych – stan i perspektywy badań w świetle literatury przedmiotu.” *Pedagogika Rodziny* no. 5 (2015): 69–80.

- Reese, Roger. *The Soviet Military Experience. A History of the Soviet Army, 1917–1991*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Tomek, Prokop. *Československá armáda v čase Sametové revoluce. Proměny ozbrojených sil na přelomu osmdesátých a devadesátých let*. Cheb: Svět křídel, 2019.
- Tomek, Prokop. „Jiný pohled. Zpráva přidělců obrany velvyslanectví Spojeného království v Praze za rok 1981.” *Historie a vojenství* no. 2 (2016): 60–72.
- Tomek, Prokop. „Mimořádné události v ČSLA.” *Historie a vojenství* no. 4 (2019): 24–41.
- Tomek, Prokop. „Morálně-politický stav ČSLA na počátku normalizace.” *Historie a vojenství* no. 3 (2020): 30–43.
- Tomek, Prokop. „Šikana, skrytý problém Československé lidové armády po roce 1969.” *Historie a vojenství* no. 2 (2012): 30–41.
- Vědecký ateismus a překonávání náboženských přežitků ve vědomí vojenské mládeže. Závěrečná výzkumná zpráva, vědeckovýzkumný úkol S4-VN-06*. Brno: Vojenská akademie Antonína Zápotockého, 1989.

#### Unpublished research results

- B., Daniel. „Armáda jako nástroj socializace: Reflexe fenoménu základní vojenské služby v českých zemích 1968–2004.” Výzkum podpořený Grantovou agenturou ČR, č. 410/19-19311S, rozhovor ZVS-010.

#### Internet

- „GA19-19311s – armáda jako nástroj socializace: reflexe fenoménu základní vojenské služby v českých zemích (1968–2004).” Informační systém výzkumu, vývoje a inovací. Accessed October 23, 2022. <https://www.isvavai.cz/cep?s=jednoduche-vyhledavani&ss=detail&n=0&h=GA19-19311S>.

### STRESZCZENIE

#### Prokop Tomek, Upadek morale i dyscypliny w Czechosłowackiej Armii Ludowej jako przejaw rozbieżności między wzorcem żołnierza socjalistycznego a rzeczywistością w ostatnich dwóch dekadach istnienia socjalistycznej Czechosłowacji

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie stanu morale w Czechosłowackiej Armii Ludowej w ostatnich dwóch dekadach jej istnienia. Wykorzystując ramy metodologiczne Jacques'a van Doorna, autor porównuje ogólne wymagania stawiane zawodowym wojskowym z rzeczywistością Czechosłowackiej Armii Ludowej. Istotny okazuje się wpływ interwencji zbrojnej w sierpniu 1968 roku na późniejsze morale armii. Żołnierze nie byli już w stanie zjednoczyć swoich interesów w ramach jej organizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: Czechosłowacja, armia, partia komunistyczna, morale, 1968, Układ Warszawski, NATO, fala

## SUMMARY

### **Prokop Tomek, Decline of Moral and Discipline in the Czechoslovak People's Army as a Sign of a Discrepancy between the Ideal of the Socialist Soldier and Reality in the last two Decades of socialist Czechoslovakia**

This study is intended to map the state of morale in the Czechoslovak People's Army in the last two decades of its existence. Using Jacques van Doorn's methodological framework, the Author compares the general demands of the military profession with the reality of the Czechoslovak People's Army. A significant finding is an overwhelming influence of military intervention in August 1968 on the subsequent morale of the army. Its members were no longer able to unite their interests within the organisation of the army.

Keywords: Czechoslovakia, army, communistic party, morale, 1968, Warsaw Pact, NATO, bullying

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

### **Prokop Tomek, Verfall von Moral und Disziplin in der Tschechoslowakischen Volksarmee als Zeichen der Diskrepanz zwischen dem Ideal des sozialistischen Soldaten und der Realität in den letzten beiden Jahrzehnten der sozialistischen Tschechoslowakei**

Ziel dieser Studie ist es, den Zustand der Moral in der Tschechoslowakischen Volksarmee in den letzten beiden Jahrzehnten ihres Bestehens darzustellen. Unter Verwendung des methodischen Rahmens von Jacques van Doorn vergleicht der Autor die allgemeinen Anforderungen an den Soldatenberuf mit der Realität der Tschechoslowakischen Volksarmee. Eine wichtige Erkenntnis ist der überwältigende Einfluss der militärischen Intervention im August 1968 auf die spätere Moral der Armee. Ihre Mitglieder waren nicht mehr in der Lage, ihre Interessen innerhalb der Organisation der Armee zu vereinen.

Stichworte: Tschechoslowakei, Armee, kommunistische Partei, Moral, 1968, Warschauer Pakt, NATO, Schikanen