

## Database of Czechoslovak legionaries as a source for historical research

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We can distinguish two types of primary documents – those which were created with the intention to present the receiver with to a certain extent complex information on particular subject (for example military and diplomatic reports, like Gefechtsberichten or military commands), and those, which were created with the intention to register data for internal usage – like Verlustlisten, registers of soldiers, lists of buried soldiers etc. The latter are in some sense more valuable than the first, because manipulating their content because of intended effect or impression is present in much lesser extent. They represent usually large amounts of data, which nobody could have predicted will one day be usable as a source for historical research, because it is virtually impossible to do so without modern information technologies.

The advantages of using information technologies – computers and databases – in this case are basically three: it enables us to process large amounts of data; it enables us to combine such data from more sources; and it enables us to use special methods from the field of information technologies created originally not for historical research (data mining). I will demonstrate this fact on the example of statistical analysis of database of Czechoslovak legionaries from WW1, which was digitized by Military Historical Institute in Prague in 2004. The database consists of records of 132 754 members of Czechoslovak Legions in Russia, France and Italy, which contain the basic information about each soldier – his personal data, basic information about his service in Austro-Hungarian Army, date and place of becoming POW, date and place of entering the Legion and basic information about his service in it.

Capturing of IR 28 by Stebník, April 1915

The most interesting single result of statistical analysis, which I have conducted, is the number of soldiers of Prague Infanterieregiment 28 captured on 3rd April, 1915 by Stebník, who entered Czechoslovak Legion in Russia. The capturing of the whole regiment during the Easter offensive started a chain of discussions and disputes, which continues in the Czech Republic until today\*. One of the important unanswered questions in this discussions has always been: How many soldiers captured by Stebník have later entered Czechoslovak Legion?

The answer has, however, been situated directly in Prague Military Archive for the whole time. The list of Czechoslovak Legionaries contains among other data also the date and place of becoming POW and original unit of Austrian Army. For almost hundred years, nobody used this source to answer the question laid in previous paragraph. Even after the list of Legionaries was digitised in 2004, no professional historian tried to use it for this purpose. It seems probable, that professional historians in Czech Republic are simply not used to working with this kind of sources and with statistical methods.

Anyway, what are the results of this research? Out of around 1 400\*\* captured members of IR 28, 383 are recorded in the database of Legionaries. This means, that roughly 30 % of soldiers captured by Stebník have later entered Czechoslovak Legion in Russia. This result, however, needs interpretation – we must compare it

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\* Details can be found in Czech book of Josef Fučík: “Osmadvacátníci”, or much more completely in Austrian book of Richard Lein: “Pflichterfüllung oder Hochverrat? Die tschechischen Soldaten Österreich-Ungarns im Ersten Weltkrieg”

\*\* Richard Lein: Pflichterfüllung oder Hochverrat? Die tschechischen Soldaten Österreich-Ungarns im Ersten Weltkrieg

with the overall statistical figures. Different sources agree, that there were 200 000 – 250 000 Czechs in Russian captivity during the war. According to the Legionaries database, around 72 000 of them entered Czechoslovak Legion. This means that overall, 29–36 % of them entered Czechoslovak Legion in Russia. So the resulting claim is, that soldiers of IR 28 captured by Stebník in April 1915 entered Czechoslovak Legion exactly in average numbers.

Differences among numbers of Legionaries from different regions

Another question, which has been, as far as I know, never examined, is how homogeneous the number of Legionaries is when we take into account place of origin of the Legionaries. We can again use the database very reliably, because it contains information about native parish of each soldier. Firstly, let us examine the numbers depending on the historical lands which constituted Czechoslovakia:

Historical land	inhabitants	legionaries	%Czechs/ Slovaks	% legionaries per inhabitant	% legionaries per Czech/ Slovak
Bohemia	6 670 582	60 929	65,72	0,913	1,390
Moravia	2 662 884	25 917	77,32	0,973	1,259
Silesia	624 263	1 788	49,19	0,286	0,582
Slovakia	2 997 048	9 524	68,11	0,318	0,467
Overall	12 954 777	98 363	65,33	0,761	1,165

We can see, that in Bohemia, the relative number of Legionaries has been the highest, a little higher than in Moravia. Silesia and Slovakia, on the other hand, have significantly smaller numbers. It is clear, that this is the result of the unequal degree of intensity of Czech (Slovak) nationalism, which has been highest in Bohemia, little lower in Moravia and much lower in Silesia and Slovakia. To get more detailed results, I went down to the level of districts. Two types of correlation emerged: In Bohemia and Moravia, the relative number of Legionaries is the higher, the more Czechs lived in the district. This means, that inhabitants of purely or mostly Czech districts were entering Legion in much greater numbers than inhabitants of mixed or mostly German districts. I suppose it shows, that Czech nationalism has been significantly stronger in purely or mostly Czech regions than in the mixed or mostly German ones.

In Silesia, however, such correlation does not exist – here we can find out, that the more western district, the more Legionaries come from it. I suppose the reason is, that eastern districts (Frýdek, Fryštát, Těšín) were inhabited not only by Germans and Czechs, but also Poles, were very industrial region and the border between historical Czech lands and Polish lands was not clear here, which all contributed to lesser intensity of Czech nationalism in this area. Finally, in Slovakia, there is clear correlation between geographical position and the number of Legionaries – the more western and northern part of Slovakia, the more legionaries. This can be easily explained by proximity of Czech lands, which greatly encouraged Slovak nationalism, and by ethnic composition of inhabitants of Slovakia, where southern and eastern parts of the land have been inhabited by great numbers of Hungarians. Also, southern and eastern border of “Slovak land” was absolutely unclear until 1918.