

## CONSTRUCTING VETERANS

### Legal Systems and Welfare Policies



Providing former combatants of WWI with a formal legal status was one of the basic compensatory tools that the state had at its disposal to support post-war demobilization and the transformation of soldiers into veterans.<sup>1</sup> This process generally included both a re-assessment of a soldier's service and the granting of access to various material and financial benefits.<sup>2</sup> Investigation of the genesis, legal construction and practice of granting soldiers status as a veteran allows us to analyse not only the basic parameters of a given state's policy towards them, but also the wider values of the post-war social order. Unlike countries that existed prior to 1918, Czechoslovakia and Austria faced problems arising from discontinuity in the form of statehood. In both cases, the state recalculated the moral debt that the 'grateful homeland' owed veterans, on the basis of new interpretations of what constituted 'valuable self-sacrifice'.<sup>3</sup> This formed the fundamental justification for providing compensation and the extent of financial support, as well as the potential denial of benefits.

Czechoslovakia emerged from the war as a victorious nation state, born – so went the official narrative – of resistance and revolution. Hence, the worth of military service on behalf of the collapsed Habsburg Monarchy plummeted drastically in Czechoslovakia. Instead, the post-1918 government valued the 'anti-Habsburg resistance' very positively. It defined this as beginning with illegal activities undertaken by a handful of people in the summer of 1914 and culminating, thanks to the Allied states' success in the war and a nation-wide mobilization, in the 'revolution' that established the new nation state in autumn 1918.

However, translation of the republican narrative into legal status and rights for veterans had to face the reality of a multi-ethnic society that straddled the old and new regimes on the one hand, and victory and defeat on the other.<sup>4</sup> This victorious perspective, in other words, created tensions between those veterans who had participated in the republic's foundation and managed to profit from it and those who could not benefit from this heroic story.

In Austria, by contrast, a comparably clear, dominant narrative regarding the war struggled to emerge. Instead, competing interpretations, with regional inflections, attributed different meanings to the sacrifices made.<sup>5</sup> In Tyrol, for example, military sacrifice was placed within a longer tradition of defence of the (local) 'fatherland' and the 'old values', while seeking to ensure that the sacrifice had not been made 'in vain'.<sup>6</sup> In Vienna, however, the Social Democratic city government questioned the value of the deaths of 'murdered soldiers', who were presented more as 'victims' of the Habsburg dynasty than 'heroes of the fatherland'.<sup>7</sup> Yet, despite their respective standpoints regarding the war, both Austria and Czechoslovakia departed from a common legislative basis, and the differing connotations of 'sacrifice' did not automatically translate into more generous provision for the 'victorious'.

In the Bohemian and Austrian lands, state policy towards veterans adhered to the same legal framework up until 1918. Thereafter, both Czechoslovakia and Austria stuck to this framework on a provisional basis while they drafted new legislation.<sup>8</sup> In imperial Austria, the legal status and rights associated with the transition from military to civilian life were conferred according to a soldier's position and rank. For the rank and file, for example, conscription constituted a base line that did not establish any formal rights in civil society. By contrast, longer serving Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) received priority consideration for employment in the civil service, while discharged officers were entitled to social benefits such as severance payments or pensions. In addition to the institutional logic of military status groups, a soldier's service record also played a role in assessing benefits. Former soldiers whose health deteriorated, and immediate relatives of those who lost their lives, were entitled to material compensation. Those who had proven themselves to be 'good soldiers', or 'heroes' with stellar service records, typically received only a symbolic acknowledgement, in the form of medals, promotion or in exceptional circumstances, the conferment of an aristocratic title.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter examines how, after 1918, the monarchy's legacy, the influence of total war on new social policies, and republican narratives about heroes and victims were reflected in the legal status and respective rights of veterans in Czechoslovakia and Austria. In addition, it considers those whom the state regarded as 'suspects': namely, former Austro-Hungarian officers. Suspected of abuse of power during the war and of being hostile to the new political order and national interests, their future after 1918 was uncertain. Besides the legislative

process and the resulting codification of veterans' status, we also focus on the political and social background to state policy towards veterans and the administrative procedures involved in granting a soldier the status of a veteran – in effect, a daily test of the legal theory.

## Czechoslovak Legionnaires: Heroes of Anti-Habsburg Resistance

The Czechoslovak republican narrative about WWI relativized the general idea of neatly defined war alliances and military fronts through the concept of resistance against Austria-Hungary. This notion divided the historical players into the 'foreign resistance' (i.e. Czechs and Slovaks in the Allied countries and their armed forces or undertaking activities in neutral states) and the 'domestic resistance' (i.e. Czechs and Slovaks subverting Austria-Hungary from within).<sup>10</sup> Initially, the political-diplomatic wing of the foreign resistance, represented from November 1915 by Tomáš G. Masaryk and the Czech Committee Abroad (later Czechoslovak National Council) based in Paris, was relatively small, comprising a few dozen individuals in exile. By the autumn of 1918, however, the Allied Powers recognized it as the provisional Czechoslovak government.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, no more than several hundred Czech and Slovak expatriates voluntarily enlisted in France and Russia in 1914, yet by late 1918 the armed forces of the foreign resistance, the Czechoslovak Legions, grew to over 100,000 men thanks to the recruitment of Czech and Slovak POWs in Russia, Italy and elsewhere. Through this joint political-diplomatic and military mission, the foreign resistance formed the recognized representation of the new state before Czechoslovakia came into existence. In turn, this created highly favourable diplomatic circumstances during the negotiations over post-war arrangements for the old Habsburg territories.<sup>12</sup>

While the foreign resistance essentially committed to one strategy, namely of fighting against Austria-Hungary for an independent Czech(oslovak) state, the domestic resistance was more ambivalent and open-ended, with loyalty to the monarchy for the most part prevailing over subversion. In other words, the domestic resistance lacked an orchestrated character and for a long time only took the form of isolated clashes between individuals or small groups and the repressive power of the state. Since 1914, a secret intelligence network (later called the *Maffia*) coordinated the domestic resistance movement by connecting several dozen Czech politicians and spies with the foreign resistance. However, it did not possess a comprehensive political programme for national independence, and its importance diminished with the recall of the Austrian parliament by Emperor Karl in May 1917. Apart from a few confidants among the officer corps, the domestic resistance did not have its own armed forces, although it did begin to recruit volunteers and took control over Austro-Hungarian army units during the coup d'état in Prague in October 1918.<sup>13</sup>

Hence, many Czechs and Slovaks celebrated members of the foreign resistance and legionnaires as war heroes who fought for national liberation and state independence. There was also a widespread political consensus that the new nation state must express its gratitude to the legionnaires as its 'first soldiers', so the priority for the Czechoslovak authorities was to make provision for them.<sup>14</sup> A series of measures passed in the spring and summer of 1919 granted legionnaires a special legal status and facilitated their demobilization.<sup>15</sup> In defining this status, however, the Czechoslovak parliament did not come up with an entirely new legal framework, but re-used the laws inherited from the monarchy. The common basis of the monarchical and republican legislation was the idea that an offer of employment in the public administration ensured livelihoods for these former soldiers, with the state using this group of loyal and experienced men of productive age to fill lower-ranking positions. This privilege was originally granted to NCOs and the rank and file by the imperial Austrian law No. 266 of 19 December 1853, Section 38 of which limited the stipulation to NCOs who had served in the army for at least twelve years (eight of which as NCOs, after military service was made compulsory in December 1868). Austria-Hungary's Ministry of War and the army had to issue them with formal confirmation, making them known as 'certificate holders', who could then apply for jobs in the administration or state-owned enterprises reserved for this group of candidates.<sup>16</sup>

Two draft legislative proposals in Czechoslovakia, one on jobs in the civil service for legionnaires from 1 April 1919 and a second on legionnaires' rights bill from 25 June 1919, deliberately copied the imperial Austrian certificate holder system.<sup>17</sup> Where the former stated that, following the repeal of the valid legislation on certificate holders, all vacant or newly created posts in the civil service should be reserved for legionnaires, the latter simply proposed that legionnaires be granted the same rights as certificate holders. The first proposal did not deal at all with the issue of defining who was a legionnaire, while the second only briefly stated that a legionnaire was anyone who joined the Czechoslovak legion prior to 28 October 1918. Both of these rather hastily drafted proposals were followed by an elaborate bill on jobs for legionnaires, which was written with the help of legionnaires from the Office of the Czechoslovak Legions (*Kancelář československých legií*, KLEG) within the Ministry of National Defence. Passed on 22 July 1919, and entered into the statute books as Law No. 462/1919, it codified the status as legionnaire and introduced one of the main social benefits: preference for legionnaires over others when applying for a job in state institutions, where up to 50 percent of all positions among manual labourers and lower level administrative staff were to be reserved for legionnaires.<sup>18</sup>

This key piece of legislation was based on the above-mentioned Austrian law not only in terms of its conception, but also in terms of its structure; several passages were even copied word for word. The most complicated part of the law in terms of interpretation was Section Two, which contained the definition of a

legionnaire. In the eyes of the law, a legionnaire was anyone who volunteered for service in the Czechoslovak foreign army ('Legions') or a 'Czechoslovak' who, despite his then Austrian or Hungarian citizenship, chose by 28 October 1918 to join the army of an Allied state (the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, Serbia, or – up until February 1918 – Russia) in order to fight against the Central Powers. In other words, this section translated into the language of the law the political consensus on meaningful sacrifice according to the Czechoslovak republican interpretation of WWI. Instead of service in a regular army, which emphasized traditional military virtues such as bravery and endurance, this revolutionary perspective valued an individual's renunciation of allegiance to Austria-Hungary and voluntary service in the foreign resistance before Czechoslovakia was established. However, this concept only applied to the period up until 28 October 1918, when representatives of the domestic resistance declared Czechoslovak independence. Therefore, this definition excluded volunteers who joined the legions in Russia during the ongoing recruitment between October 1918 and January 1919 and those who enlisted in Russia as conscripts in 1919 and 1920, before the legions were repatriated to Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, legionnaire status did not apply to members of the 'second' Czechoslovak army, the fifty-six infantry battalions formed from Czech and also German-speaking POWs from the Bohemian lands in northern Italy in the autumn of 1918; nor did it apply to volunteers and conscripts who helped defend the Czechoslovak state in 1918/19 in the border areas claimed by its neighbours.<sup>19</sup>

The 28 October 1918 limit was primarily a political dividing line between illegal resistance against the old regime and legal service to the new state. To a certain extent, this was also an ethnic line separating Czechs from other nationalities because it derived from the perspective of Czech national history.<sup>20</sup> In particular, Slovak legionnaires resented the injustice implicit in this ethnic demarcation. Of the 86,688 legally recognized legionnaires, Slovaks accounted for 5,515 (just over 6 percent), but 'Czechoslovaks' in Slovakia made up about 15 percent of Czechoslovakia's population (according to the 1921 census).<sup>21</sup> Slovak legionnaires asked unsuccessfully for an amendment that would allow legionnaire status to be extended to at least some of the 3,926 Slovaks who voluntarily joined the legions after 28 October 1918. They argued that they could not have known about the revolution in Prague while being held in POW camps in Siberia: at a time when it was unclear what would happen in Russia, joining the legion could not be interpreted simply as an act of post-war opportunism.<sup>22</sup>

Although the legions were established as a Czechoslovak national army, they were not ethnically homogeneous. According to post-war citizenship records, 4,435 foreigners served in their ranks. A substantial number were Czech compatriots from Russia (1,686) but there were also other people from Russia (969), post-war citizens of Yugoslavia (581), Poland (342), Austria (360), and several other countries. Although details about ethnicity are missing in the available

records for the latter, the men concerned were most likely Czechs and Slovaks living abroad, but may also have been Allied soldiers temporarily serving in the Czechoslovak legions in the same way that some Czechs and Slovaks fought in the Allied armies if there was no Czechoslovak unit to join.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, it was not until 1919/20 that several hundred German- and Hungarian-speakers joined the legions in Russia on the basis of their new Czechoslovak citizenship. Except for a few cases, they were not used for armed military service, but given civilian jobs in support units.<sup>24</sup> However, if an applicant for legionnaire status who met the legal prerequisite was not Czech or Slovak, officials in the Ministry of National Defence did not let this influence their decision, even if they may have harboured doubts about the 'reliability' of other ethnicities.

The main task for officials in the KLEG was not to verify ethnicity, but to separate legionnaires from non-legionnaires by examining their service records. According to official statistics from 1935, the Czechoslovak foreign army numbered 109,590 (71,022 in Russia, 26,721 in Italy, 11,847 in France), of which 20,902 (about 19 percent) were not entitled to legionnaire status under the law.<sup>25</sup> Most of them were men who joined the legions after 28 October 1918 and, to a lesser extent, deserters and convicts as well. A presidential amnesty annulled many judicial sentences handed down by Czechoslovak military courts in Russia,<sup>26</sup> allowing, for example, the interwar Communist Member of Parliament Jan Vodička to be accorded legionnaire status despite his involvement in the Aksakovo tragedy of October 1918. Back then, Vodička had incited disobedience in his unit, which led to a decline in morale among legionnaires and caused the regiment's commander to commit suicide. Vodička was sentenced by a Czechoslovak military court in Russia to five years in prison for this incident, but was pardoned at the end of 1919. Although he subsequently lost his active legionnaire rights due to repeated convictions for political crimes in the interwar period, his already recognized status as a legionnaire could not be taken away.<sup>27</sup>

Crucial for the granting of legionnaire status was the fact that the relevant law was not simply about rewarding military service, as occurred in other states where civic loyalty was considered self-evident and was not worthy of special distinction. In short, we must view the law in relation to a situation where most Czech and Slovak POWs preferred to remain in Russian or Italian captivity rather than risk combat by enlistment in the legions. Moreover, there were also Austrian-patriotic Czechs who rejected the idea of committing treason against the Habsburg monarchy in the name of an independent Czechoslovakia. Within this context, the public declaration of willingness to become part of the resistance was sufficient for attaining legionnaire status, even if active military duty was not immediately possible. Thus, at the outbreak of war, a group of Czech sailors in the Austro-Hungarian navy found themselves aboard the battle cruiser *SMS Kaiserin Elisabeth* in the Far East. They took part in the battle against Japanese and British troops over the German colony of Qingdao, a port on the Chinese

coast. After the Japanese occupied the port in November 1914, the sailors were deported to a POW camp in Japan.<sup>28</sup> There they remained until spring 1919, when they managed to join the Czechoslovak legion in Russia. Although they did not join up prior to 28 October 1918, the KLEG still granted them legionnaire status on the grounds that they had sent several letters expressing their willingness to join the Czechoslovak foreign army, having read about recruitment efforts in American newspapers. They requested help from the Czech and Slovak representatives in exile to obtain release from Japanese captivity, but this proved impossible during the war, so the authorities judged that the Japanese government had prevented them from joining the legions.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, the foreign resistance did not comprise just soldiers, but also civilians, some of whom later held prominent positions in the new republic. While the above-mentioned law did not explicitly mention this group, Article Five of Regulation No. 151 of 4 March 1920 specified that active duty was equivalent to 'political, promotional, defensive, educational and other services', provided they were in accordance with orders issued by the Czechoslovak National Council. This meant equal treatment for soldiers who risked their lives fighting in the war and civilians who worked for the foreign resistance and focused on politics, diplomacy and propaganda.

Hence, people with very different war experiences acquired legionnaire status. Radola Gajda, for instance, had an adventurous career and rose quickly through the ranks during the war. Having begun service in the Austro-Hungarian army, he first switched sides to the Montenegrin army before joining the Serbian military. Subsequently, he became one of the leaders of a Czechoslovak legion in Russia and later commanded one of Alexander Kolchak's anti-Soviet White armies during the Russian Civil War. While serving in the legions, he reached the rank of major-general and was awarded the British Order of the Bath, the Russian Order of St. George and many other decorations.<sup>30</sup> At the opposite end of the spectrum, the lawyer, journalist and politician Lev Sychrava serves as a perfect example because he spent almost the entire war in Swiss and later French exile. As editor-in-chief of the journal *L'Indépendance tchèque-slovaque*, Sychrava collaborated closely with Edvard Beneš and Tomáš G. Masaryk, performing all sorts of political and diplomatic tasks. Although Sychrava enlisted in the legions along with other members of the Czechoslovak National Council in Paris in January 1918, he never actually saw army service. Initially, the KLEG determined that his legionnaire service started on 1 February 1918 and ended on 31 December 1919. Later, thanks to Beneš' intervention, the starting date for Sychrava's service was reset to 23 September 1914, when he emigrated to Switzerland and began his anti-Habsburg political activities.<sup>31</sup> Thus, despite their very different war experiences, Czechoslovakia's legislation viewed Gajda and Sychrava as almost equal because the only variable in their legionnaire status was length of service. For legionnaires, service counted three times that of the

usual military service. Thus, Sychrava's service was calculated as lasting sixteen years, while Gajda's equated to thirteen years and six months. The impact of these calculations on subsequent career progression, salary and other social benefits depended on the individual's position within the state administration, but the message was clear: service in the foreign resistance counted more than other forms of war service.

Apart from length of service, legionnaire status did not formally differentiate between so-called 'sweaty' legionnaires, who rushed to enlist shortly before 28 October 1918, and the first few hundred who already did so in the summer and autumn of 1914.<sup>32</sup> In 1919, these early volunteers, the so-called 'Old Companions' (*starodružiníci*) who joined the 'Czech Company' (*Česká družina*) in Russia, the 'Nazdar Company' (*Rota Nazdar*) of the French Foreign Legion in France, or some other Allied army, tried unsuccessfully to acquire a special status that would distinguish them from the later legionnaires.<sup>33</sup> A draft bill submitted to the chamber of deputies at the end of 1919 defined an Old Companion as someone who voluntarily joined the Czech Company in Russia or the Czechoslovak legion in France and served before the end of 1914 at the latest. Volunteering thus remained the decisive factor, but where the bill truly differed was in the social rights accruing from legionnaire status. While the existing laws merely favoured status-holders when applying for work in the state administration, the new bill proposed a guarantee of employment and housing. The bill further foresaw the assignment of Old Companions to the Czechoslovak army as officers, thus ensuring them a job and livelihood.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the existing law granting room for manoeuvre to civilians, legionnaire status could not disguise its origins as a measure for social and political demobilization. For the state, the law's main purpose was to facilitate the transition of working-age men from military to civilian work. However, some legionnaires and members of the public saw the granting of status as an official reward for serving in the foreign resistance and the designation 'legionnaire' as a kind of honorific title. The KLEG was aware of this, but when processing applications for legionnaire status, it was obliged to follow the legal definition and reject applicants who did not fulfil the criteria, even if officials believed that the applicant had made a valuable contribution to the Czechoslovak resistance. Hence, the KLEG proposed a decree that, instead of granting legionnaire status, would symbolically express appreciation of such people, yet without giving them any ensuing rights. As with other applicants, the KLEG would make recommendations to the ministry.<sup>35</sup>

Besides this decree, the state's new military decorations could gradually fulfil the same purpose, even if the government initially adopted a reserved attitude towards the issue. Law No. 61 of 10 December 1918 abolished all aristocratic titles, orders and decorations, which were seen as undesirable relics of a feudal society and the monarchist tradition.<sup>36</sup> The law also applied to the entire system





**Figure 2.1.** Allegoric reconstruction of the execution of Czechoslovak legionnaires during the carriage parade for ‘The Day of the Legions’, Prague, 1922. Vojenský ústřední archiv-Vojenský historický archiv, Prague. Unnumbered image.

of Habsburg military decorations, from the oldest ones issued under Empress Maria Theresia to those introduced during WWI. However, while former Austro-Hungarian army soldiers were left with an ‘empty coat’, legionnaires could continue wearing decorations received for service in the Allied armies and the Czechoslovak legions.<sup>37</sup> For those affected, the empty space was not easy to fill, since Czechoslovakia was rather slow in introducing its own system of orders and decorations.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, the most important status symbol for legionnaires remained their historic uniform which, depending on where they were stationed, was based on the war-time uniforms of the French, Italian, Russian or other Allied armies. Legionnaires on active duty in Czechoslovakia still wore this military dress until 1920, when the merger of the foreign and domestic troop units led to the introduction of a new army uniform. Even so, legionnaires who stayed in the army after 1920 wore patches on their sleeves that distinguished them from other soldiers. Moreover, they were allowed to wear their old legionnaire outfits on public and private ceremonial occasions (see figure 2.1), whereas other historical uniforms, above all, those of the Habsburg armed forces, were not permitted in public.<sup>39</sup>

By contrast, participants in the ‘home’ resistance movement did not succeed in acquiring legal status as legionnaires, mainly because a consensus was never reached

as to what actions counted as acts of domestic resistance. None of its leading ideologues, such as Social Democrat politician and author František Soukup, came up with a precise definition. In consequence, the domestic resistance narrative disintegrated into examples of anti-Czech political persecution during the war, riots by Czech and Slovak soldiers, and, above all, the successful overthrow of the monarchy in autumn 1918.<sup>40</sup> However, only in retrospect were these diverse events connected together and given causal meaning. The situation was complicated by the fact that the number of domestic resistance fighters rose sharply after 28 October 1918, because Austrian patriotism rapidly became undesirable and many Czechs sought to present their personal war stories using the trope of national resistance against Habsburg persecution.<sup>41</sup> Hence, the KLEG proceeded cautiously in dealing with claims. For example, it rejected a request for legionnaire status from Czech sailor Bedřich Jaura. He wrote in his application that, at first, he had been imprisoned during the war for political reasons. Jaura then served the Yugoslav and Czechoslovak causes in the Czechoslovak Naval Legion (*Československá námořní legie*) in the Adriatic Sea during the autumn revolution of 1918.<sup>42</sup> In addition, he had been permanently disabled after the battles over Slovakian territory against Bolshevik Hungary in 1919, when he lost a leg. In the eyes of the KLEG, however, wartime persecution did not constitute grounds for compensation under the terms of the legionnaire legislation. Similarly, combat after 28 October 1918 was seen as standard military service for the new state. Lastly, injuries acquired in the Slovakian campaign simply provided grounds for compensation as a war invalid. In sum, ministry officials did not discern in Jaura's wartime experience the legally defined criteria of resistance.<sup>43</sup>

A further important factor was that the domestic resistance did not have its own armed forces, even if Major Jaroslav Rošický and several other Czech officers in the Habsburg armed forces established the so-called 'Military Maffia', whose task was to prepare for the revolution. One of its members was celebrated air ace Jindřich / Heinrich Kostrba, who shot down eight fighter planes while fighting in the Austro-Hungarian air force.<sup>44</sup> Yet, requests for legionnaire status for Rošický or Kostrba remained unanswered by the ministry; participants in military mutinies and other manifestations of domestic resistance in the army likewise found their claims ignored.<sup>45</sup> Although these people were recognized by society at large, the government never extended legionnaire status to them in the manner it did to political activists in the foreign resistance. Moreover, Rošický's original programme had actually included the goal of integrating the 'Green Cadres' into the military preparations for a takeover of power, on the basis that some reliable and nationally conscious soldiers from his regiment had deserted to them. Yet, these plans never came to fruition.<sup>46</sup> In addition, the rural radicalism and anti-authority activities of the deserters did not fit in with either the national narrative of the bourgeois Czech parties or the social conservatism of the Czech Agrarian Party, with the consequence that the 'Green Cadres', too, were not recognized as

part of the domestic resistance and became marginalized in public commemoration of the war.<sup>47</sup>

Interest in legionnaire status was driven not only by the prestige associated with official recognition, but also by the social benefits that came with it. Legionnaires were given priority over other applicants for admission to the civil service, land allotments under the land reform or, in the case of disabled legionnaires, state licences to operate cinemas, newsagents or railway station taverns. These programmes were quite successful. For example, the official ratio between legionnaires' applications for employment and the number who managed to get jobs was 2:1, but in reality it was even more favourable, as Ivan Šedivý attests.<sup>48</sup> The KLEG also offered a number of support programmes, ranging from advice on applying for a job or a plot of land, to loans for setting up a business, and financial assistance for those most in need. This was a level of support that other veterans did not receive, which aroused resentment towards the legionnaires. However, this did not mean that, thanks to these programmes, all legionnaires were safe from poverty – especially later on, during the Great Depression.

## Czechoslovak War Victims

Providing for the enormous number of war invalids and the families of fallen soldiers during and after WWI ushered in a new chapter in modern social welfare, which involved a fundamental change in the state's approach to this issue. Under the old Austrian system for professional soldiers, stipulated by the Military Subsistence Law of 27 December 1875 (or Law No. 41/1887 for their surviving families), invalids were cared for by the army.<sup>49</sup> A military medical commission was responsible for assessing applicants. It could grant a disability pension, injury compensation or recommend admission to a residential home for military invalids. The size of a soldier's pension depended on his position in the military hierarchy; supplemental payments for injuries were calculated according to their severity. In military invalid residences, patients had a roof over their heads, received regular meals, a tobacco ration, a uniform and, depending on their rank, an allowance. For invalids already deemed unfit for military service before 1914, this system remained in force in Czechoslovakia. The Ministry of National Defence registered several thousand such cases and, in November 1918, 67 ex-soldiers lived in the monumental, baroque Invalids Residence in Karlín, on the outskirts of Prague.<sup>50</sup>

Among these was Josef Velíšek (1841–1933), who had fought in the Second Schleswig War in 1864 and was injured in the hand and abdomen during the Austro-Prussian War of 1866. From 1903, he lived out the last thirty years of his life in the Karlín residence, making him illustrative of an older generation of war veterans. Apparently content with the barrack-style regime, Velíšek was proud of

his service (though he sold off his old army decorations, he kept the ribbons as a precious memento). A portrait of him from his army days hung over his bed and he enjoyed telling war stories whenever asked. He was popular not only with the other residents, but also the local population.<sup>51</sup> In sum, Velišek made peace with his military past and the injuries he had suffered, viewing his period of combat as a formative experience that eventually provided him with security in old age.

Velišek's resolutely positive attitude did not necessarily typify a whole generation, but his acceptance of fate was definitely far less common among disabled WWI servicemen, reflecting the devastating experience that the war constituted. In the post-war era, most invalids responded in a substantially different way to the impact of total war, which caused hitherto unseen damage to the human body and sullied the reputation of military life. Invalids now reacted with anti-militaristic attitudes, rather than attempts to glorify their war experience. Moreover, they found the proverbial music organ and the right to beg, which were associated with the image of invalids under the monarchy, humiliating; they viewed barracks life among other crippled ex-soldiers in an invalids residence in much the same way.<sup>52</sup> Recognizing this mood shift, state policy sought to break with the implicitly 'disciplinary regime' that had characterized residential care for invalids since its inception in the eighteenth century.<sup>53</sup> The new ideal was to re-integrate the war disabled back into civilian working life, instead of merely offering charity and compassion, and placing them in a military institution for the rest of their lives.

Expansion of social security for war invalids and families of the deceased had in fact begun during the war, when Austria implemented, among other things, subsistence benefits (under Imperial Decree No. 161 of 12 June 1915). This was necessary because the previous legislation applied to career soldiers rather than to conscripts and left the latter reliant on self-help and charity. Up until the end of the war, however, the pension for invalids in this group only amounted to 72 Austro-Hungarian Crowns annually, the same amount since the introduction of the system in 1875. Only in specific circumstances was it possible to obtain additional supplements. Depending on the severity of the wounds incurred, the amount could rise to 96, 192 or 288 Crowns. The 1915 legislation allowed war wounded to apply for state support, provided they could demonstrate a 20 percent reduction in working capacity. According to the extent of damage to their bodies, invalids could apply for 60, 120 or 180 Crowns per year. If someone was completely unfit for work, the pension could increase to a maximum of 21 Crowns per month. Signs of change occurred with the establishment of the Austrian Ministry of Social Welfare in 1917, but not until Law No. 119 of 28 March 1918 were disabled servicemen and family members of fallen soldiers granted financial supplements. These constituted a relative improvement, but remained inadequate in real terms.<sup>54</sup> In part, the gap in welfare provision for veterans was filled by semi-official and private initiatives, in cooperation with state

institutions and local administrations.<sup>55</sup> However, due to the ongoing war, the whole system remained provisional. Setting up something more permanent was a task left to the successor states.<sup>56</sup>

In the case of Czechoslovakia, Law No. 199/1919, specified further by Regulation No. 346/1920, introduced the status of ‘person harmed by war’ (*válečný poškozenec*). This term covered a large group of war invalids and dependent family members of fallen soldiers. A further significant change was that the welfare programme was now in civilian hands, namely the Czechoslovak Ministry of Social Welfare (*Ministerstvo sociální péče*), which disposed of a network of provincial and district offices to assist claimants.<sup>57</sup> The first step undertaken in the new programme was the registration of applicants and assessment of their needs. Although Austria-Hungary had already started this process, it had been carried out by military medical commissions. The Czechoslovak authorities – not unjustifiably – did not fully trust their verdicts on the fitness or unfitness of disabled soldiers. For example, a well-known representative of the previous system was Franz Halbhuber, a military doctor who became infamous for ruthlessly rooting out ‘malingerers’ at the military hospital on Prague’s Charles Square.<sup>58</sup> After 1918, it was no longer essential to try and return wounded soldiers to active service, which opened up the possibility of re-integrating them into civilian life by providing rehabilitation, finding suitable employment and offering compensation for loss of earnings via disability pensions. The new system thus required disability pension claimants to undergo an examination before a ‘Social Medical Committee’. Its task was to determine whether the applicant’s health problems had arisen during active military service, employment as a civilian for military purposes, or wartime captivity. If someone was considered a ‘person harmed by war’, the commission’s next task was to determine the percentage of the victim’s loss of earnings and to calculate the size of payment due. To gain a pension, the Ministry of Social Welfare set the minimum value for loss of earning capacity at 20 percent (in accordance with the old Austrian Law No. 119/1918). Subsequent gradations scaled upwards at 10 percent intervals, all the way up to 100 percent. After a certain amount of time had elapsed, invalids were summoned to a new examination in order to check if their condition had altered. Widows, orphans and parents of invalids had their social situation assessed by ministry committees, but a childless widow, for example, could only claim the entitlement if her earning capacity had fallen by more than 30 percent.<sup>59</sup>

‘People harmed by war’ were entitled to a pension, classified according to their loss of work capacity, providing they met two conditions: they had to be Czechoslovak citizens and have an annual salary lower than 4,000 Czechoslovak crowns (ČSK), or 6,000 ČSK if the injured party supported other dependents in a common household.<sup>60</sup> The claimant would then receive a pension that raised their salary to the established income threshold. If an invalid’s income was at least 85 percent lower (in the toughest cases), then he was entitled to a full pension

of 1,800 ČSK per year.<sup>61</sup> For comparison, according to accident insurance wage statistics, the average daily wage of workers in Czechoslovakia was 18.64 ČSK in 1920, that is, 4,756 ČSK per year (one year later, it was 7,561 ČSK).<sup>62</sup> In 1922 and again in 1930, the law on benefits for war victims was amended, raising the yearly pension for the neediest invalids first to 2,400 ČSK and then to 4,800 ČSK, and also slightly increasing pensions for widows and blind invalids.<sup>63</sup> Considering that by 1930 the average daily salary was 29.13 ČSK, this was something of a small victory from the recipients' perspective.<sup>64</sup> In 1931/32, for example, white flour, potatoes, milk and eggs were the most commonly consumed foodstuffs among working-class families, costing a family of five around 34.50 ČSK per week. Including other staples such as bread, beef and beer, weekly expenditure rose to 60 ČSK. Hence, the pension increase greatly helped the neediest since it doubled a family's weekly budget (from 46.15 to 92.30 ČSK).<sup>65</sup>

Up until 1929, a total of 951,148 war victims applied for benefits under the law, 654,698 of whom were granted pensions of varying amounts.<sup>66</sup> Of the total applicants, 308,460 were invalids and 334,373 the orphaned children of fallen soldiers; the remainder comprised widows (166,451) and dependent parents, together with siblings (141,864). Geographically, about half of these war victims were located in Bohemia, about one quarter in Moravia and Silesia, about one fifth in Slovakia, and about 5 percent in Subcarpathian Rus. Those who fully lost their eyesight during the war numbered 467, while there were 325 invalids who were completely dependent on care by others. Over time and for different reasons, the numbers in each of these categories gradually decreased, but throughout the interwar period war victims formed a significant proportion of those members of the population who were partially or entirely reliant on social benefits.<sup>67</sup> The enormous cost was covered by the State Support Fund for Czechoslovak Invalids, which administered its share of the assets from the imperial welfare fund set up during the war, the *Kaiser und König Karl Kriegsfürsorgefonds* in Vienna.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to increasing pensions for the severely disabled, the state organized training courses and clothing drives, distributed prostheses, and granted licenses to operate tobacco shops, cinemas or taverns. Here, the new mixed with the old. For example, the principle of granting licenses for the war disabled to sell tobacco under the state monopoly was an old social measure already introduced in the late eighteenth century.<sup>69</sup> The government also sought to improve invalids' chances of economic independence by helping them start their own business through capitalizing their pensions, which could be received several years in advance. However, while debates were frequently held about passing a law on their compulsory employment, invalids were overlooked in the labour market and constituted a large percentage of the unemployed. As stated above, jobs in state institutions were only reserved for legionnaires and, in this regard, Czechoslovakia differed from Austria, as well as some other Central and Western European countries with similar or higher numbers of war invalids. In short,

welfare services offered by the Ministry of Social Welfare for 'people harmed by war' were different and – potentially – less generous than those received by legionnaires from the Ministry of National Defence.

For disabled legionnaires, the 'person harmed by war' status applied from the beginning, too. Legal differentiation occurred in early 1922 when the Law on Military Provisions and Benefits No. 76/1922 was adopted, which regulated social security benefits for professional soldiers in the Czechoslovak army. Section 81 of the Law stated that disabled legionnaires would be excluded from the purview of the Ministry of Social Welfare and taken care of by the Ministry of National Defence as if they were professional soldiers of the Czechoslovak army. Thus, not only were invalid legionnaires classified separately from other war victims, but the ensuing benefits were, under certain circumstances, more generous than those accorded to 'people harmed by war'.<sup>70</sup> However, the precondition for granting this status was a loss of work capacity of at least 20 percent, resulting from the applicant's military service in the legions. According to this law, the claims of surviving family members of legionnaires who died while on duty were also to be settled. The intention here was to correct the unfairness in the earlier legislation, which presupposed good health and did not take into account the needs of invalid legionnaires and their surviving family members.

In reality, the 'state fulfilled its obligation' (to use the wording in the law) only in part towards legionnaires who died or became disabled.<sup>71</sup> As applications from legionnaire invalids came under the purview of the Ministry of National Defence, assessments of their condition were made retroactively by the Czechoslovak successors to the Austrian military medical examiners. Military commissions not only assessed an applicant's ability to work in his civilian job, but also his ability to serve in the military. As a result, their opinions were sometimes stricter than those of the civilian Social Medical Commissions, which was reflected in the figures. By the statutory deadline of 30 November 1925, 10,345 disabled legionnaires had applied for pensions on the basis of the above law. Of these, 8,420 applicants were rejected by the military medical commission, either because the soldier's decreased work capacity was lower than 20 percent or because the injuries were not incurred while serving in the legions, but during earlier service in the Austro-Hungarian army. As a result, most of these applicants (7,775) were then transferred back to the Ministry of Social Welfare as 'people harmed by war' and only 1,921 legionnaire invalids remained on the Ministry of National Defence's register.<sup>72</sup>

Dividing legionnaires with disabilities into two differently defined status groups was unfair and inconsistent. Some of them fluctuated between the two systems and received contradictory opinions because the same injuries were assessed differently by the various commissions. One tragic case was the invalided legionnaire Petr Korčák, a participant in the Battle of Vouziers in France in October 1918, who was awarded the Czechoslovak War Cross for his bravery

in action. Subsequently, the authorities incorrectly assessed his health problems and, after an administrative marathon that ultimately ended with his pension being revoked, Korčák took his own life in desperation.<sup>73</sup>

Generally, ‘disability acted as a kind of reconciliatory force, diminishing – if not entirely eroding – the divisions based on wartime experience and cultures of victory and defeat’, as Adam Luptak and John Paul Newman have argued, but a divisive institutional line persisted in the case of Czechoslovakia.<sup>74</sup> While most military invalids from the rank and file fell under the purview of the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Ministry of National Defence became responsible for a relatively small group of disabled legionnaires from the spring of 1922 onwards.<sup>75</sup> Thus, care was split between civilian and army institutions, which worked independently and to some extent offered different services. It is clear from discussions between state institutions that, outside of military circles, this division was considered impractical, even if it had an essential political purpose, based on a principle that can be termed ‘politically desired heroism’.<sup>76</sup>

Overall, the Czechoslovak state invested a large amount of resources in welfare services for those affected by the war. Although expenditure decreased over time, it initially topped the new republic’s social spending. In 1920 and 1921, for instance, the state dispensed 90.8 and 245.1 million ČSK respectively. By 1927, the state’s total spending on war invalids had reached 4.2 billion ČSK, most of which went towards the treatment of invalids and amputees.<sup>77</sup> The wave of expenditure peaked in 1924 and decreased as veterans passed away and orphans reached adulthood; between 1928 and 1932, the number of people who received some form of support dropped by 34 percent, from 427,000 to 281,753.<sup>78</sup> This drop also reflected the fact that, as time passed, public opinion gradually became less favourable to granting invalids preferential treatment. Hence, many invalids were still in a precarious situation, despite welfare support. Indeed, at the second conference convened by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva in July and August 1923, differences in the economic integration of war invalids became clear when delegates described in detail the Polish and Austrian cases. These countries demonstrated the substantial impact of the legal obligation to provide employment to war invalids, given that voluntary cooperation with employers could not be relied upon (in Poland, for example, the measure reduced war invalids’ unemployment rate from more than 10,000 to a few hundred).<sup>79</sup> By contrast, Czechoslovakia never placed on its statute books a law favouring war invalids in the labour market during the interwar era. The unacknowledged reasons for this were the legionnaires, who were already privileged, and the numerical preponderance of ordinary former soldiers of the Habsburg Monarchy.

After 1918, Czechoslovakia was built as a nation state, but it was one that contained a large proportion of national minorities. War victims from other ethnic groups sometimes felt the administration treated them unfairly and gave preferential treatment to Czechs and Slovaks, yet the law itself did not stipulate any role



for ethnicity when granting the status and rights pertaining to a 'person harmed by war'. Given the prerequisite of Czechoslovak citizenship, foreign nationals living in Czechoslovakia, such as Russian migrants, were unable to attain this status and receive benefits. At the same time, Section Five of Law No. 199/1919 originally assumed that the related issues of foreign war invalids in Czechoslovakia and Czechoslovak war invalids abroad would be resolved by bilateral agreements, such that invalids would be provided for by local authorities. However, this never came to pass, meaning that alternative arrangements had to be made for Czechoslovak citizens living abroad. Claimants still had to appear before Social Medical Commissions, which were specially convened at Czechoslovak embassies. Benefits were then provided according to Czechoslovak laws and pension schemes, but recipients' place of residence and local costs of living were not taken into account. Thus, war victims living in Germany or the United States, where prices were significantly higher than in Czechoslovakia, received the same level of benefits as those who lived back home (see Chapter 3 below).<sup>80</sup>

Not surprisingly, therefore, interest groups repeatedly criticized the level of state support and expressed their dissatisfaction through various forms of political activism. Veterans reacted in four basic ways: declaration (the adoption of resolutions after meetings); negotiation (with government representatives and parliamentary deputies); interpellation (tabling proposals in the legislative assembly); and demonstration (public manifestation of dissatisfaction with government policy, although Czechoslovak invalids did not resort to violence to achieve their goals).<sup>81</sup> Unlike other European countries and the United States, the veterans movement in Czechoslovakia never became a protest movement and the activities of veterans groups were strictly regulated and closely monitored by the state.<sup>82</sup> The Czechoslovak law on associations followed the former Austrian legislation in not allowing organized veterans to engage in political activities.<sup>83</sup> Such groups thus had to declare themselves as 'non-political', even though war invalids were the most fervent advocates of social justice. These restrictions were reinforced by the Act on the Protection of the Republic, passed by parliament in March 1923 in response to the assassination of Czechoslovak Finance Minister Alois Rašín.<sup>84</sup>

In arguing for the expansion of social welfare and the amendment of legislation, veterans relied on two main arguments: merit (fighting for their homeland) and suffering (physical injuries or loss of livelihood). Those who managed to combine both, like the legionnaires, were better placed to make their claims, ahead of others who could only deploy one of the arguments. To further their case, war invalids accompanied the open display of war injuries on the streets of Prague with arguments about 'the decline of democracy' and the demand for 'justice to be done', based on the democratic nature of the Czechoslovak state. In other words, they adopted an argument that transformed the political elites' emancipatory discourse surrounding the proclamation of an independent republic into a substantive, individualized demand.<sup>85</sup>

Throughout the interwar era, for example, the Union of Invalids of the Czechoslovak Legions (*Svaz invalidů čs. legii*) complained about the administrative dispersion of disabled legionnaires between two ministries, each with their specific welfare system. On the one hand, those recognized as ‘people harmed by war’ were treated like other disabled soldiers from the Habsburg army, without any bonus for their service in the legions. On the other hand, those whose disability was recognized by the Czechoslovak army under the military provision law sometimes had the extent of their disability underestimated and consequently their benefits, too. In some cases, the military medical inspection left them worse off than after the original examination by the Social Medical Commissions.<sup>86</sup> Medical examinations might also be repeated: disabled veterans were periodically invited back for doctors to check any changes in their condition and to recommend adjustment to their benefits.

The recollections of Italian legionnaire Josef Prudil give a good sense of what this meant for individuals. In 1929, he wrote in the legionnaire press about his ordeals in front of various commissions. He had suffered a gunshot wound to the abdomen during the engagement of Czechoslovak Infantry Regiment (IR) 34 in a battle in Slovakia in 1919. His first military fitness inspection was in the Moravian capital, Brno, in 1920. The report concluded that his working capacity had decreased by 50 percent. After demobilization, he appeared the same year before a commission at the Ministry of Social Welfare, which measured his work capacity loss at 30 percent. In 1923, after amendments to the laws on legionnaires and the disabled, he again appeared before a military commission. Despite deeming him unfit for military service, it determined his work capacity to be reduced by only 20 percent. Then, in 1924, Prudil received notification that his pension was suspended because he had retroactively been recognized as ‘capable of auxiliary military service’. At his own request, in 1925 he went through another inspection, again being classified as 20 percent unfit. The same occurred the following year. In 1928, the 20 percent capacity loss was permanently recognized, but meanwhile the calculation of his pension had stalled. Prudil filed one request after another to speed up the process and submitted himself to yet more examinations in hospital. Finally, the army supplemental headquarters in Brno informed him that he had been recognized as fit for auxiliary service and that his civilian work capacity loss was below 20 percent, making him ineligible for a pension. In a newspaper article telling his story, Prudil bitterly concluded, ‘blessed are those whom the bullet struck with perfect aim!’<sup>87</sup>

In addition to these dividing lines, gender was another factor in terms of granting social provision. The war was immeasurably cruel to male bodies and, at first glance, many invalids appeared almost emasculated. There is no doubt, too, that considerable numbers of them keenly felt a sense of personal humiliation and degradation.<sup>88</sup> In sum, war victims were defined solely as men with varying degrees of physical injuries.<sup>89</sup> Within the assessment and distribution of public

welfare, therefore, women benefited only as widows and mothers of fatherless children. Neither the Czechoslovak nor the Austrian case deviates from the European paternalistic model of the welfare state as posited by Theda Skocpol in her analysis of the pre-war American system.<sup>90</sup> Unlike the United States, however, distribution of benefits in Czechoslovakia was only decided by male officials and most of the recipients of this aid were men or their dependent families. The critical economic and social situation of war victims' families thus became a political issue. According to Alice Masaryková, a member of the National Assembly, the situation placed enormous demands on the shoulders of women who were caring for the children of crippled men. Calling for a 'new world of justice and law', as early as 19 November 1918, she appealed to her fellow deputies to support systemic change in order to turn the lack of support in previous years into a decent living allowance.<sup>91</sup> A similar proposal was made in parliament two years later.<sup>92</sup>

The situation is further illustrated by the inadequate provision for female nurses who lost their opportunity to earn a living after spending many years caring for soldiers in military institutions. Laws in Austria-Hungary had overlooked female nurses, with provision only foreseen for male nurses working under the auspices of the Red Cross or the Order of the Knights of Malta; later on, this group came within the purview of the so-called Grace and Favour Benefits (*Gnadenversorgungsgenüsse*). At the end of the war, it was planned to incorporate female nurses into the scheme for their male counterparts, on the same level as military guards without rank, as part of the new Austrian Military Care Act (*Militärversorgungsgesetz*). However, the imperial Austrian parliament (*Reichsrat*) voted against the bill.<sup>93</sup> In 1920, officials at the Czechoslovak Ministry of Social Welfare looked with interest at the proposed Austrian regulations from 1918, although – somewhat surprisingly – initial Czechoslovak legislation explicitly excluded military guards, NCOs and their surviving dependents from the new benefits system.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, ministry officials considered that nurses with the same status as guards without rank could not receive welfare assistance. Their conclusions were underscored by two key laws (No. 199/1919 and No. 142/1920), which 'only had men in mind' when using the term invalids, as ministry officials emphasized. In short, their initial policy was a blatant display of indifference to the issue. Instead of pensions, the one suggestion they came up with was ad hoc assistance, but only if the nurses 'were in dire need of it'.<sup>95</sup> Eventually, pensions for nurses were incorporated into the Military Benefits Act of 1922, which granted professional nurses and auxiliary care-givers a pension of up to 1,200 ČSK (approximately 17 percent of a worker's annual wage), if, due to their service, they had become completely incapable of making a living and had no other means of support.<sup>96</sup>

## The War Damaged in Austria

In shifting our attention to the territories that became the First Austrian Republic, we have already established the common legislative starting point for dealing with veterans and invalids. Between 1914 and 1918, there was broad consensus that the Military Subsistence Law of 1875 did not meet the challenges of industrialized total warfare. Indeed, even before the outbreak of war, the law 'did not reflect the reality' of the new conscripted army created in 1868.<sup>97</sup> As the conflict unfolded, medical care and rehabilitation soon came up short and even the military administration came to realize that the key aim – the support of invalids, widows and orphans – was insufficiently realized. Provisional measures for war victims only helped to a limited extent, while the suspension of the *Reichsrat* in March 1914 prevented any improvement to the legal framework for the greater part of the war. When the *Reichsrat* eventually reconvened in May 1917, deputies and civil servants hardly had time to improve the general situation, although Provincial Commissions continued to alleviate the situation as best they could through improvised accommodation, job placement schemes and charitable fundraising.<sup>98</sup>

As in neighbouring Czechoslovakia, it was up to the new republic to pass measures, which occurred in the shape of the Compensation Law for Disabled Soldiers (*Invalidenentschädigungsgesetz*) of 25 April 1919.<sup>99</sup> This law finally brought together the two groups, of 'war damaged' (*Kriegsbeschädigte*) and war widows, via the common regulation of their claims to compensation. Oriented towards the equalization of differences between ranks and categories of wounded, as well as compensation higher than mere subsistence level, the new regulations altered the welfare system fundamentally, complementing the progressive social legislation in other areas.<sup>100</sup> After four years of bloodshed, the provisions not only offered curative treatment, disability pensions (measured against previous income), body-part replacements, orthopedic aids and free job training, but also – for the first time – sick pay covering the time span of the rehabilitation process and vocational education.<sup>101</sup>

When comparing developments, one obvious difference between Czechoslovakia and Austria was the absence of legionnaires, meaning that the system was – in theory, at least – easier to administrate. In contrast to Czechoslovakia, the concern in Austria after 1918 was not to offer support to war invalids according to how they comported themselves during the war or what they fought for. For the authorities, military status proved decisive, at least to begin with. Another noticeable difference was the slightly lower threshold for gaining access to benefits and, above all, an invalidity pension. If an Invalid Compensation Commission identified a reduction in earning capacity of at least 15 percent, it referred claimants to the district administration, with its information and advice centres. At the same time, the State Office for the Armed Forces – a federal ministry for defence did not yet exist – endeavoured to free the

examination process from military influence. Thus, compensation commissions consisted of local health officials and civilian doctors, along with members of war victims' organizations. Under these circumstances, the authorities did not ignore the influential groups of surviving dependents. According to the new regulations, widows and orphans of fallen combatants received 'survivor pensions' and a death grant for funeral expenses.<sup>102</sup> A final crucial difference to Czechoslovakia was that, on paper at least, invalids were given preference for jobs in the public administration that they were able to perform.<sup>103</sup>

In the wake of the 'red years' of 1918/19, the revolutionary upheavals and the initial dominance of left-wing groups, the setting up of the welfare system mirrored ideological standpoints that clearly rejected militaristic doctrines and attempts to construct a glorifying narrative of battlefield experiences. Parliamentary debates on the Invalids Law demonstrated this tendency. While the catholic-conservative Christian Social Party paid tribute to disabled servicemen and respectfully called them 'defenders of the fatherland', Social Democrats refrained from any overt stylization or rhetorical exaggeration. For them, there existed no 'heroes' (as the Christian Socials termed fallen, wounded or disabled soldiers), but only victims of imperialist militarism. Rejecting the old regime, the socialist reading of the war left no space for an identification with the Austro-Hungarian army and a positively laden 'veterans culture'. Or, as Ke-Chin Hsia has argued, 'war disabilities were not a symbol of the state's martial glory or patriotic integration but of the previous regime's crimes and/or failure'.<sup>104</sup>

The discussion in the constituent national assembly in 1919 was telling in this sense, because it laid out positions that defined much of the interwar discourse on the war's meaning. For example, Josef Aigner, a Christian Social deputy from Upper Austria, proclaimed in the debate on 24 April 1919:

It is not my task to determine whether the war was necessary, or necessary in such dimensions and length. But there is one thing I would like to state in honour of our invalids: if a public gazette has written, our invalids and fallen are not heroes, they're martyrs and only martyrs, then I say, well, my invalids, then the man who wrote this is also a hero, but a tragic hero, who has never heard a bullet whistle, shrapnel howl or a grenade explode . . . Summon here today an active serviceman from Tyrol, from the Tyrolean Emperor's Hunter Regiment (*Kaiserjäger*) or a brave soldier from the 14th, 59th, 7th or 27th Regiments from Upper Austria, Salzburg, Carinthia or Styria and tell him to his face, he's no hero, merely a martyr, and he'll teach him a different opinion with his bare hands.<sup>105</sup>

The following day, the Social Democrat deputy Anton Hölzl responded directly to Aigner's speech, arguing that he could only accept the point made to a very limited extent. He continued:

[The previous speaker] said, that [the war damaged] want to be counted as heroes, because they bled for ideals . . . We know in fact, that a great delusion overcame the

peoples due to the warmongering of governments and the ruling classes and that they went to war as if going to play and dance. But the delusion was short, the war was long and the subsequent regret lasts longer still. Today, most victims of the war see that they were the victims of dynastic and imperialist interests . . . I would firmly recommend . . . [the previous speaker] . . . to attend the meetings of those blinded by the war, the lame, the quivering neurotics, the sufferers with tuberculosis and the many other war victims, and tell them that they are not martyrs, but want to be seen as heroes.

(Interjection by Aigner: I've spoken in front of such people!)

I'm convinced the only correct opinion is that these war victims – as they themselves now recognize – merely bled for . . . the interests of dynasties and imperialism.<sup>106</sup>

The debate took another twist when Josef Ursin, a doctor from Tulln in Lower Austria, articulated the German-National perspective in a way that deliberately opened up the question of state borders, as well as invoking the notion that other nationalities had not fought as bravely as Austrian-Germans had done. Ursin suggested: 'Go with me not just onto the streets of Vienna but into the open countryside, and there you'll find that, out of 100 invalids, at least 98 are Germans. Go up to the Eger region, into the Sudetenland or down to Styria, and everywhere you'll find that it was Germans, members of our tribe [*Stamm*], who bled for the old empire and Greater Germany'. Ursin went on to sketch the case of a 'thoroughly national-minded' invalid, who had initially received aid from both 'German-Austria' and Czechoslovakia. However, in Czechoslovakia, soldiers had suddenly stormed the train compartment in which the invalid was travelling and demanded that he open his suitcase. The invalid showed his permit issued by the German-Austrian provisional government and a Czech delegation seconded to Vienna's North-West rail station. 'But that did not stop the Czechs . . . from robbing this poor invalid of his food and clothes', Ursin expostulated, before concluding his nationalist diatribe with a side-swipe against the Habsburg dynasty. Numerous invalids had been 'seized by the German spirit' since the 'thanks for our heroes from the House of Austria' was not forthcoming.<sup>107</sup>

As well as demonstrating political cleavages over the war, the parliamentary exchanges demonstrated how veterans and invalids formed an important social constituency in the republic's early years. Indeed, where under the old system war victims had previously been mere passive recipients of state and charitable welfare policy, they now firmly entered the political arena as 'citizen-clients, activists, lobbyists, organizers, and the partners of the republican state', actively seeking to shape 'their own future'.<sup>108</sup> At the same time, however, the arguments made in parliament indicated a degree of fluidity in this transitional period. On the one hand, Social Democrats and German-Nationals shared elements of anti-dynastic criticism, as well as – at this stage – a common interest among the party leaderships in closer ties to Germany, even if the former were reticent about interpreting the war as a joint enterprise in defence of the 'German people'. On the other hand, German-Nationals and Christian Socials converged around a rheto-

ric of veterans' heroism, while both rejected the Marxist programme of the Social Democrats.<sup>109</sup>

Nevertheless, there was very little common ground to be found between the two largest parties and it is noticeable that social democratic newspapers hardly ever used the word 'veteran' to designate ex-servicemen in the interwar period. Occasionally, the leftist press employed the term to describe former soldiers from earlier times (i.e. before 1914) or from other countries like the United States or Italy. Yet, leading dailies such as the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and *Arbeiterwille* generally understood the term in a general or metaphoric sense, speaking of 'veterans' of sports and various professions or – with a positive political connotation – of 'labour', the 'labour movement', the party, 'the social revolution' and socialism.<sup>110</sup> Certainly, many other newspapers did not attribute a military significance to the term, either. Yet, when they did, usage differed remarkably from social democratic discourse. For the *Reichspost* (the leading Christian Social mouthpiece), for example, veterans always appeared as a venerable group, whether referring generically to all 'old soldiers' prior to 1918 or specifically to WWI combatants. In the years immediately after the conflict, however, the latter were most commonly called (or called themselves) returnees, warriors (*Krieger*) or members of comradeship associations (*Kameradschaftsverbände*), whereas – perhaps also in implicit recognition of the different nature and scale of the recent war – veterans meant the dwindling number of 'ancient soldiers' from nineteenth-century campaigns.<sup>111</sup>

Away from these debates, the various groups of ex-servicemen faced comparable problems. Economic crisis and, above all, inflation devalued welfare benefits. Legal provisions gradually deteriorated even for physically impaired war veterans, let alone the mentally damaged, who were quickly pushed to the very margins of the respective welfare systems in both Austria and Czechoslovakia.<sup>112</sup> In July 1922, the seventh amendment to the Compensation Law for Disabled Soldiers came into force, which sought to reorganize care for invalids.<sup>113</sup> In October the same year, Ignaz Seipel's government signed the Geneva Protocols in order to obtain international loans to stabilize the Austrian economy and contain hyperinflation.<sup>114</sup> While both these aims were achieved in the short-term, this meant an abrupt end to the emergency policy of printing money to meet budgetary needs. In effect, the first post-1918 governments had continued wartime fiscal policy, which allowed them to make welfare payments. They had viewed this as a social and political necessity, if revolution was to be averted. However, the Christian Social-led government thought the policy was unsustainable and the price of the international loans was a reiteration of the ban on union with Germany, international supervision of Austrian government financial policy, and budgetary cuts.<sup>115</sup>

The devaluation of the currency and hyperinflation had already stoked resentment towards the invalids' compensation law among those affected, and the budgetary restrictions torpedoed what had seemed to be promising changes to the legislation. With around 96,000 civil servants dismissed in the period

after October 1922, state institutions were soon overloaded. It thus proved difficult to implement the proposed changes, and the compensation commission for invalids was unable to keep up with the approximately 300,000 applications for pensions that they received.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, following budget retrenchment, from the mid-1920s Austria granted hardly any financial benefits to ordinary war veterans. In this respect, the Austrian government cut back more sharply than Czechoslovakia.<sup>117</sup>

Hence, the impoverished, quivering war veteran quickly became a visible phenomenon shaping everyday experience on the streets of Austrian towns. Civil servants were alarmed by the enormous increases in peddling and begging. Nonetheless, the media, medical experts and many veterans groups did not consider these men to be war casualties, but peacetime beggars who did not want to integrate into civil society. Mirroring the scientific discourse on war-related mental disorders, articles frequently described the beggars as simulating and trying to deceive the passing pedestrians with ‘feigned shaking’.<sup>118</sup> In this respect, the situation was not much different to Czechoslovakia, where provincial offices responsible for war invalids’ benefits were formally reminded that their core duties included preventing such individuals from begging and displaying their misery in public (with the result that many invalids filed complaints against the officials’ rude behaviour).<sup>119</sup>

Significant here is the fact that, beyond the ideological differences over the meaning of the war, there were actually common attitudes regarding traumatized soldiers. In Austria, even social democratic newspapers did not call war neurosis a disease, but labelled it an ‘instinctive’, albeit ‘unconscious pretence’.<sup>120</sup> More particularly, the Austrian conservative and rightist press often viewed these ex-servicemen as ‘frail creatures’ or as ‘genetically predisposed weaklings’ with a ‘degenerate physical condition’.<sup>121</sup> The police issued repeated warnings about the ‘great nervousness’ among returnees. At the same time, articles in daily newspapers informed their readers about suicides or attempted suicides by penurious ex-servicemen and disabled home-comers whose applications for social assistance had been rejected.<sup>122</sup> Press coverage of murder trials focusing on the war experiences of the accused further shaped public opinion in this respect.<sup>123</sup> The same applies to reports about the ‘aggression’ shown by those who asked for government aid. A certain Florian R., who was at least 35 percent disabled according to his own statement, demanded immediate help and, ultimately, an invalidity pension. Otherwise, so he wrote to the Social Democrats’ parliamentary club in 1922, ‘it would be better to kill us all by machine gun, so that we, the war victims, do not have to suffer anymore’.<sup>124</sup>

Besides, in line with the widespread prevalence of eugenicist and Social Darwinist ideas, war neurotics came to be seen – both before and after 1918 – not only as frauds or lawbreakers, but also as ‘unmanly apparitions’. Against the backdrop of psychoanalytical notions of a ‘fatherless society’ and the ‘dis-



appearance of the monarch' resulting from the 1918 revolution, 'neurotic men' appeared to be typical examples of an 'endangered masculinity'.<sup>125</sup> According to these paradigms, experts – physicians in general and neurologists in particular – bluntly described all those suffering from mental disorders after the end of the war as 'inferiors'.<sup>126</sup> In this respect, the situation was similar to Czechoslovakia, with mentally disordered soldiers and ex-servicemen often stigmatized in both countries.<sup>127</sup> This contrasted with the appreciation shown for 'military strength', 'heroism', 'willpower', 'physical or emotional hardness' and 'masculinity', which were seen as a fundamental part of military ideals both for future fighting forces and for the conservative wing of the organized veterans movement.

Under such circumstances, the Austrian Social Democrats were reluctant to discuss the reasons for mental disabilities, broaching the issue less and less. Published statistics further suggest that the phenomenon barely registered at the official level. In March 1918, the Austrian list of 'war injuries' only mentioned neuroses among the so-called 'marginal phenomena', accounting for a mere 2.5 percent of total injuries. In 1920, nervous diseases were not specifically mentioned in Austria, just 'mental illnesses' (making up 2 percent of injuries). Of course, the interpretation of such figures created many difficulties, because the categories were not comparable and hard to delineate.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, neurotics were not specifically recorded after 1918 in Austria (or, for that matter, in Czechoslovakia). Prominent neurologists on both sides of the border concluded in their comprehensive studies that neurotic disorders could hardly be related to the war.<sup>129</sup>

In the meantime, the more or less intact, undamaged returnees from the frontlines, occupation zones and POW camps focused on claims for compensation, severance payments and outstanding fees for treatment, although the Austrian government could hardly meet all the demands in the initial period of turmoil and unrest. Special aid programmes, such as further education courses, the granting of licenses for cinematic and musical performances, or the provision of clothing for returnees only partially fulfilled the needs. The State Office for Social Welfare, run by the Social Democrat Ferdinand Hanusch, urged the homecomers to contact their former employers as soon as possible, in the hope that they would be taken back on. Nevertheless, Hanusch was well aware that it would not suffice to leave the social integration of ex-servicemen to a disrupted labour market in the midst of the economic and political crisis. Accordingly, a poster issued by his office announced the right of every former soldier and his family to receive state unemployment benefits 'as long as he is jobless'.<sup>130</sup>

This financial support was conceived as a provisional measure to cover the transitional months from November 1918 to February 1919. Thereafter, the task was handed over to the newly elected national assembly. In March 1920, legislation converted the unemployment benefit into a system of unemployment insurance. However, the welfare state and the social insurance structure, in particular,

were far from being complete. To give but one example, underprivileged groups, such as agricultural and forestry workers, remained excluded from the health insurance for years. Moreover, the circle of unemployment insurance beneficiaries was already drawn much tighter in 1920 and the situation deteriorated even for those who belonged to the modified system, due to the lower level of state contributions, inflation and the currency crisis of the early 1920s.<sup>131</sup>

## **The Austrian Invalids Movement**

These developments had an impact across the whole of Austrian society, with the hyperinflation particularly affecting those on fixed incomes or relying on state benefits. Coming on top of defeat, which made government bonds worthless, the currency crisis led to a radicalization of middle-class opinion from the mid-1920s onwards.<sup>132</sup> Amongst former soldiers, invalidated veterans were hardest hit by the financial retrenchment after 1922, and as a result they were especially active in forming groups to articulate their interests. As in other European countries, invalids associations constituted a new type of interest group, whose influence and reach was not to be underestimated.<sup>133</sup> Austrian war invalids and their families developed associations essentially distinct from those of the homecomers and veterans. As Verena Pawlowsky and Harald Wendelin have shown, the invalids movement in Austria formed a dense network of organizations, even if – superficially, at least – a degree of overlap occurred. For example, the Union of Christian Homecomers and Invalids began its activities in March 1919, but despite the name concentrated its activities on the concerns of homecomers.<sup>134</sup>

In the Austrian half of the Habsburg Monarchy, associations of the ‘war damaged’ already began to emerge in 1917, when the constituent meeting of the League of War Wounded for Austria (*Bund der Kriegsverletzten für Österreich*) took place in north Bohemian Reichenberg / Liberec at the end of October, under the leadership of Bernhard Leppin.<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, its activities remained strictly limited because the Interior Ministry did not formally approve its foundation and in effect undermined the further organization of the war wounded.<sup>136</sup> A change only came in the period of political transition at the end of 1918, when an Association of War Invalids appeared on 3 November 1918, although this group proved only temporary. Just over a week later, on 11 November, its place was taken by the Central Association of German-Austrian War Damaged (*Zentralverband der deutschösterreichischen Kriegsbeschädigten*), which amended its name the following summer via the addition, ‘War-Damaged Union of Invalids, Widows and Orphans’.

This formed part of an organizational drive in the weeks after the monarchy’s fall, which built on the charitable activities in civil society evident during the war and gained impetus from the emancipatory momentum of regime change.

Hsia suggests that several factors contributed to the rapid growth of associations of 'war damaged' soldiers in late 1918: 'disabled men's activism (in some cases aided by the ongoing soldiers' council movement); local authorities' appeasing cooperation under the pressure of a volatile environment; and local communities' charitable contributions'.<sup>137</sup> Developments in the border town of Bruck an der Leitha (Lower Austria) illustrate how this dynamic worked at the local level, once a group of invalidated veterans founded a branch of the *Zentralverband* there in December 1918. Within a short space of time, the group organized a fund-raising event at New Year, which raised 4,000 Austrian Crowns for the central organization and confirmed the widespread support among local society for their cause in the immediate aftermath of the armistice. The branch soon grew in numbers and turned into a key source of information and support for returning invalids and demobilized soldiers seeking assistance. Aided by the supply of an office and materials from the town mayor, the disabled veterans association worked with members of the *Volkswehr* and the local Soldiers' Council (*Soldatenrat*) to extend its influence over welfare support in Bruck. Although the mayor grew uneasy at its growing influence, the district administration allowed the group's burgeoning role to expand, recognizing its importance in filling a gap in the provision of services that the state was struggling to provide and thereby contributing to political stability. In effect, therefore, the Bruck invalids more or less supplanted the role of the local Invalid Office until the nascent republic regulated the situation properly.<sup>138</sup>

On the basis of such actions, the *Zentralverband* came to play a leading role in the following years, but in 1919 had to deal with competitor organizations, such as the Social-Economic Imperial Federation of War Invalids for German-Austria (*Sozialwirtschaftlicher Reichsbund der Kriegsinvaliden Deutschösterreichs*) and the Central Council of War Victims of German-Austria (*Zentralrat der Kriegsbeschädigten Deutsch-Österreichs*). Eventually, these two groups merged with the *Zentralverband* in the spring of 1920, thereby concentrating the lobbying power of war invalids and their dependents.<sup>139</sup>

Already in October 1919, the State Office for Social Administration received a report from the Vienna Police Directorate listing fifteen unions of war disabled. As well as indicating the ongoing associational flux, the report accentuated the divergences and political antagonisms between these groups.<sup>140</sup> For example, separate organizations represented the ideological milieu of Zionist-oriented Jewish invalids (*Verband Jüdische Kriegsinvalide und Heimkehrer in Wien*) on the one hand, and antisemitic, German Nationalists advocating the interests of war disabled, widows and orphans on the other hand (*Hauptverband der Kriegsbeschädigten, deren Witwen und Waisen deutscher Nation*). Christian Social politicians initially focused on homecomers immediately after the republic's foundation, actively supporting the foundation of the Association of Christian Homecomers, War Invalids, War Widows and Orphans of German-Austria

(*Verband christlicher Heimkehrer, Kriegsinvaliden, Kriegerwitwen und -waisen Deutschösterreichs*) in August 1919.<sup>141</sup> However, they gradually paid more attention to the question of invalids, and gathered groups sympathetic to their cause in an Imperial Association of War Invalids, War Widows and War Orphans Organizations of Austria (*Reichsverband der Kriegsinvaliden-, Kriegerwitwen- und Kriegerwaisen-Organisationen Österreichs*). Renamed the Imperial Association of Christian War Invalids, War Widows, War Orphans and Returnees of Austria in Vienna (*Reichsverband christlicher Kriegsinvaliden, Kriegerwitwen, -waisen und Heimkehrer Österreichs in Wien*) in 1921 and then, more simply, Imperial Union of War Victims of Austria (*Reichsbund der Kriegsoffer Österreichs*) in 1924, it sought to challenge the dominance of the *Zentralverband* in Vienna and surrounding areas.<sup>142</sup>

Nevertheless, the *Zentralverband*, which in 1920 renamed itself the Central Association of the Provincial Organizations of War Invalids and surviving Dependants of Servicemen of Austria (*Zentralverband der Landesorganisationen der Kriegsinvaliden und Kriegerhinterbliebenen Österreichs*) to reflect its spread across the country, constituted by far the largest and most influential invalids organization in Austria until its dissolution by the dictatorship in 1934.<sup>143</sup> From the mid-1920s onwards, the association functioned as a moderate lobby group and maintained its position by offering a wide variety of support to its members, as well as carefully balancing the different interests among the member associations in Vienna and the federal provinces.<sup>144</sup> For example, representatives of other political parties were integrated into the provincial organizations during its founding phase. The *Zentralverband* stressed its non-partisanship, even if leading functionaries stood in close proximity to the Social Democrats. Nevertheless, the broad representation undoubtedly helped it to be taken seriously by the administrative authorities, who from the start ‘recognized it as the authorized representation of the invalid community’, given that it was estimated to speak on behalf of up to 90 percent of invalids at the peak of its influence.<sup>145</sup>

Indeed, the *Zentralverband* already played an important role in the preparation of the Invalids Compensation Law of April 1919, although this did not simply result from orderly discussions around the negotiating table. Highly significant was the bringing together of many crippled and wounded homecomers, their public organization and street protests.<sup>146</sup> After the law’s enactment, the *Zentralverband* frequently appealed to its members to continue attending public protests, such as in September 1920 when a draft bill proposed cuts to benefits and pensions. The association called on the political parties to remember their election promises and to throw out the bill before it was too late: ‘Only a government oblivious of its duty dares to bring such a law before the national assembly. Can the people’s representatives approve such a law, as long as they have a feeling heart in their body? No, never! . . . This protest by invalids from throughout German-Austria must force the national assembly to listen to the voice of

humanity'.<sup>147</sup> War invalids kept up the pressure over the following years, repeating their demand for 'the means to exist' at another demonstration in Vienna in July 1922.<sup>148</sup> Hence, maimed and disabled veterans were a common sight on the streets of urban areas not just in the transition phase from monarchy to republic, but throughout the 1920s. Reflecting on such scenes in 1920, the writer and journalist Joseph Roth memorably termed the war damaged 'living war memorials' in a newspaper article and argued for the worldwide dissemination of pictures of the disfigured as a warning of war's terrible consequences.<sup>149</sup>

If the *Zentralverband* gathered the majority of invalids under its umbrella, the actions of different factions nonetheless dissipated its overall impact. One special interest group, for example, was the Association of the War Blind of German-Austria (*Verband der Kriegsblinden Deutschösterreichs*), whose demand for a special status was acknowledged, given their particular needs.<sup>150</sup> More vociferous was the Association of War Damaged Intellectuals of German-Austria (*Verband kriegsbeschädigter Intellektueller Deutschösterreichs*), a group which, in practice, represented the interests of career soldiers, senior administrators and men with academic qualifications. Their demonstrative assertion of their own interests sometimes appeared detrimental to the wider cause and led to criticism from the authorities.<sup>151</sup> Arguably, however, this derived from the systemic tension between the needs of invalids and a financially stretched state that struggled to provide adequate welfare structures. Those most affected directed their anger and criticism at the authorities, repeatedly calling them to task for failing to keep their promises.<sup>152</sup> As one report by the Viennese police noted, with a hint of scepticism, about another protest by invalids in April 1924: 'The assembled war victims expect sympathetic support for their interests from the public'.<sup>153</sup>

Yet, support and appreciation for invalids was always hard-earned and remained contentious throughout the First Republic, not least because of the politicization of veterans issues in general, including welfare payments to invalids. For example, as well as having exerted influence on the Invalids Compensation Law in the interests of its members, the *Zentralverband* had used the opportunity to curb communist tendencies among war invalids, in line with the political course followed by Austrian Social Democracy. Nevertheless, the *Zentralverband* did not enjoy a monopoly position within the invalids movement. As mentioned above, the Christian Socials sought to gain influence among invalids through the Imperial Federation of War Victims of Austria, and neither side spared any blushes in verbal exchanges with their opponents, whether in their association newspapers, newsletters or other printed material.<sup>154</sup>

Thus, the *Reichsbund* defamed the *Zentralverband* as 'Jewish-Communist', or simply the 'Brandeis Club', although the most prominent figure in the association, Maximilian Brandeis, was never actually president of the organization.<sup>155</sup> Brandeis, who had been released from military service after being wounded

in 1916, became head of the Viennese Invalids Association in mid-1920 and rose to the position of deputy chairman of the *Zentralverband* in 1922, thereafter becoming the figurehead for Austrian invalids at the international level (see Chapter 4). In retaliation, Brandeis called the *Reichsbund* a ‘meaningless sham organization’, accusing it of reactionary intentions and militarism.<sup>156</sup> This was not without justification, given that the *Reichsbund* was often criticized for its close connections to the FKV.<sup>157</sup>

Where the *Reichsbund* used antisemitism and anti-Bolshevism as codes for self-confirmation and differentiation from political opponents, the watchwords for the *Zentralverband* were anti-monarchism and anti-militarism. These points of orientation found reflection in how the rival invalids organizations interacted with other actors in the veterans landscape, with the latter seeking to maintain a clear distance to veterans and comradeship associations, as well as supporting a range of activities in favour of peace. By contrast, the *Reichsbund* strove for a close relationship with other veterans groups and viewed joint parades in public as an advantageous way of promoting their own cause. The tensions between the two organizations intensified as a result of the political conflict in Austria in 1927, following the Schattendorf trial (see Chapter 3).<sup>158</sup> While invalids remained heterogeneous in their allegiances and meetings sometimes led to clashes between groups affiliated to different political colours, this did not lead to a radicalization of the movement as a whole.

### ‘Suspects’: Former Habsburg Officers

If the discussion hitherto has demonstrated certain common features of the situation after 1918, another pressing issue in both republics was how to deal with former officers of the Austro-Hungarian army who acquired Czechoslovak or Austrian citizenship. Unlike civilian officials, whose transition from the old to the new states was relatively smooth, army officers were seen not only as an untrustworthy former pillar of the monarchical regime, but were also suspected of abusing their authority and committing crimes during the war.<sup>159</sup> In particular, the military justice system was considered responsible for numerous death sentences that were handed down for petty political or military offences, in a way that was symptomatic of the disintegration of the rule of law.<sup>160</sup> In the left-wing milieus of both countries, stories about the indefensible brutality of officers against their subordinates in the army, as well as against the civilian population, circulated widely and were morally condemned.

In Czechoslovak society, these ideas were interpreted along nationalist lines as being motivated by anti-Slavic sentiments among the monarchy’s German or Hungarian-speaking military elites. Hence, post-war demobilization became a litmus test of political and national loyalty and the vetting of former professional

soldiers – above all, officers – was born not only of the need to build a reliable officer corps within the new republican armed forces. Besides formal and military criteria, enlistment in the Czechoslovak army was also denied on the grounds of German nationality, service in the Austrian *Volkswehr* between 1918 and 1920, insufficient knowledge of the official ‘Czechoslovak’ language, permanent residency abroad, or retirement before the regime change of 1918. Moreover, there was also the pressing moral concern that those suspected of war crimes might be granted social security in line with the old monarchy’s laws.<sup>161</sup>

In reality, this affected a wider group of former soldiers, but high-ranking former officers came directly under the spotlight. Hence, the Personnel and Complaints Commission of the Czechoslovak Ministry of National Defence carefully assessed claims submitted by former Austro-Hungarian officers. The commission was established in autumn 1918, and all former officers seeking support from the Czechoslovak state were obliged to apply through this route.<sup>162</sup> Some applicants were already retired and only interested in receiving further instalments of pensions that had begun under the monarchy. Others were prepared to be honourably discharged and have their social benefits paid out. In addition, there were those, typically from the younger generation, who hoped to continue their military careers in the Czechoslovak army. The public only learned about the results of the Commission’s proceedings via the Ministry’s Personnel Gazette, which printed long lists of former officers whose applications had been approved.<sup>163</sup>

The lack of fuller information led to much public speculation as to whether the Ministry took Czechoslovak national interests sufficiently into account when creating the new army’s officer corps. Parliamentary questions put to the Minister of National Defence, Václav Klofáč, in September 1919 focused on the requirements officers had to meet before being admitted into the army and the protection of the interests of legionnaire officers. Alongside the composition of the new officer corps, an equally urgent question was how ‘compromised or incompetent officers and officials’, who had ‘greatly sinned against the Czech nation’ during the war, were dealt with.<sup>164</sup> The latter question specifically pertained to generals who had become notorious in the eyes of the Czech national movement due to their involvement in various high-profile episodes, such as General Ludwig / Ludvík Matuschka. As military commander, Matuschka had ordered the execution of the leftist journalist Josef Kotek in December 1914 at the military court in Moravská Ostrava, on the grounds that Kotek had publically expressed doubts about the victory of Austria-Hungary.<sup>165</sup> In answering these questions, the minister assured deputies that no former officer compromised in this way would wear the uniform of the Czechoslovak army. Yet, Klofáč also stated that the ministry was following the stipulations of the Treaty of Saint-Germain, which – he alleged – required Czechoslovakia to grant social security benefits to former officers who became state citizens. However, according to Klofáč, the newly drafted law on accepting

officers was meant to ensure that ‘the republic won’t be bothered by its chief and most cynical enemies’.<sup>166</sup>

Although Klofáč’s assurances may have calmed members of parliament and the public, his ministry nevertheless faced the dilemma of reconciling the principles of social and national justice contained in the draft of the new law with the administrative practice of the Personnel and Complaints Commission. On the one hand, it seemed socially just to grant former Austro-Hungarian officers benefits based on the length of their military service and the highest rank attained, after an assessment based on the relevant Military Subsistence Law of 1875. On the other hand, this principle came into conflict with the idea of national justice, namely that the victorious Czechoslovak nation should not sustain its enemies from the state budget.

At the same time, the Treaty of Saint-Germain, which Klofáč had referred to in parliament, did not make the deputies’ work on the new law any easier, because it did not in fact mandate that the signatory states assume responsibility for former Habsburg officers. Instead, Article 216 of the treaty merely stipulated that the Republic of Austria was not under any obligation to finance the pensions of those who had acquired the citizenship of another state.<sup>167</sup> In short, the Czechoslovak authorities were free to decide what to do about former officers. Rather than a legal obligation, it was more a question of the moral commitment within the international public sphere to provide for the former military elites.

Ultimately, the resultant Law No. 194/1920 denied pensions to applicants who were convicted of war crimes under the peace treaties, as well as those deemed to have harmed the Czechoslovak nation or its members during the war, unless ‘they washed away their guilt through proven extraordinary services on behalf of the Czechoslovak independence struggle’.<sup>168</sup> However, due to the courts’ failure to prosecute people for war crimes, the assessment of guilt fell back on the military administration.<sup>169</sup> In the case of applicants not seeking to remain in the army, but only claiming benefits, the commission examined their criminal records and determined whether or not they had held positions in the military justice system and could therefore be held responsible for perpetrating injustices.<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, Section Two, Paragraph Three of Regulation No. 514/1920 necessitated checking the ‘moral values and national reliability’ of those applying to undertake active service. Given that these officers would be serving in a unified army together with officers from the Czechoslovak legions, it was often legionnaires who set the standard for evaluating their qualities, either directly as members of the Personnel and Complaints Commission or more abstractly as models of the ‘new spirit’ in the Czechoslovak army. Legionnaires also had the right to report former Austro-Hungarian officers who, in their view, should not be accepted into the Czechoslovak army.<sup>171</sup> In the absence of written documentation, reporting in this way became a typical source of information about an



applicant's past. In addition to the legal definition, the Commission also took into account the criterion of ethnicity. At first, German or Hungarian officers were not accepted into active service and their assessment was less detailed than that of Czech officers. While the Commission assumed that German or Hungarian-speaking officers were not involved in internal issues concerning the Czechoslovak nation, officers of Czech or Slovak ethnicity had to account for their behaviour during the war in detail.<sup>172</sup>

Up until the end of 1922, when its activities were terminated, the Commission processed around 73,000 applications from former Austro-Hungarian officers.<sup>173</sup> Given that the peacetime number of officers in the Czechoslovak army after demobilization was less than 10,000 men (about half of whom were legionnaires), the Commission's work put a brake on further military careers for large numbers of men. However, the vast majority of applicants were recognized either as inactive professional soldiers or at least as military pensioners without rank, whose severance payments or pensions were assessed and confirmed under the 1875 law. It is not clear how many applicants were completely deprived of their benefits because the Commission found them guilty of harming the 'Czechoslovak nation' during the war (on the basis of Act No. 194/1920, §4 and Act No. 514/1920, §21) but the available sources suggest it was not very many.<sup>174</sup> What is clear is that former Austro-Hungarian generals (357 in total) were subject to collective sanctions.<sup>175</sup> Firstly, all were forced to retire at the end of 1918, except for a number of Czech generals who were temporarily kept on active duty.<sup>176</sup> Secondly, their pensions were reduced across the board, being made equal to those of colonels. The government justified the reduction in status with reference to a limited budget, but many found this unfair and made formal complaints.<sup>177</sup> Subsequently, the struggle for equality involved all military pensioners recognized under the original Austrian law, because legislation with more favourable terms was passed for a new generation of military pensioners who retired from the Czechoslovak army.<sup>178</sup>

Overall, the search for perpetrators among former Habsburg officers, and their punishment by demotion, was limited, mainly due to lack of evidence and the shortcomings of the screening process. Although not overly severe, the treatment of the numerically small group of generals indicated the potential risk of social destabilization and radicalization, if all officers were demoted as a group. At the same time, the Czechoslovak government made a symbolic national statement in depriving them of their military glory, because ex-officers lost the right to wear their Austro-Hungarian uniforms and medals; in some cases, they also lost their original ranks. The welfare system thus ensured that ex-officers did not go hungry and become radicalized against the state, even though their organizations repeatedly complained about discriminatory lower pensions. Figuratively speaking, however, their unadorned chests constituted something of an open wound and provided a basis for future demands about a restoration of dignity.

While Czechoslovakia essentially followed a consistent line towards members of the old military elite, Austria's handling of the issue underwent remarkable changes during the interwar period. Fuelled by the collapse of the monarchy and the heated mood of the transition period, representatives of the 'bankrupted old system' were exposed to countless incidents of abuse, including physical attacks. Especially in 1918 and 1919, political demonstrators blamed high-ranking officers for the bloodshed and trauma of the war. The newly formed associations of war victims, disabled soldiers, orphans and widows of fallen combatants, together with groups of ex-servicemen, condemned the 'demon of martialism', often supported by leftist organizations and their magazines.<sup>179</sup>

Against this backdrop, leading politicians in Austria supported the establishment of a Commission for Inquiries into Breaches of Military Duty (*Kommission zur Erhebung militärischer Pflichtverletzungen*) in December 1918.<sup>180</sup> In theory, this heralded the onset of a new era characterized by a readiness to condemn 'the Habsburg war' and to replace monarchical traditions with republican ideals. In practice, however, the Commission's work was limited in scope.<sup>181</sup> Expert reports contributed to the obstruction of the respective investigations because these tended to favour the ex-officers. The reports frequently resorted to arguments about a fighting unit's right to employ self-defence in emergency situations and to ignore the provisions for summary courts.<sup>182</sup> Legal scholars went even further and sided openly with former military leaders who justified atrocities against civilians or non-combatants, whether at the front or in enemy territory. Around 1920, a group of jurists and army officials stated that, without doubt, 'our army' was surrounded by 'high treason'. Thus, arbitrary actions and even mass executions were considered 'just and appropriate'.<sup>183</sup>

Hence, most of the commission's investigations between 1919 and 1922, namely 325 out of a total number of 484, were terminated without any further action taken. The remaining cases were handed over to the attorney general or state prosecutor, as well as to the military attorney. Ultimately, only twelve investigations found 'evidence of a gross breach of duty', but even these cases were not forwarded to the judicial authorities for criminal prosecution.<sup>184</sup> Vested interests and members of the old elite obstructed the commission, which failed to stem the reactionary fightback. Even before the break-up of the grand coalition and the exclusion of the Social Democrats from government, the commission was openly rebuffed by generals of the 'old army' and members of the Habsburg family. Archives and official institutions frequently ignored requests for documents and the commission's work was further hampered by the lack of coordination between the successor states.<sup>185</sup> In short, a retrospectively applied 'reason of state' prevailed, which had wider social and cultural implications. It helped allow a military historiography to emerge that was dominated by ex-officers and favoured exculpatory narratives and memory cultures of WWI.<sup>186</sup> This trend was to culminate in a personality cult around the former Chief of the Austro-Hungarian

General Staff, Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, and later in the 'Austro-fascist' policy of 'reconciliation' with the emperor's family, pro-Habsburg commemorations and celebrations of the 'glorious armed forces' (see Chapter 5).<sup>187</sup>

Despite the limited effectiveness of the Commission for Inquiries into Breaches of Military Duty, the role of former army elites remained a live political issue and the actions of officers aroused suspicion. It was primarily Social Democrats who questioned the continued employment of high-ranking officers. Field marshalls, generals, colonel-generals and general-quartermasters were among the first 'imperial officers' that prominent representatives of the new republic wanted to get rid of. Julius Deutsch, State Secretary for the Army, noted that 'those who do not perform a service that corresponds to our aims and attitudes' should be retired. German-National leaders such as Franz Dinghofer backed Deutsch's stance. On 19 November 1918, in the course of a session of the state council, the governmental and executive organ of the provisional national assembly in Vienna, Dinghofer stressed the need to remove the commanders of the old fighting forces, just as with the archdukes of the former ruling dynasty. They all embodied the collapsed system, and – as Dinghofer put it – the republic should avoid at all costs being perceived as the successor to Austria-Hungary.<sup>188</sup>

At the end of the war, the Austro-Hungarian armed services had at their disposal approximately 34,000 career soldiers, of whom 16,473 (47 percent) opted for the 'German-Austrian Republic'. For the most part, reserve officers were dismissed straightaway, but many other officers faced the prospect of enforced retirement, simply because of the downsizing of the army resulting from the Treaty of Saint-Germain. With few exceptions, the government pensioned off the majority of high-ranking officers very quickly (including, for example, 300 generals on 1 January 1919), while only a few found a position in the *Volkswehr*.<sup>189</sup> Thus, the existing regulations on pensions, fees and severance payments, based on the nineteenth-century provisions, became the central point of contention between the state administration and discharged military personnel. An Economic Association of Professional Military Soldiers (*Wirtschaftsverband der Berufsmilitärgagisten*), which claimed to represent 18,000 members, demanded higher financial benefits at a protest meeting in May 1919. A few weeks later, a new military pension act was adopted, although it took some time to be implemented.<sup>190</sup>

Just under a year later, at the end of April 1920, the 'military professionals' gathered again in the presence of Social Democrat and Pan-German members of parliament, as well as the former Austrian Minister of Home Defence, Friedrich von Georgi. Speakers at the rally acknowledged improvements in the welfare system for regular soldiers and ex-servicemen, but they nevertheless contended that 'most promises only exist on paper'. In particular, they stated that returnees from captivity did not even receive what other ex-combatants were getting. After a long and intense discussion, the meeting resolved that the struggle with the

authorities must be continued. It also deliberated on the situation of homecomers and their families, as well as that of orphans and widows of those who had died at the front or in POW camps. In sum, the meeting brought home the social dimension of the whole problem, given that as many as four-fifths of career soldiers had to leave their occupation. This group would form the backbone of a large part of the veterans movement, above all at the level of association leadership.<sup>191</sup>

Although the Economic Association of Professional Military Soldiers primarily blamed the Treaty of Saint-Germain and the victorious Allied Powers for the situation, some ex-officers also attacked the new republican leadership and, more specifically, the 'Marxists'.<sup>192</sup> For example, the Economic Association of Inactive Officers and Coequals (*Wirtschaftsverband der nichtaktiven Offiziere und Gleichgestellten*) went even further, cooperating with anti-republican and anti-democratic circles or clandestine groups. Among other purposes, the network served as a platform for radical and armed veterans groups, such as the already mentioned FKV. This group disseminated monarchist, but also German-Nationalist, racist and antisemitic attitudes in line with what it termed the 'front-line spirit of comradeship against destructive elements, Social Democrats, Communists and Jews'.<sup>193</sup>

Nevertheless, some members of the emerging private militias met with difficulties when they combined paramilitary and political activities with the claim to be accepted as veterans and recipients of welfare benefits. Emil Rybitschka was a professional officer who provides a good example of this dilemma. Born in Moravia, he returned from Russian captivity and opted for Austrian citizenship, but was unable to find permanent employment and lived in poverty with his family. He was then recruited for espionage services against Czechoslovakia, joined the *Heimwehr* and worked temporarily for its federal leadership. However, his monthly salary of 150 Schilling for this work caused administrative difficulties and prevented the Ministry of the Army from granting him a pension. It thus required a personal intervention to solve the problem. The prominent *Heimwehr* leader, Ernst Rüdiger von Starhemberg, a key figure in the political landscape of interwar Austria, supported Rybitschka and personally contacted the relevant minister and high-ranking functionary in the Christian Social party, Carl Vaugoin, who secured the necessary dispensation for him.<sup>194</sup>

## Conclusion

Upon their return home, World War I veterans became a key reference group in the shaping of social welfare systems in post-war Europe. The millions of individuals on their way back from war were in need not only of immediate support such as food, clothes and shelter, but also required help with their long-term reintegration into society. There had undoubtedly been a transformation in how

welfare was provided to ex-soldiers in the territories that comprised Austria and Czechoslovakia when compared to the pre-1914 situation. However, the expectations and needs of ex-soldiers and their families had changed enormously over the course of the war, too, turning the question of whether the compensation offered was commensurate with the perceived sacrifice into such a contentious political issue. Thus, states established new rules on how social welfare services would be provided to ex-soldiers and their dependents. They expanded their welfare systems, but in doing so governments formally defined new types of status and benefits for specific groups of ex-soldiers, targeting their distinct social situation.

Frequently showing continuities with the old imperial legislation, laws passed in Czechoslovakia and Austria after 1918 defined the degree of merit displayed in war and categories of veterans, as well as establishing social welfare services in their modern form. These rested on three pillars: pensions, physical rehabilitation, and economic restitution.<sup>195</sup> In practice, all three were interconnected, but were often enforced inconsistently. In the long run, governments placed crucial importance on the economic 'emancipation' of veterans and the physically disabled in particular, since they were considered to be a greater burden on the state budget. In doing so, both states built on the interventionist model established by the imperial Austrian state in a way not automatically adopted in other successor states. For example, provision in Galicia, part of Poland after 1918, was far less extensive, and disabled veterans had to rely on their own associations and other charitable organizations.<sup>196</sup>

In comparing how Czechoslovakia and Austria utilized welfare programmes as part of the process of demobilizing soldiers and reintegrating them into society, three main points can be made. Firstly, and most obviously, Czechoslovakia projected the founding master narrative of national anti-Habsburg resistance onto those defined as 'legionnaires', who received special legal status and benefits. The overriding aim was to create a specific package of social welfare regulations for those who had actively fought for an independent Czechoslovakia between 1914 and 1918. The most important benefit was preferential employment in state service, which was actually a republican remaking of the system used for long-serving NCOs in the Habsburg army. Legionnaires could also count on other benefits administered by the KLEG, a newly created agency of the Ministry of National Defence. After 1922, the same ministry also took care of some legionnaire invalids, who could thereby expect – but did not always obtain – more generous treatment than from the Ministry of Social Welfare. This system helped many on their 'way back' but it did not mean that all legionnaire applicants found a safe job, received the desired land allotment or were granted a disabled pension.

By contrast, in Austria, no phenomenon similar to the legionnaires is observable, given that no fighting force for anti-Habsburg or pan-German interests had emerged during the war. If this lack of equivalence in national terms is not surprising, it is nevertheless worth emphasizing that a republican narrative based

around military units engaged in internal conflict or a civil war did not emerge in the years 1918/19 either. Moreover, Social Democrats rejected heroic war narratives. Thus, there was no substantial basis for the creation of a privileged category of WWI veterans in the way that occurred in Czechoslovakia. Instead, what Hsia terms ‘a partnership of the weak’ emerged between war invalids and a state striving to assert its authority after the collapse of the monarchy. This proved mutually beneficial, because it facilitated a more rapid amelioration of the situation of war victims, who in turn were inclined to ‘accept and work with the new Austrian Republic’.<sup>197</sup>

Secondly, both governments were equally concerned to reintegrate into society those masses of people who were hindered by physical impairment or the loss of a breadwinner. The categories of ‘invalid’ (Austria) or ‘a person harmed by war’ (Czechoslovakia) had a common denominator in both countries, but differences are, nonetheless, evident. The Prague government was slower and less bold in adopting new legal measures to improve the situation of ‘people harmed by war’. While Austria immediately passed a new law on invalids in 1919, Czechoslovakia took until 1921 to complete its legislative framework. However, neither country did so by formulating war victims’ unconditional entitlement to compensation or the state’s obligation to pay it. This gave states the power to reduce pensions should the income of a war invalid increase, meaning that they estimated the level of compensation not only in relation to the degree of disability, but also to a veteran’s personal wealth.<sup>198</sup> Nevertheless, even though Austria performed a pioneering role in comparison with most other European countries, its welfare system, including the unemployment insurance of 1920, still proved inadequate to meet demand in the long run, not least because its financial basis was unsure. The soaring inflation and currency instability that hit Austria in the early 1920s – at a time when inflation was curbed and the currency stabilized in Czechoslovakia – had a major impact on pensions, fees and salaries, putting the relationship between veterans and the state under pressure. Social benefits did, however, undoubtedly provide a certain measure of support in both countries during the 1920s.

Thirdly, both Austria and Czechoslovakia undertook vetting of former Habsburg professional soldiers before the relevant ministries allowed them to serve in the armies of the new republics. Besides the common search for perpetrators who broke laws during their wartime service, Czechoslovak authorities also investigated whether these people caused ‘harm to the Czechoslovak nation’. In both countries, however, no real transitional justice took place due to the lack of appropriate legal instruments, so most former Habsburg officers did not have to fear judicial punishment. Aside from certain reductions and alterations in rank, the Czechoslovak authorities generally acknowledged entitlements to social benefits from the Habsburg era, while forbidding former professional soldiers marks of prestige, such as military decorations (and related bonuses) from the

old regime. In contrast, the former military elites regained influence in Austria after a short period of unrest and upheaval from 1918 to the early 1920s. From the mid-1920s onwards, heroic narratives and the military ‘virtues’ of former imperial officers became the backbone of conservative and national cultures of memory and the official presentation of World War I experiences (see Chapter 5).

Finally, a large proportion of veterans was not covered by any special legal status and could not benefit from the welfare programmes mentioned in this chapter. Moreover, the amorphous status groups such as ‘legionnaires’, ‘invalids’ or ‘people harmed by war’ were further differentiated in the various kinds of veterans associations. How the diverse groups of veterans in Austria and Czechoslovakia developed their relationship to the state depended upon their own definition of their place in post-war society and the interpretation of their war experiences, as well as how they were affected by renewed economic crisis following the Wall Street Crash of 1929. We explore elements of the respective veterans landscapes more extensively in the next chapter.

## Notes

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93. See further Pawlowsky and Wendelin, *Die Wunden des Staates*, 84.
94. Sb. z. a n., Act no. 142/1920, here § 44.
95. NA, PMR, box 3093, Sporné a nevyřešené otázky příslušnosti jednotlivých ministerstev v péči o vojenské oběti války a oběti občanské války, 8.10.1920.
96. Sb. z. a n., Act no. 76/1922, here § 89. Figures derived from the accident insurance wage statistics (7,216 ČSK in 1922); see Průcha, 'Nástin vývoje nominální mzdy', 71.
97. Hsia, *Victims' State*, 31.
98. Pawlowsky and Wendelin, *Die Wunden des Staates*, 62–92; Hsia, *Victims' State*, 43–63. See also *Mitteilungen des Ministeriums des Innern*, no. 6 (1918): 146–51.
99. *Staatsgesetzblatt für den Staat Deutschösterreich*, no. 245, 25.4.1919. See also Pawlowsky and Wendelin, *Die Wunden des Staates*, 194.
100. Emmerich Tálos, 'Zwischen Ausbau und Abbau – Sozialpolitik 1918–1938', in *Die umkämpfte Republik*, ed. Karner, 269–76.
101. For full discussion, we refer to the respective studies by Pawlowsky and Wendelin, *Die Wunden des Staates*, and Hsia, *Victims' State*.
102. Pawlowsky and Wendelin, *Die Wunden des Staates*, 221–59. See also *Staatsgesetzblatt für den Staat Deutschösterreich*, no. 214, 4.4.1919; no. 245, 25.4.1919; no. 355, 3.7.1919; no. 433, 25.7.1919 and no. 439, 27.8.1919.
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106. *Ibid.*, 274.
107. *Ibid.*, 278–80.
108. Hsia, *Victims' State*, 131.
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113. Pawlowsky and Wendelin, *Die Wunden des Staates*, 260.
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133. Luptak and Newman, ‘Victory, Defeat, Gender, and Disability’.
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137. Hsia, *Victims' State*, 133.
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141. *Ibid.*, 272. On welcome parties for Catholic returnees see also: ÖStA, AdR, BKA, Inneres, box 2435, 15/3, 1918–21, Zl. 4251-1919 Polizeidirektion Wien betr. Begrüßungsfeier der katholischen Heimkehrer, 2.2.1919.
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150. Compare Martina Salvante, 'Mutilati e invalidi in Trentino-Alto Adige: Il caso dei ciechi della Grande Guerra', *Annali: Museo storico italiano della guerra* 23 (2015): 7–26.
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155. *Oesterreichs Kriegsoffer*, 15.11.1925, 5.
156. *Der Invalide*, 28.2.1925, 2.
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158. *Ibid.*, 447–48. A comparable development was evident in Lviv in the 1930s, when ethnic divisions became increasingly important among disabled veterans; see Vynnyk, 'Beyond National'.
159. Sb. z. a. n., Act no. 74/1919. On the recruitment of civil servants in the Czech lands see Martin Klečáček, 'Převzetí moci: Státní správa v počátcích Československé republiky 1918–1920 na příkladu Čech', *Český časopis historický* 116, no. 3 (2018): 693–732. See further: Doppelbauer, *Zum Elend*; Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, 205–10.
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  171. Vorel, ‘Legionáři’, 453.
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  174. NA, PMR, box 1860, Petice Říšské Jednoty československých aktivní službu nekonajících osob vojenských a jejich rodinných členů se sídlem v Praze-II., Příkopy 26, November 1926.
  175. Alex Maskalík, *Elita armády: Československá vojenská generalita 1918–1992* (Banská Bystrica, 2012), 849–52. See also Marin, ‘Imperial into National Officers’. By 1937, only seventy-three former Habsburg generals remained alive; forty-eight of them were over seventy-five years of age and twenty were over eighty. NA, PMR, box 1860, Memorandum (Staiří generálové bývalé V. a vyšší hodnostní třídy, vdovy a sirotci), October 1937.
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