

# Czechoslovak Pilots in the RAF

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Bachelor's Thesis  
2023



**Tomas Bata University in Zlín**  
Faculty of Humanities

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Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně  
Fakulta humanitních studií  
Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Akademický rok: 2022/2023

# ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení: **Edita Daňková**  
Osobní číslo: **H20621**  
Studijní program: **B0231P090005 Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi**  
Forma studia: **Prezenční**  
Téma práce: **Českoslovenští piloti v RAF**

## Zásady pro vypracování

Shromáždění materiálů k tématu  
Studium odborné literatury  
Formulace cílů práce  
Analýza shromážděných materiálů  
Vyvození a formulace závěrů práce

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**  
Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**


**Seznam doporučené literatury:**


Bungay, Stephen. *The Most Dangerous Enemy: The Definitive History of the Battle of Britain*. London: Aurum Press, 2000.  
Holland, James. *The Battle of Britain: Five Months That Changed History; May-October 1940*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2012.  
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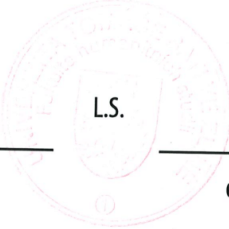
Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **Mgr. Oldřich Kopeček**  
Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **7. listopadu 2022**

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **9. května 2023**

  
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## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá činností a významem Československých pilotů v Britském královském letectvu za druhé světové války. Práce se nejprve zaměřuje na události, které zapříčinily vypuknutí druhé světové války a věnuje se zejména událostem, které souvisely s děním v Československé republice. Dále práce stručně zmiňuje emigraci Československých vojáků, kteří za účelem aktivní účasti v bojích proti německé Luftwaffe migrovali do okolních zemí. Hlavní část práce je věnována životu Československých pilotů ve Velké Británii během druhé světové války a jejich službám v Britském královském letectvu. Důraz je také kladen na Československé perutě, které létali pod velením Královského letectva. V neposlední řadě se práce věnuje porovnání mezi polskými a československými piloty a významu československých pilotů nejen pro britskou vládu, ale také pro československou exilovou vládu v Londýně.

Klíčová slova: Českoslovenští piloti, Druhá světová válka, Velká Británie, Britské královské letectvo, Československá exilová vláda, Bitva o Británii, Československé perutě

## **ABSTRACT**

This Bachelor's thesis examines the service of Czechoslovak soldiers in the Royal Air Force during World War II and its impact on the Czechoslovak nation. In its beginning, the thesis is aimed at events that caused the Second World War, especially events that were connected to the Czechoslovak Republic. The thesis further deals with the migration of Czechoslovak personnel to neighbouring countries. The main body of this work is dedicated to the life of Czechoslovak pilots in Great Britain and their duty in the RAF. The Czechoslovak squadrons are also emphasized in this part of the thesis. Finally yet importantly, a comparison between the Polish and the Czechoslovak pilots occurs at the end of this work as well as a reference to the importance that the Czechoslovak airmen had for both the British and the Czechoslovak government.

Keywords: Czechoslovak pilots, World War II, Great Britain, Royal Air Force, Czechoslovak government-in-exile, Battle of Britain, Czechoslovak squadrons

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Mgr. Oldřich Kopeček for his guidance through writing this Bachelor's thesis. I am thankful for his valuable advice, continuous support, and patience during the supervision. Furthermore, I would like to thank my family for their support during my studies at Tomas Bata University.

I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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## INTRODUCTION

The world did not manage to recover from the First World War, and only a few years apart arose the most disastrous conflict in the history of humankind - the Second World War. The powers on either side of the conflict were the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) and the Allies (Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States). Contrary to the First World War, the Second World War recorded an increase in the use of aerial warfare and the Air Force units gained more importance. Among the most prestigious Air Forces ranked the Royal Air Force.

The Royal Air Force serves as a defensive system protecting Great Britain from any airspace threats up to the present time. During the Second World War, the Royal Air Force engaged in a multitude of operations against Nazi Germany and its allies and successfully defended the British Isles preventing the invasion of Great Britain. The defence would not be successful without the help of thousands of soldiers who migrated to Great Britain and applied to join the RAF. Military personnel from abroad that joined the British Army consisted mainly of occupied European nations, and one of the nations was the Czechoslovaks. Many Czechoslovak soldiers migrated to Great Britain in order to fight against the Luftwaffe. Although the proportion of Czechoslovak soldiers was lower compared with the proportion of Poles, they had a significant impact on the combat victories of Great Britain. Airmen from the Czechoslovak Republic were more skilled than the British pilots and, in several cases, had combat experience from battles in France or Poland.

The thesis aims to briefly document the life of Czechoslovak pilots in the Royal Air Force in Great Britain and to present their importance not only as a fighting power but also as a political tool. Moreover, the successes of Czechoslovak squadrons, where the majority of Czechoslovak pilots operated, are also mentioned due to their importance. However, the Czechoslovak pilots further served in other squadrons and fought not only on European territory but also on other continents.

## 1 THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Second World War, also called World War II was a global conflict during the years 1939 – 1945 and it is ranked as the bloodiest military conflict in history. According to the United Nations statistics, more than 60 million people died in this war.<sup>1</sup> The main combatants were the Axis powers involving Germany, Italy, and Japan, and the Allied Powers where dominated the so-called “Big Three”– Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union. The majority of battles were located in Europe, Asia, Africa, and islands in the Pacific Ocean.

The root causes of World War II are tightly connected to the previous global war – World War I. After the First World War, which lasted from 1914 to 1918, a peace document – the Treaty of Versailles was signed by defeated Germany and the victorious Allied Nations. The treaty punished Germany for starting the war and set harsh penalties on the country including large reparation payments. Penalties, hyperinflation, and the effects of the Great Depression caused a severe economic recession. Eventually, in 1933, Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany and began with his plans to restore the German economy. Moreover, Hitler was obsessed with the idea of a pure German race and wanted the race to expand. The growing economy and booming industry helped Germany to prepare for a new war and thus the country was ready to fight for its lost colonies and expand to new territories.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1 The Anschluss of Austria

The Anschluss or in other words the annexation of Austria into the German Reich took place on March 13, 1938, and it was the first act of territorial expansion of Germany. Through this operation, Germany violated the terms of the Treaty of Versailles yet again.<sup>3</sup>

After the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian Empire fell apart, and consequently new, restored, or succession states were formed as well as the Republic of Austria (First Austrian Republic). Additionally, the new Austrian territory lost its industrial base which

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<sup>1</sup> “The United Nations Remembers the Dead of WWII,” United Nations, last modified May 8, 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1091582>.

<sup>2</sup> J. M. Roberts, *Europe 1880-1945* (London: Routledge, 2001), 403-410.

<sup>3</sup> “Judgement: Violation of International Treaties,” Yale Law School, accessed January 31, 2023, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/judviol.asp>.

was located in the Czechoslovak Republic. Accompanied by the Great Depression, the economy of Austria went quickly down.<sup>4</sup>

There were bonding elements between Austria and Germany such as language, history, and culture. Moreover, the revival of Germany's economy raised Austrians' hopes for a better future.<sup>5</sup> Eventually, on March 15, 1938, Adolf Hitler declared the annexation of Austria to the Third Reich (Nazi Germany). The annexation itself went smoothly, and German troops encountered no resistance from Austrians. Austria became fully dependent on the Third Reich, meaning it did not have any sovereignty and served as a satellite state. Nazi terror began immediately – documents that prohibited any other political party than the Austrian Nazi party were issued, and Jewish work in public services was forbidden.<sup>6</sup> Without further delay, the first transports to the concentration camp in Dachau took place on April 1, 1938.<sup>7</sup>

The next target after the successful annexation of Austria became Czechoslovakia, which was surrounded by German territory at that time. The most vulnerable part of Czechoslovakia was Sudetenland inhabited mainly by German-speaking residents.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.2 Sudeten Crisis

The successful Anschluss made Sudeten Germans, who lived in the border area of Czechoslovakia, thrilled about the advance of German troops. They believed that their next steps would lead to Czechoslovakia and that the Sudeten question would be solved soon.<sup>9</sup>

Discrimination together with the Great Depression made living for the Sudeten Germans very difficult. The comparison between the economies of declining Czechoslovakia and reviving Germany supported thoughts about the secession of Sudetenland.<sup>10</sup> Conflicts in Sudetenland were more frequent, the crisis in Czechoslovakia got worse and demands for

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<sup>4</sup> Walter M. Iber, "Post-war Economies (Austria-Hungary)," last modified April 16, 2020, [https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/post-war\\_economies\\_austria-hungary](https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/post-war_economies_austria-hungary).

<sup>5</sup> "The Germany Economy Under Hitler," Global Security Organization, accessed January 23, 2023, [https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/de-drittes-reich\\_economy](https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/de-drittes-reich_economy).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Schwarz, "Nazism in Austria," *Syracuse Scholar (1979-1991)* 3, no.1 (Spring 1982): 2.

<sup>7</sup> "12 March 1938: The onset of great suffering – Commemoration and Reflection," City of Vienna, accessed January 23, 2023,

<https://www.wien.gv.at/english/history/commemoration/anschluss.html#:~:text=On%2015%20March%201938%20Adolf,to%20Nazi%20Germany%20was%20commemorated>.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Roberts, *The Storm of War: A New History of the Second World War* (London: Penguin, 2010), 183-184.

<sup>9</sup> Petr Kaplan, „Sudetští Němci a soumrak první republiky,“ review of *Die Sudetendeutschen im Krisenjahr 1938*, by Detlef Brandes. *Soudobé Dějiny* 17, no. 1-2, (Spring 2010): 207.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

the annexation of the Sudetenland to Germany were more pressing. Additionally, Hitler enounced that if the Czechoslovaks did not leave the Sudetenland to Germany by October 1, 1938, the Nazi army would attack the country.<sup>11</sup>

Western powers were afraid of the declaration of war by the Third Reich and because of their fear, they spurred Czechoslovaks to accept Hitler's requirements.<sup>12</sup> On the night of September 29, 1938, the agreement reached at the Munich conference was signed by representatives from Germany (Chancellor Adolf Hitler), Italy (duce Benito Mussolini), Great Britain (prime minister Neville Chamberlain), and France (premier Édouard Daladier). The agreement stated that Czechoslovakia must hand the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany by October 10, 1938. Czechoslovak diplomats were not invited to the meeting room and had to wait outside. President of Czechoslovakia Edvard Beneš learned about the outcomes of the agreement on the morning of September 30, 1938.<sup>13</sup>

### 1.3 Czechoslovakia after the Munich Agreement

After the Munich Agreement, the Nazi army occupied Czechoslovakia's borders immediately on October 1, 1938. Lost border areas meant the end of Czechoslovakia's First Republic.

The "new" Second Republic lasted five and a half months until the complete annexation.<sup>14</sup>

At the insistence of Berlin, President Edvard Beneš was forced to resign from his function on October 5, 1938. Later, the former president flew to exile in London. On November 30, 1938, Dr. Emil Hácha was appointed to be the president of the Second Republic.<sup>15</sup>

On October 5, 1938, a meeting of Slovak parties took place at Žilina. The parties agreed on forming an autonomous Slovak government which was led by Jozef Tiso. The following day Slovakia was validated as an autonomous province in the Czechoslovak Republic. Slovakia's separatist movement was supported by the German government and

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Ladenburg, "Munich: Anatomy of Crisis," University of Houston, last modified 2007, [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/teachers/lesson\\_plans/pdfs/unit10\\_12.pdf](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/teachers/lesson_plans/pdfs/unit10_12.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Roberts, *The Storm of War: A New History of the Second World War* (London: Penguin, 2010), 184.

<sup>13</sup> Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark: European International History 1933-1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), 641.

<sup>14</sup> Theodore Procházka, *The Second Republic: The Disintegration of Post-Munich Czechoslovakia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 9-10.

<sup>15</sup> William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 66.

simultaneously, it was part of a plan of weakening the rest of Czech territory and making the rest of the country more vulnerable. Eventually, on March 14, 1939, an independent Slovak State was born and similarly to Austria, it became a satellite state for Nazi Germany.<sup>16</sup>

The following day, on March 15, Hitler invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia's territory and took its lands.

#### **1.4 The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia**

The day after the invasion of Nazi Germany into the Second Republic, on March 16, 1939, was created the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. This new territory became a part of the Third Reich and lasted approximately 6 years.

Unlike other territories that were incorporated into the Third Reich, the Protectorate still had the Czech government with Czech politicians in charge. However, members of the Czech government had to obey the Third Reich's orders including the persecution of Jewish people.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, the population of the Protectorate was divided into German citizens and nationals with different rights and privileges. To strengthen the position of Germans in the Protectorate's society so-called "Germanisation" was introduced. The German language became more dominant – localities were transcribed into German language and Czech authorities and officials were made to use the German language when dealing with the Reich authorities or the German population. In comparison, it was not compulsory for Germans to use the Czech language on such occasions. Nazi Germany also possessed Czech wealth including movable property that had belonged to the former Czechoslovak army and Air Force.<sup>18</sup>

Many Czech citizens, approximately tens of thousands, emigrated from the Protectorate right after its birth on March 15, 1939. Among the refugees were also members of the Czechoslovak army, such as pilots and soldiers who later join foreign militaries and created resistance in exile.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Jan Hamara, "The Second Republic," *The History of Czechoslovakia*, last modified December 9, 2018, <https://scalar.usc.edu/works/dissolution-of-czechoslovakia/the-second-republic-19381939>.

<sup>17</sup> Stuart Parkes, "The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia: Czech initiatives, German policies, Jewish responses," review of *The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia: Czech initiatives, German policies, Jewish responses*, by Wolf Gruner. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 28, no. 2, April 22, 2020, 280-282.

<sup>18</sup> Moses Moskowitz, "Three Years of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia," *Political Science Quarterly* 57, no. 3, (September 1942), 353-360.

<sup>19</sup> Markéta Bernatt-Reszyska, "Češi bojovali proti Hitlerovi na třech zahraničních frontách," *Paměť Národa*, last modified November 7, 2011, <https://www.pametnaroda.cz/cs/magazin/pribehy/cesi-bojovali-proti-hitlerovi-na-trech-zahranicnich-frontach>.

## 1.5 The First Slovak Republic

The Slovak state, established on March 14, 1939, and governed by Jozef Tiso, pretended to be an independent state, but in fact, was a puppet state for Nazi Germany, as mentioned before.<sup>20</sup>

The former Czechoslovak Army had several military units on the Slovak territory but due to the dissolution of the Czechoslovak state, Slovak officers overtook these units. The secretary of defense offered help to Czech soldiers who decided to stay in Slovakia. The majority of Czechs left Slovakia and went to the Protectorate.<sup>21</sup>

## 1.6 Invasion of Poland

Conquering Austria, Slovakia and Bohemia and Moravia moved Hitler's focus to Poland. In this regard, Fuhrer's hands were tied because of the non-aggression pact which was a peace treaty between Germany and Poland signed approximately 5 years earlier. There was no other option than a withdrawal from the contract and so happened on April 28, 1939.

During the summer of 1939, an attempt to make a three-way alliance against Germany was made. The three parties were the Soviet Union, France, and Great Britain. However, Poland refused to accept Soviet troops on its territory and thus the agreement was not valid.<sup>22</sup>

On August 23, 1939, a new non-aggression pact was formed between Germany and the Soviet Union. The German-Soviet Pact, also known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, was not only a peace treaty but the countries also secretly agreed to divide Poland between them. This act enabled Germany to attack Poland without Soviet intervention.<sup>23</sup>

In conclusion, Poland suspected Germany of planning an attack on them, but they did not have any relevant evidence. The only country that knew about the Third Reich's

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<sup>20</sup> "On this day, in 1939: Slovakia declared its independence to side with Nazi Germany," Kafkadesk, last modified March 14, 2021, <https://kafkadesk.org/2021/03/14/on-this-day-in-1939-slovakia-declared-its-independence-to-side-with-nazi-germany/>.

<sup>21</sup> Charles K. Kliment and Břetislav Nakládal, *Slovenská Armáda 1939-1945* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 2001) 20-22.

<sup>22</sup> Christopher Klein, "How Germany's Invasion of Poland Kicked off WWII," HISTORY, last modified August 30, 2021, <https://www.history.com/news/world-war-ii-begins-german-invasion-poland-1939>.

<sup>23</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Invasion of Poland, Fall 1939", Holocaust Encyclopaedia, last modified August 25, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/invasion-of-poland-fall-1939>.

intentions was the Soviet Union, which would not betray Germany because of the Molotov-Ribbentrop contract.<sup>24</sup>

On September 1, 1939, German troops invaded Poland. The attack happened suddenly, and the Polish military force was utterly unprepared. The military strategy used by Germany was later called the Blitzkrieg. This Blitzkrieg strategy involved extensive bombing followed by a massive land invasion.<sup>25</sup> The Polish army had a very low chance of defeating Germany – its equipment was outdated, and they did not even have enough men. On September 3, 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany. However, on September 17, 1939, Poland was attacked by the Soviet Union and thus the defence became much tougher. Eventually, on September 28, 1939, Poland officially surrendered to Nazi Germany.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Christopher Klein, “How Germany’s Invasion of Poland Kicked Off WWII,” HISTORY, last modified August 30, 2021,

<https://www.history.com/news/world-war-ii-begins-german-invasion-poland-1939>.

<sup>25</sup> “Germany invades Poland,” History.com, last modified March 29, 2022,

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/germany-invades-poland>.

<sup>26</sup> J. M. Roberts, *Europe 1880-1945* (London: Routledge, 2001), 435-439.

## 2 MIGRATION OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK MILITARY PERSONNEL

The occupation of former Czechoslovakia engendered the migration of thousands of people including members of the Czechoslovak army, as stated before. The majority of soldiers went to Poland which was at that time the only Czechoslovak neighbour that was not a part of the Third Reich.<sup>27</sup> However, Poland served rather as a “transit stop”. Soldiers further headed to the United Kingdom, France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the United States of America.<sup>28</sup>

Members of military personnel who stayed in the Protectorate could only watch how Nazis ruins their country. The Czechoslovak army was dissolved and replaced by the Government Army which was a lightly armed organization comprising about 7000 men. At the same time, Gestapo collaborated with the Czechoslovak police and searched for possible anti-fascist resistance fighters. It is estimated that around 5800–6400 people were detained out of which approximately half were later released. Arrested German emigrants and Jews were sent to concentration camps.<sup>29</sup>

However, those who managed to escape from Gestapo and those who were not willing to obey the Nazi regime started building a resistance force. In connection with the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, four official resistance groups were established – the Political Centre (*Politické Ústředí*), the Committee of the Petition “We Remain Faithful” (*Petiční výbor Věrní zůstaneme*), the Nation’s Defence (*Obrana národa*) and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (*Komunistická strana Československa*). These resistance groups were comprised mainly of former members of the armed forces.<sup>30</sup> Not to forget to mention, ordinary people who fought on their own against the Nazi regime were part of the resistance force as well.

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<sup>27</sup> Markéta Bernatt-Reszyska, “Češi bojovali proti Hitlerovi na třech zahraničních frontách,” Paměť Národa, last modified November 7, 2011, <https://www.pametnaroda.cz/cs/magazin/pribehy/cesi-bojovali-proti-hitlerovi-na-trech-zahranicnich-frontach>.

<sup>28</sup> Eduard Čejka, *Bitva o Francii*, (Pilsen: MUSTANG, 1994 ), 184-185.

<sup>29</sup> Vladislav Kroupa, *Český antifašismus a odboj* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1988), 12.

<sup>30</sup> Václav Svoboda, *Československá armáda v odboji proti nacismu v období 1938-1942*, (Prague: Arcibiskupské gymnásium, 2005) 14.



## 2.1 The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

The Soviet Union was not “the dream destination” for many escaping Czechs and Slovaks, but it was more convenient than being captured by Nazi Germans. The majority of refugees who crossed Soviet borders were arrested and accused of illegal border crossing and espionage. Soon afterward, the accused were sentenced to 3 to 5 years of forced labor in gulags.<sup>31</sup>

At the beginning of 1942, the leadership of the Soviet Union declared amnesty for Czechoslovak citizens, and thus thousands of Czechoslovaks were freed. Most of the released Czechoslovaks signed as volunteers to a Czechoslovak military unit formed in Buzuluk<sup>32</sup> which was known as Svoboda’s Army. This unit later fought on the Eastern Front against the Third Reich.

## 2.2 Poland

The integration of Czechs and Slovaks into the Polish army was unsuccessful initially. Emigrants who managed to escape from the Protectorate had to handle interrogation by Polish police. A. Ressel, a member of the Czechoslovak Resistance, wrote in his memoir about how he was sent back to the Protectorate because there were no units in Poland to which he could sign as a member of the Czechoslovak Resistance.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the Polish army did not want to incorporate Czechoslovak soldiers into their units and did not want to create an individual Czechoslovak unit either.

Despite the Polish hostile attitude towards Czechoslovaks, on April 30, 1939, the first Czechoslovak unit abroad was created in Krakow. Additionally, with the incoming attack on Poland, the Polish army became more interested in Czechoslovak personnel, mainly pilots. On September 3, 1939, the Polish president issued a decree enabling the creation of the Czech and Slovak Legion. This legion later defended Poland against the German invasion.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Jan Hornik, “A Repression of Czechoslovak Citizens in the USSR,” *Acta Universitatis: European and Regional Studies* 7, no. 1 (September 8, 2015): 73-78.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Eduard Čejka, *Bitva o Francii* (Pilsen: MUSTANG, 1994), 204.

<sup>34</sup> Radomír Luža, *V Hitlerově objetí: Kapitoly z českého odboje* (Prague: Torst, 2006), 536.

### 2.3 France

Till the end of April 30, 1939, Polish authorities were rejecting the incorporation of Czechoslovaks into the Polish army. Czechoslovak diplomats did not have any other option than to relocate the personnel to the West. For this reason, the Czechoslovak diplomats began negotiating the conditions under which would England or France accept Czechoslovaks on its territory. English authorities expressed objections and reservations while France allowed refugees to stay on its territory under the circumstance that Czechoslovaks would serve in the Foreign Legion. The majority of soldiers agreed with the application in the Foreign Legion and thus the relocation of the personnel to the West began.<sup>35</sup>

The first transports took place on May 22, 1939, and the last on September 21, 1939. About 1,212 Czechoslovaks were conveyed in total, of which 470 were pilots.<sup>36</sup>

Similar to the situation in Poland, the acceptance of Czechoslovak soldiers in France was not very warm. Soldiers complained about poor housing quality, lack of finances, food shortage and starvation, and cold and poor hygiene conditions. Eventually, soldiers admitted that conditions in France were incomparable to what was happening in the French Foreign Legion.<sup>37</sup>

At the beginning of the summer of 1939, Czechoslovak soldiers were offered to enter the French Foreign Legion in Africa. Many of them were pressured to sign an application to the French Foreign Legion already in Poland. If they did not do so, they could not be transported to France. The French Foreign Legion was infamous for the origin of some of its members who were criminals. Czechoslovaks felt humiliated but there were no means of escaping as they signed the application. The only circumstance under which would they be able to leave the French Foreign Legion in Africa was the outbreak of war. Conditions were tough – extreme temperatures, cruel treatment, and harsh punishments were demanding however, legionaries helped each other and thus were able to complete the training program.<sup>38</sup>

On September 1, 1939, France declared war on the Third Reich, and consequently, Czechoslovaks expected to leave the French Foreign Legion soon. However, it took a month until the reconstruction of the Czechoslovak Army on the French territory was agreed upon. The number of members of the Czechoslovak army went quickly up and at the end of May

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<sup>35</sup> Eduard Čejka, *Bitva o Francii* (Pilsen: MUSTANG, 1994), 207-209.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 209.

<sup>37</sup> Miloslav Pajer, *Českoslovenští letci v RAF* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 2016), 40-44.

<sup>38</sup> Philip Muehlenbeck, *Czechoslovakia in Africa, 1945-1968* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1-15.

1940, the Czechoslovak division comprised about 11,405 men.<sup>39</sup> These men were eventually sent to defend France when on May 10, 1940, Nazi Germany attacked the country.

Notably, Czechoslovak pilots helped to defend the Western Front and later even France. About 30 Czechoslovak pilots were sent to the Western Front at the end of 1939. Due to the Phoney War, Czechoslovak pilots were not fully able to show their skills. Additionally, pilots had to deal with bad-quality fighter aircraft that were outdated and did not have enough ammunition. At the minimum, the involvement of Czechoslovaks improved personnel morale.<sup>40</sup>

### 2.3.1 Battle of France

On May 10, 1940, when Nazi Germany attacked the French territory, France was lacking properly trained reserves, and military armed vehicles including fighter aircraft, ammunition, and military personnel.

France was surprised by the rapid attack and its unpreparedness made Germany's proceeding to the capital Paris easier. In two weeks, Wehrmacht managed to encircle the French army and its allied troops. Units defending France were ordered to retreat. The French and British authorities predicted the fall of France and in order to save as many men as possible, they came up with a rescue plan called "Operation Dynamo". It lasted from May 27 to June 4, 1940, and more than 338,000 soldiers were evacuated from Dunkirk and transported to Dover.<sup>41</sup>

During the evacuation of soldiers from Dunkirk to Dover, escaping soldiers were under the attack of the German Luftwaffe. To reduce the casualties as much as possible, the Royal Air Force was sent to help. The RAF suffered approximately similar losses as the Luftwaffe, but it was the first time, that the Luftwaffe was not successful in its mission which was thwarting the evacuation.<sup>42</sup>

## 2.4 Invasion of the British Isles

The successful invasion of France in July 1940 shifted Germany's focus further toward Great Britain. The British government expected German invasion beforehand and so the British

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<sup>39</sup> Eduard Čejka, *Bitva o Francii* (Pilsen: MUSTANG, 1994), 313-320.

<sup>40</sup> Eduard Čejka, *Bitva o Francii* (Pilsen: MUSTANG, 1994), 344-346.

<sup>41</sup> Martin S. Alexander, "After Dunkirk: The French Army's Performance against 'Case Red', 25 May to 25 June 1940", *War in History* 14, no.2 (2007): 220-223.

<sup>42</sup> Eduard Čejka, *Bitva o Francii* (Pilsen: MUSTANG, 1994), 453-464.

leadership rethought its policy towards military refugees, boosted production of the military industry, and implemented measures for civil protection. Nevertheless, Germany did not lag behind and stockpiled all kinds of military equipment and strived for increasing its combat power. Ultimately in July 1940, the first battles took place over the English Channel.<sup>43</sup>

The official starting day of the Battle of Britain dates July 10, although sporadic air battles above the English Channel occurred already before.<sup>44</sup> Nazi Germany used tactics primarily aimed at the destruction of the RAF and cutting off British supplies and military production. Elimination of the Royal Navy was then a secondary goal.<sup>45</sup> On July 10, 1940, Luftwaffe launched two large operations. The first operation was targeted at a British shipping convoy in the English Channel and the second at dockyards Falmouth and Swansea. Eventually, at the end of the first official combat day of the Battle of Britain, Luftwaffe lost a total of ten aircraft while the RAF lost only one RAF fighter and eight were damaged during the defence.<sup>46</sup>

This Luftwaffe tactic, aimed at bombing convoys in the British Channel, continued for about a month. Not only the tactics but also the statistics in the Luftwaffe's losses remained similar to the first day of battles. From 10 July to 12 August 1940, "the Luftwaffe lost 286 aircraft while the British Fighter Command lost 148".<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the English Channel was defended by the Royal Navy which was at that time the most powerful naval military organization, and even the German navy could not compare with its strength. Consequently, another plan for destroying Britain was introduced.<sup>48</sup>

At the beginning of August 1940, Hitler issued a plan called *Adlerangriff* (the Eagle Attack) which predicted the defeat of the RAF in two weeks. The plan was based on the massive bombing of British airfields, military industries, military installations of the RAF, and supply systems.<sup>49</sup> 'The Eagle Attack' began on so-called *Adlertag* (the Eagle Day)

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<sup>43</sup> Dimitar Danevsky, "Why Didn't Hitler Invade Britain During World War II," The Collector, last modified December 20, 2021, <https://www.thecollector.com/nazi-germany-invasion-britain-wwii/>.

<sup>44</sup> Loren M. Olsen, "The Battle of Britain: A Study in Command and Control," *USAWC Military Studies Program Paper*, U.S. Army War College: Pennsylvania, 1991, 6-16.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen Bungay, *The Most Dangerous Enemy: The Definitive History of the Battle of Britain*, (London: Aurum Press, 2000), 110.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 152.

<sup>47</sup> Loren M. Olsen, "The Battle of Britain, A study in command and control," *USAWC Military Studies Program Paper*, U.S. Army War College: Pennsylvania, 1991, 6-16.

<sup>48</sup> Dimitar Danevsky, "Why Didn't Hitler Invade Britain During World War II," The Collector, last modified on December 20, 2021, <https://www.thecollector.com/nazi-germany-invasion-britain-wwii/>.

<sup>49</sup> James Holland, *The Battle of Britain: Five Months That Changed History; May-October 1940*, (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2012), 419.

on August 13, 1940, and till the beginning of September continued extensive bombing of these areas.<sup>50</sup>

In September, Hitler in cooperation with Hermann Goering, the Luftwaffe Commander in Chief, made a sudden shift in battle tactics. The focus of bombing raids was shifted to the destruction of London. In the Military Studies Program Paper aimed at the Battle of Britain, the author presents several theories about this sudden change. The first theory supports the argument that the German attack on London served as an act of revenge for German cities that were destroyed during the British attacks. The second theory states that the RAF would use its full strength in order to defend the capital city, which would leave unprotected military bases, airfields, and other installations that would become more vulnerable. Additionally, a multitude of British aircraft in the airspace could cause an increase in fratricide. The last theory in the study claims that extensive bombing of London would force the British government to capitulate for the purpose of saving civilians.<sup>51</sup>

On September 15, 1940, which is also called the Battle of Britain Day, the Luftwaffe launched its most extensive bombing raids on London. RAF Fighter Command successfully defended the capital city and destroyed numerous German aircraft. British government perceived that not only citizens but also soldiers were terrified. To preserve the public's motivation to fight against Nazis, the government used propagandistic leaflets, posters, and broadcasts and presented statistics of the current war. However, these statistics were not always correct. The journal *Scientia Militaria* by arrangement with *Rolls Royce Magazine* published an article that revealed that the RAF's claimed 185 shootdowns of German aircraft on 15 September 1940, but it was found out that this number was highly inaccurate and in fact, "the Luftwaffe lost only about 60 bombers and fighters on that day."<sup>52</sup> Misinterpretation of war statistics was not rare and was used as one of the propagandistic tools.

Although badly affected by severe losses, the RAF successfully resisted the German bombing raids from July 1940 to May 1941 and did not surrender to Nazi Germany as Hitler predicted. In the aftermath of the period from July 1940 to May 1941 the United Kingdom lost a total of about 2,780 aircraft, 43,000 civilians died during the bombing raids and 1.1

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<sup>50</sup> "The Battle of Britain Phase Three," Royal Air Force Museum, accessed on March 10, 2023, <https://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/research/online-exhibitions/history-of-the-battle-of-britain/the-battle-of-britain-phase-three/>.

<sup>51</sup> Loren M. Olsen, "The Battle of Britain, A study in command and control" (USAWC Military Studies Program Paper, U.S. Army War College, Pennsylvania, 1991), 6-16.

<sup>52</sup> "The Battle of Britain as It Really Was," *Scientia Militaria – South African Journal of Military Studies* 20, no. 4 (1990): 12.

million houses and flats were destroyed in London. On the other side, Germany suffered greater losses with more than 3,587 destroyed aircraft.<sup>53</sup> Especially the Battle of Britain is regarded as one of the largest air battles in history and the credit for the successful defence went mainly to the RAF.<sup>54</sup>

Interestingly, the British magazine *History Today* published an article that devalued the RAF's contribution to the defence of the British Isles, and the credit for preventing the German invasion in 1940 was given to the Royal Navy. The article was made by journalist Brian James who interviewed three historians, namely Dr. Christina Goulter, Dr. Andrew Gordon, and Dr. Gary Sheffield, and wrote the article based on their dialogue. However, the journalist modified the historians' statements and consequently interpreted in the article with different information than he received from the historians. The story later appeared in the national press and created a lot of controversies. Historians found out about the changed interpretation of their reports and published an article in the *RUSI Journal* where they wrote about journalist's passion for publicity and not for scientific evidence. Additionally, in the *RUSI Journal*, they further explained their attitude toward the contribution of the RAF and Royal Navy in the Battle of Britain.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> John, T. Correll, "How the Luftwaffe Lost the Battle of Britain," *Air&Space Forces Magazine*, August 1, 2008, <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/article/0808battle/>.

<sup>54</sup> "10 Largest Air to Air Battles in Military History," Norwich University Online, last modified October 20, 2020, <https://online.norwich.edu/academic-programs/resources/10-largest-air-air-battles-military-history>.

<sup>55</sup> Christina Goulter, Andrew Gordon & Gary Sheffield, "The Royal Navy Did Not Win the 'Battle of Britain'," *The RUSI Journal* 151, no. 5 (June 10, 2008): 66-67.

### 3 CZECHOSLOVAK PILOTS IN THE RAF

The voyage to the British Isles was not comfortable for anyone. Soldiers, regardless of their rank, had to live in inhumane conditions for several days. They complained about malodor, little to no food, and lack of space which did not enable them to rest after exhausting evacuation from Dunkirk.

After their arrival in Dover, soldiers headed directly to military camps in Cholmondeley, Innsworth, Bridgnorth, or Warrington which served as temporary accommodation. After their adaptation to the new environment, airmen were further sent to RAF Cosford, where their requalification to English machines began. These were the very first steps of Czechoslovaks into the Royal Air Force.<sup>56</sup>

#### 3.1 The Beginnings of the Royal Air Force

The Royal Air Force is a separate military force included in the British Armed Forces. Its performance is managed by the Air Ministry. It has two main organizational structures which are RAF Home Command and RAF Overseas Command.<sup>57</sup>

The RAF was created as a merger of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) on April 1, 1918.<sup>58</sup> The unification of the RFC and RNAS occurred because of their overlapping interests. The majority of personnel and aircraft in the RAF in its beginnings came from the RFC and RNAS. David Wragg in *RAF Handbook* states that the number of personnel was “around 360,000 men and 23,000 aircraft”.<sup>59</sup>

In the 1920s, the United Kingdom suffered from the Great Depression, as well as other states, and thus was forced to introduce cutbacks. Reduction in spending was also introduced in the RAF. The service had to decrease the number of squadrons from more than 200 to 12. Later, in the 1940s, it was decided that the number of squadrons should be increased to 134 squadrons.

Simultaneously with the expansion of the air force, the production of new aircraft took place. For instance, the new aircraft were Hawker Hurricane, Supermarine Spitfire, Short Sunderland, and Vickers Wellington.

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<sup>56</sup> Eduard Čejka, *Bitva o Francii* (Pilsen: MUSTANG, 1994), 59-64.

<sup>57</sup> Miloslav Pajer, *Českoslovenští letci v RAF* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 2016), 15-18.

<sup>58</sup> H. A. Jones M.C., “The Birth of the Royal Air Force,” *Royal United Service Institution* 83, no.529, (September 11, 2009): 1-10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071843809423907>.

<sup>59</sup> David Wragg, *RAF Handbook 1939-1945* (Stroud: Sutton, 2007), 2-3.

However, by the time the war was declared to Nazi German, the amount of British equipment and manpower was incomparable to the German Luftwaffe.<sup>60</sup>

### 3.2 The Arrival in England

For many soldiers was the first impression of England, including the air force personnel, very positive. One of the pilots – Stanislav Fejfar recalled England as incomparable with France regarding its tidiness, orderliness, and being well-equipped. Besides this, the warmth of local people made Czechoslovaks feel better in this country.<sup>61</sup>

The friendliness of locals and the pleasant environment could not hide the fact that the morale in the Czechoslovak unit was low and the main catalyst for it was the crude attitude of Spaniards, Sudeten Germans, and Jews.<sup>62</sup> Although these ethnic groups voluntarily joined Czechoslovak units to support the fight against Nazi Germany, their improper behavior made relationships in the army more difficult.<sup>63</sup> The leadership of the army saw the escalating conflict and decided to reorganize the Czechoslovak army which meant mostly dropping out the uncomfortable soldiers. Kudrna in his book *Když nelétali* states that about “500 soldiers either Spaniards, Communists, Jews or simply those who did not want to fight anymore” left the Czechoslovak army and were sent to the British concentration camps.<sup>64</sup> Those who stayed in the Czechoslovak army were further moved to the No 2 School of Technical Training, Cosford.<sup>65</sup>

#### 3.2.1 Cosford

RAF Cosford was the first Czechoslovak Depot. The air force personnel were required to complete the RAF basic training here in order to become members of the RAF VR (Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> David Wragg, *RAF Handbook 1939-1945* (Stroud: Sutton, 2007), 5-8.

<sup>61</sup> Ladislav Kudrna, *Když nelétali: Život našich letců v Polsku, Francii a Británii za 2. světové války* (Prague: Libri, 2003), 59-62.

<sup>62</sup> Stanislav Fejfar, *Deník stíhače* (Hradec Králové: Kruh, 1970), 80.

<sup>63</sup> Ladislav Kudrna, *Když nelétali: Život našich letců v Polsku, Francii a Británii za 2. světové války* (Prague: Libri, 2003), 62-63.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> BBC, “Cosford, No 2 School of Technical Training – 1939-1940,” WW2 People’s War, last modified December 1, 2005, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/35/a7441535.shtml>.

<sup>66</sup> Od paměti k dědictví, “Czechoslovak Depots WW2,” Free Czechoslovak Air Force, last modified June 21, 2020, <https://fcfa.com/2020/06/21/czechoslovak-depots-ww2/>.



Airmen were examined by British officers for their aviation skills and were required to meet the RAF standards. Pilots and mechanics did not have many problems with British combat techniques but the real issue for the majority of Czechoslovaks was the English language.

### 3.2.2 Difficulties in Learning the English Language

The English language was a major concern for Czechoslovak airmen. They did not have enough time to learn it during the evacuation from Dunkirk and the pressure from the British officers was not helpful either. Contrary to the French language, which was taught at high schools at that time, our pilots had no base to build upon.

Learning the English language gained such importance because the British combat system was based on constant communication with the ground which very often included the usage of RADAR. This British combat technique was different from what Czechoslovak airmen were used to for instance in France, and thus the adaptation became more demanding. Without a minimal knowledge of the English language pilots were not allowed to participate in operations.<sup>67</sup>

British leadership did not leave Czechoslovaks on their own, and they started teaching English already in temporary accommodation. Over time, pilots got used to the English language, and learning about a complex combat formation was their “daily bread”. Interestingly, airmen admitted that the best and easiest way how they learned English was with the help of English ladies.<sup>68</sup>

### 3.3 The Integration of the Czechoslovak air force personnel

After the arrival of the Czechoslovak personnel to England, the exile government began to negotiate the position of the Czechoslovak pilots in the RAF. On October 25, 1940, an agreement between the Czechoslovak leaders in exile and the British government was made. It was decided that Czechoslovak pilots would be a part of the RAF, more specifically of the RAF VR. The agreement included figures about equipment, ranks, salary, and disciplinary charges which were in charge of the British bylaw. Czechoslovaks were allowed to put their

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<sup>67</sup> Ladislav Kudrna, *Když nelétali: Život našich letců v Polsku, Francii a Británii za 2. světové války* (Prague: Libri, 2003), 78-79.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 80-82.

own markings on British military aircraft and most importantly, it was agreed that the leadership of Czechoslovak squadrons would be left to Czechoslovak officers (in the beginning with an English leader by their side).<sup>69</sup>

In total, about 44 squadrons were built in the United Kingdom. Ladislav Kudrna claims that there were “fifteen Polish squadrons, twelve French, four Czechoslovak, four Norwegian, three Dutch, and Belgium, Greece, and Yugoslavia had each two squadrons”.<sup>70</sup> This act of British leadership was questioned by the historian Jiří Rajlich. In his book *Pilotem krále Anglie*, he states that the United Kingdom in 1939 did not want to have foreign pilots or even squadrons in their air force. However, about a year later, they allowed the formation of foreign squadrons. According to Rajlich, the main reason for a sudden change of opinion was the imminent war and possible attack on England. In that case, the incoming foreigners were much-needed help in two aspects – “fighting power and propagandistic effect”.<sup>71</sup> Britain suffered from the lack of personnel and aircraft so the masses of soldiers from all around Europe could help to solve this problem. The incoming masses also showed, that even when their homelands were occupied by the enemy, they were not hesitant to fight under another country’s flag.

The incorporation of Czechoslovak airmen into RAF VR was not what Czechoslovaks desired and new requirements were requested by the Czechoslovak authorities. The new contract from January 14, 1943, required mainly the independence of Czechoslovak squadrons and the ability to serve next to the RAF. The independent air force would swear loyalty to the Czechoslovak Republic, not to the king of the United Kingdom. It would be dependent on Czechoslovak jurisdiction and not on the British. However, there were no means of fulfilling these conditions and thus the contract was not accepted.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, Czechoslovak squadrons remained a part of the RAF VR.

### 3.4 Czechoslovak squadrons

Members of the Czechoslovak air force, along with other Czechoslovak military units in Britain, were determined to fight against the Third Reich to regain the freedom of their

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<sup>69</sup> Stanislav Motl, *Kam zmizel zlatý poklad republiky* (Prague: Rybka Publishers, 2003), 69.

<sup>70</sup> Ladislav Kudrna, *Když nelétali: Život našich letců v Polsku, Francii a Británii za 2. světové války* (Prague: Libri, 2003), 67-70.

<sup>71</sup> Karel Černý and Jiří Rajlich, *Pilotem krále Anglie* (Brno: Tváře, 2018), 24-26.

<sup>72</sup> Ladislav Kudrna, *Když nelétali: Život našich letců v Polsku, Francii a Británii za 2. světové války* (Prague: Libri, 2003), 68-70.

occupied homeland. Airmen and ground crew completed the training in the shortest time possible and prepared for the awaited German invasion.

### 3.4.1 No 310 Squadron

No 310 Squadron was the first Czechoslovak fighter squadron formed on June 12, 1940, in Duxford. The squadron was created during the Battle of Britain and for this reason, it was crucial to complete the training in the shortest possible time. As the first squadron leaders were appointed S/Ldr Alexander Hess and S/Ldr George Douglas Morant Blackwood.<sup>73</sup> The reason for having a British squadron leader was because of the problems with the English language that many Czechoslovak airmen had. The motto of this squadron was “We fight to rebuild” and it was equipped with aircraft Hurricane Mk. I. and later with Spitfire Mk. IIA.<sup>74</sup>

The squadron became fully prepared for military action on August 17, 1940, and since that time, the airmen maintained combat readiness,<sup>75</sup> meaning that not only pilots but also aircraft were constantly prepared to fight. Similarly to other Czechoslovak squadrons, No 310 participated in crucial combats. On August 26, 1940, the squadron was sent on its first mission in the Battle of Britain. During this combat, they achieved their first successes by destroying one Messerschmitt Bf 110, namely by P/O Emil Fechtner, and one Dornier Do 215 by Sgt Eduard Prchal.<sup>76</sup> One of the most important battles took place on September 15, 1940. On this day, which is also called ‘the Battle of Britain Day’ the German Luftwaffe heavily bombed London and airfields in southern England.<sup>77</sup> The squadron contributed to the defence of England with twelve shoot-downs and ranked among the most successful squadrons. Later, on September 18, 1940, No 310 attacked German bombers above London. With zero casualties, the squadron destroyed 6 Dorniers. Till the end of September, it reported the destruction of 40 German planes.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Manuel F. van Eyck, *Zemřeli jsme pro Anglii* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1993), 13.

<sup>74</sup> Zdeněk Hurt, *Češi a Slováci v RAF za druhé světové války* (Brno: Computer Press, 2005), 10.

<sup>75</sup> Alexander Hess, *Byli jsme v bitvě o Británii* (Prague, Naše vojsko, 1993), 17-22.

<sup>76</sup> Od paměti – k dědictví, “310 Sqn – We Fight to Rebuild,” Free Czechoslovak Air Force, last modified April 19, 2013, <https://fcfa.com/2013/04/19/310-sqn-we-fight-to-rebuild/>.

<sup>77</sup> Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund, “Battle of Britain Timeline,” Battle of Britain, accessed March 6, 2023, <https://www.rafbf.org/battle-of-britain/about-battle-britain/battle-timeline#:~:text=against%20the%20city.-,15%20September%201940,shoots%20down%2056%20German%20aircraft.>

<sup>78</sup> Eduard Čejka and Toman Brod, *Na západní frontě* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1963), 209.

Despite its remarkable successes, the squadron suffered several losses too. In total 26 aircraft were destroyed completely, and 31 aircraft were severely damaged. Nine pilots died during their service in No 310.<sup>79</sup>

The squadron tightly cooperated with the No 19 which was a British Fighter Command squadron. This British squadron borrowed 4 Czechoslovak pilots and these men became the very first Czechoslovak pilots who were serving in a British squadron. The exchange pilots were P/O František Doležal, P/O František Hradil, Sgt. František Marek, P/O Stanislav Plzák.<sup>80</sup>

### 3.4.2 No 311 Squadron

The second Czechoslovak squadron was the No 311 which was also the first Czechoslovak bomber squadron. The creation of No 311 was discussed at the same time as the creation of No 310 because there was an urgent need for both fighting and bombing squadrons. Therefore, less than three weeks after the birth of No 310, on August 2, 1940, No 311 was formed in Honington. The motto of this squadron was “Never regard their numbers” which should have encouraged crewmen not to be afraid of being outnumbered by the Luftwaffe air force. The squadron used the aircraft Wellington Mk. IA and in 1943 it was rearmed with the aircraft Liberator.<sup>81</sup> In its beginning, the appointed squadron leaders were W/Cdr John Griffiths, DFC, and W/Cdr Karel Toman-Mareš.<sup>82</sup>

The whole squadron was divided into 2 air groups – group A and group B. Air Group A was the one that was active in combats and Air Group B was in charge of training crewmen for the parent unit.<sup>83</sup>

The first operation, that the squadron flew, took place on September 10, 1940. The objective was the destruction of a railway station in Brussels that was occupied by the Nazis. Three aircraft were sent on this raid, however, none of them remained unnoticed and the German Luftwaffe went immediately after them as they appeared above the invaded territory.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Jiří Rajlich and Jiří Sehnal, *Stíhači nad kanálem* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1993), 11.

<sup>80</sup> “No 19 Sqn RAF,” World Naval Ships, last modified February 28, 2018, <https://www.worldnavalships.com/directory/squadronprofile.php?SquadronID=47>.

<sup>81</sup> Zdeněk Hurt, *Češi a Slováci v RAF za druhé světové války* (Brno: Computer Press, 2005), 20-30.

<sup>82</sup> Zdeněk Hurt, *Czechs in the RAF in Focus* (Lampeter: Red Kite, 2004), 10-15.

<sup>83</sup> Zdeněk Hurt, *Češi a Slováci v RAF za druhé světové války* (Brno: Computer Press, 2005), 20-30.

<sup>84</sup> Radek Makovský, *Nad Biskajem čeká smrt*, (Prague: Netopejr, 2013), 201-203.

Approximately two weeks later, the bomber squadron received a significant task targeted at Berlin. Three aircraft were in charge of this operation again and the leaders for this operation were W/Cdr Karel Mareš (Toman), P/O Bohumil Landa, and P/O Karel Trojáček. The bombing raid itself was successful, although Trojáček's aircraft was damaged by enemies and made an emergency landing in the Netherlands where the crew was captured by the Nazis.<sup>85</sup> The squadron was further engaged in bombing raids on Bremen although it suffered a high rate of casualties. From a bombing raid on October 16, only one crew returned. Due to its high rate of casualties, the squadron's involvement in aerial combats was temporarily suspended.<sup>86</sup>

From the end of 1940 till the end of June 1941, No 311 recruited new crewmen and increased the number of aircraft. The lack of qualified soldiers caused the squadron to obtain members of Canadian or Polish nationality.<sup>87</sup>

After the rearmament and crew recruitment, No 311 was enabled to participate in further bombing raids. On July 1, 1941, the squadron took part in the aerial bombing of Brest, which is an important harbor city in France, and along with squadron No 9 they managed to disable a German heavy cruiser the Prinz Eugen. Additionally, two Czechoslovaks, namely Sgt Václav Korda and navigator Jan Gellner, received Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for their exceptional heroism in this operation.<sup>88</sup>

In 1942, the squadron was involved in other substantial operations such as the Fuller operation or the bombing of Cologne which was nicknamed Operation Millennium. Later in 1944, it also engaged in the D-Day operation.<sup>89</sup>

On April 25, 1942, No 311 served its last operation under Bomber Command and it took part in bombing raids of Dunkerque. At the end of April 1942, the squadron moved to Aldergrove in Northern Ireland and became integrated into RAF Coastal Command. For the purpose of fulfilling tasks of Coastal Command, the crewmen underwent another special training. The training included learning new combat strategies such as attacking moving targets at sea, namely German U-boats in the Atlantic Ocean, and mastering night flying at low altitudes. The first official flight under Coastal Command occurred at the end of May

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<sup>85</sup> Radek Makovský, *Nad Biskajem čeká smrt*, (Prague: Netopejr, 2013), 201-203.

<sup>86</sup> Ladislav Kudrna, *Českoslovenští letci ve Velké Británii a válečné fenomény*, (Prague: Naše vojsko, 2006), 69.

<sup>87</sup> Zdeněk Hurt, *Češi a Slovinci v RAF* (Brno: Computer Press, 2005), 20-30.

<sup>88</sup> Olaf Groehler, *Letecká válka 1939–1945*, (Prague: Panorama, 1981), 268.

<sup>89</sup> "311 (Czechoslovak) Squadron," Royal Air Force Museum, accessed March 8, 2023, <https://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/research/online-exhibitions/czechoslovak-squadrons-in-raf/311-czechoslovak-squadron/>.

1942. One of the most significant flights, especially for this Czechoslovak squadron happened a month later. Czechoslovaks were equipped for this raid with special bombs which had the inscription 'ZA LIDICE' and 'ZA LEŽÁKY'. The writing symbolized the commemoration of destroyed municipalities of the Protectorate and further served as an act of revenge. The squadron then operated under Coastal Command till June 4, 1945.<sup>90</sup>

From September 1940 till April 1942 the squadron fought in more than 1,023 combat flights, but its successes were not miraculous because the squadron's losses were about 40 percent. However, the squadron was successful as an anti-submarine watch and helped with the destruction of numerous German aircraft.<sup>91</sup>

### 3.4.3 No 312 Squadron

The third Czechoslovak squadron, No 312 squadron, was the second fighter squadron of the Czechoslovak air force in the RAF. It was formed in Duxford on September 5, 1940, and its motto was "Not many, but much". As squadron leaders were appointed S/Ldr Frank H. Tyson and S/Ldr Ján Ambruš. The squadron was equipped with aircraft Hawker Hurricane Mk. I and later in 1944 with Spitfire LF Mk.I.<sup>92</sup>

The Battle of Britain officially ended on October 31, 1940, and thus the squadron did not have many opportunities to contribute to the defence of the British Isles. Additionally, its results in the battle were inferior. The main task for this squadron was the defence of Liverpool's air space. The city was heavily bombed from 1940 to 1942 by the German Luftwaffe, and thus every hand was needed to protect this seaport and the civilians living there.<sup>93</sup> The lack of properly trained night fighters compelled the squadron to begin with the training for night flights. The first official night operation then occurred at the end of December 1940.<sup>94</sup>

No 312 gained its very first victory on October 8, 1940, during the defence of Liverpool. Three Hawker Hurricanes shot down a Junker Ju 88 that was tasked with the bombing of the Speke airfield at Liverpool. The attack on the German aircraft was quick, and its destruction brought the Czechoslovaks recognition and respect. However, after this success, a series of unfortunate events came. For instance, on October 10, 1940, a very skilled pilot Sgt Otto

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<sup>90</sup> Radek Makovský, *Nad Biskajem čeká smrt*, (Prague: Netopejr, 2013), 205.

<sup>91</sup> Zdeněk Hurt, *Češi a Slováci v RAF za druhé světové války* (Brno: Computer Press, 2005), 20-30.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>93</sup> Eduard Čejka and Toman Brod, *Na západní frontě* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1963), 210.

<sup>94</sup> Ladislav Sitenský, *Perut' 312*, (Prague: Mladá fronta, 2017), 153.

Hanzlíček passed away during a training flight with his damaged Hawker Hurricane. The plane caught fire and the pilot left the aircraft in order to not burn alive, but he fell into the river Mersey and drowned himself.<sup>95</sup> Another pitiful incident happened on October 13, 1940, when a formation of three aircraft led by S/Ldr Ján Ambruš identified wrongly two British aircraft from No 29 Squadron as German Junkers. One British aircraft managed to escape but the other was shot down into the Irish Sea.<sup>96</sup>

By the middle of the year 1941, the squadron participated in routine defensive duties over France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the British Isles. At the end of May 1941, No 312 was moved to the air force base at Kenley and came under the command of Fighter Command's No 11 Group which engaged in the most demanding and dangerous sweeps over occupied Europe. For these operations, No 312 was armed with the new aircraft Hurricane Mk. IIBs. that had twelve machine guns instead of the original eight. After the rearmament, the squadron operated together with No 1 and No 258 British squadrons. The Czechoslovak squadron was in charge of the secured escort of bombers to their targets in France. During these escorts, No 312 shot down four Messerschmitts, five were recorded as probably destroyed and two were damaged. Its effective defence strengthened the squadron's reputation once again.<sup>97</sup>

On May 29, 1942, the squadron became a part of the Czechoslovak Fighter Wing, which was formed earlier that year in RAF Kenley. The wing was formed from the Czechoslovak fighter squadrons (No 310, No 312, and No 313) and it was the first Czechoslovak military unit, higher than a squadron, that comprised only Czechoslovak air personnel. It took part in numerous air raids in France, Netherlands, and Belgium.<sup>98</sup> The former commanding officer of No 312 Squadron W/Cdr Alois Vašátko, who also stood behind the establishment of the Czechoslovak Fighter Wing, became the commanding officer of this wing.<sup>99</sup> During the air raids, the wing shot down 4 enemy aircraft, 5 were probably shot down, and 2 were damaged. The wing itself lost 2 aircraft.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ladislav Sitenský, *Peruť 312*, (Prague: Mladá fronta, 2017), 153.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>98</sup> Eduard Čejka, *Československý odboj na Západě (1939–1945)*, (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1997), 287.

<sup>99</sup> Ladislav Sitenský, *Peruť 312*, (Prague: Mladá fronta, 2017), 155.

<sup>100</sup> Zdeněk Hurt, *Češi a Slováci v RAF za druhé světové války* (Brno: Computer Press, 2005), 34.

Czechoslovak pilots appeared above the German territory for the first time on August 14, 1944, during Operation Ramrod 9 and later took part in an attack on three cargo trains at the railway station.<sup>101</sup>

At the end of the Second World War, No 312 squadron reported in total 39 shot down or damaged enemy aircraft and destroyed several military installations and trains with supplies. However, the squadron lost 17 airmen and 6 were held captive.<sup>102</sup>

#### 3.4.4 No 313 Squadron

The third and last Czechoslovak fighter squadron was formed on May 10, 1941, in Catterick. Its motto was “One hawk chases away many crows” and it was equipped with aircraft Spitfire Mk. I. The squadron was composed of Czechoslovak pilots who previously served in British squadrons where they were used to Hurricanes. Their training for flying Spitfires took about a month and on June 10, 1941, the squadron was operationally ready. Pilots of No 313 were Czechoslovaks, and the ground crew was comprised of British men. The squadron leaders, in the beginning, were S/Ldr. Gordon L. Sinclair, DFC, S/Ldr. Josef Jaške and S/Ldr. Karel Mrázek.<sup>103</sup>

At the end of the year 1941, the squadron joined the Hornchurch Wing, which was formed by No 64 and No 411 squadrons. The wing defended bomber squadrons which focused mainly on targets in Belgium, Holland, and France. Till the end of June 1942, pilots from No 313 eliminated 8 German aircraft, 3 were probably shot down and 9 were damaged. The squadron lost about 8 pilots.<sup>104</sup>

Missions, in which operated No 313, included combat operations above the English Channel. Later, it was in charge of attacks on German airfields in the north of France. Additionally, No 313 participated in the D-Day operation in 1944.<sup>105</sup>

The D-Day operation, which was given a codename Overlord, was a plan for the invasion of France that merged the air, land, and naval force of the Allied powers (Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union). The operation began on June 6, 1944, when the land forces landed in Normandy. The land invasion was supported by the air force which

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<sup>101</sup> Zdeněk Hurt, *Češi a Slováci v RAF za druhé světové války* (Brno: Computer Press, 2005), 41.

<sup>102</sup> Milan Malý and Bohuš Trnka, *Třistadvanáctá perut' RAF a jižní Čechy* (České Budějovice: Jihočeské muzeum v Českých Budějovicích, 2000), 7.

<sup>103</sup> Zdeněk Hurt, *Češi a Slováci v RAF za druhé světové války* (Brno: Computer Press, 2005), 42.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>105</sup> “312 (Czechoslovak) Squadron,” Wings in Exile, accessed March 10, 2023, <https://www.wingsinexile.co.uk/clanky/fighter-squadron-312-313-21.html>.



counted more than 14, 670 sorties, out of which 5,650 accounted for the Royal Air Force. In comparison, the Luftwaffe sent a few hundred aircraft to destroy the air support of the Allied powers.<sup>106</sup> After almost 2 months of fighting, Nazi Germany was defeated and northern France was liberated.

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<sup>106</sup> “British Military Aviation in 1944,” Royal Air Force Museum, accessed March 10, 2023, <https://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/research/research-enquiries/history-of-aviation-timeline/british-military-aviation/1944-2/>.

#### 4 CZECHOSLOVAK AIRMEN IN BRITAIN

As stated previously, Czechoslovak airmen were much-needed support for Great Britain. Statistics interpreted in Čejka's *Československý odboj na západě* state that "from July 1940 till December 1944 about 1,465 Czechoslovak airmen served in the RAF."<sup>107</sup> The exact ratio of crewmen in Czechoslovak squadrons to the total number of Czechoslovaks in the RAF is not specified but about a thousand airmen served in Czechoslovak squadrons. More specifically, about 320 men served in squadron No 310<sup>108</sup>, 318 men in the Czechoslovak bomber squadron – No 311<sup>109</sup>, about 280 served in the second Czechoslovak fighter squadron – No 312<sup>110</sup>, and 101 men served in the last Czechoslovak squadron, No 313. More than 580 Czechoslovak soldiers were placed in other units in the RAF.<sup>111</sup>

The Czechoslovaks who did not serve in Czechoslovak squadrons appeared mainly in British squadrons. About 30 Czechs and Slovaks flew under the command of No 1 Squadron, which is the oldest squadron of the RAF, and which operated in almost every combat that required the involvement of Great Britain.<sup>112</sup>

Squadron No 68 was established in order to defend British cities against Luftwaffe's night raids and in total 39 Czechoslovak pilots and radar operators went through this squadron. No 68 contributed to the defence of Great Britain by 21 destroyed enemy aircraft.<sup>113</sup>

Notably, Czechoslovaks served in the No 138 squadron which was at the same time the Royal Air Force Special Duties Service (RAF SD). The main task of this secret air service was maintaining contact with resistance groups in Nazi-controlled Europe. The unit was also in charge of supply drops and transportation of agents to and from the occupied countries.

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<sup>107</sup> Eduard Čejka, *Československý odboj na Západě (1939–1945)*, (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1997), 520–522.

<sup>108</sup> "Staff of No. 310 Squadron," Czechoslovak Airmen in the RAF, accessed March 11, 2023, <https://cz-raf.webnode.cz/czechoslovak-units/a310-squadron/staff-of-no-310-squadron/>.

<sup>109</sup> Pavel Vančata, *311 Squadron*, (Sandomierz: Stratus, 2013), 3-5.

<sup>110</sup> Od paměti – k dědictví, "312 Czechoslovak Squadron," Free Czechoslovak Air Force, last modified September 25, 2010, <https://fcfa.com/2010/09/25/312-czechoslovak-squadron/>.

<sup>111</sup> Eduard Čejka, *Československý odboj na Západě (1939–1945)*, (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1997), 520–522.

<sup>112</sup> "Československé perutě Královského letectva," Velvyslanectví České republiky v Londýně, last modified June 2, 2017,

[https://www.mzv.cz/london/cz/vzajemne\\_vztahy\\_cr\\_a\\_spojeneho/osobnosti\\_cesko\\_britskych\\_vztahu/ceskoslovenske\\_perute\\_kralovskeho.html](https://www.mzv.cz/london/cz/vzajemne_vztahy_cr_a_spojeneho/osobnosti_cesko_britskych_vztahu/ceskoslovenske_perute_kralovskeho.html).

<sup>113</sup> "68 Night Fighter Squadron," Royal Air Force Museum, accessed March 23, 2023,

<https://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/research/online-exhibitions/czechoslovak-squadrons-in-raf/68-night-fighter-squadron/>.

In December 1941, this unit dropped Czechoslovak parachutes<sup>114</sup> (Jan Kubis and Jozef Gabčík) who were sent to the Protectorate to assassinate Deputy Reich Protector Reinhard Heydrich.

The successes of the Czechoslovaks included about “315 shootdowns of enemy aircraft, 56 probable shootdowns, and 112 damaged aircraft.” Pilots took part in more than “50,000 combat flights and 100,000 operating hours.” Total casualties were “511 dead, 273 of whom were from squadron 311, and 51 captured.”<sup>115</sup>

Czechoslovaks encountered many obstacles during the fight for their home country. Although they lost their country for six years, they did not surrender and became involved in resistance movements. However, the beginnings of the resistance movement were not quite successful.

After the occupation of the former Czechoslovak Republic, many Czechoslovaks attempted to leave the country, escaping mainly to neighbouring Poland. Nevertheless, Polish authorities did not want to give the Third Reich any reason for attacking Poland and thus sent Czechoslovaks back to the occupied Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Several Czechoslovak pilots recalled the exhausting and dangerous journey from the Protectorate to Poland in their memoirs. Many of them wrote about the Polish policemen who forced them to go back to the Protectorate. However, they did not give up and tried to find other approaches to engage in fights against the Germans. Czechoslovak diplomats started negotiating conditions under which their people could stay in France or Great Britain.<sup>116</sup> Neither France nor Great Britain wanted to obtain thousands of soldiers on their territory. The government in Britain believed that the nation is well protected by the surrounding bodies of water that were guarded by one of the greatest naval forces – the Royal Navy.<sup>117</sup> For this reason, they did not allow the entrance of migrants into its territory. On the other hand, France offered to accept Czechoslovaks on its territory if they enter the French Foreign Legion. By entering the legion, Czechoslovaks gained at least a small chance of being engaged in combat against Nazis.<sup>118</sup> The physical and mental endurance during the endless

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<sup>114</sup> “Československé perutě Královského letectva,” Velvyslanectví České republiky v Londýně, last modified on June 2, 2017,

[https://www.mzv.cz/london/cz/vzajemne\\_vztahy\\_cr\\_a\\_spojeneho/osobnosti\\_cesko\\_britskych\\_vztahu/ceskoslovenske\\_perute\\_kralovskeho.html](https://www.mzv.cz/london/cz/vzajemne_vztahy_cr_a_spojeneho/osobnosti_cesko_britskych_vztahu/ceskoslovenske_perute_kralovskeho.html).

<sup>115</sup> Eduard Čejka, *Československý odboj na Západě (1939–1945)*, (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1997), 520–522.

<sup>116</sup> Eduard Čejka, *Bitva o Francii*, (Prague: Mustang, 1994), 184–191.

<sup>117</sup> “The Royal Navy’s Size Throughout History,” Historic UK, accessed April 4, 2023, <https://www.historic-uk.com/Blog/British-Navy-Size-Over-Time/>.

<sup>118</sup> Eduard Čejka, *Bitva o Francii*, (Prague: Mustang, 1994), 209–211.

migration that all the soldiers showed was admirable. Soldiers encountered various difficulties including poor organization, failure of communication leading to a lack of information about the situation at home, and fear for the safety of their loved ones.

After the outbreak of World War II., Great Britain adjusted its refugee policy. Before the war began, the British government followed the so-called appeasement policy that is mostly associated with British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. The appeasement policy aimed at avoiding the war at all costs. However, this policy was highly unsuccessful and allowed Hitler to be more aggressive and expand German territory.<sup>119</sup> Eventually, the invasion of Poland was the last straw for both Great Britain and France. Great Britain ended its appeasement policy and also rethought the policy against refugees on its territory. British leaders knew that they were not properly armed either with weapons and vehicles or with manpower. Therefore, any soldiers, mechanics, pilots, and other members of the army were welcomed on the British Isles.<sup>120</sup> The majority of books about Czechoslovak pilots describe the arrival of our pilots as very pleasant, without any problems, signs of fear, or hatred from the side of British people. However, several sources argue that not always the British people expressed such warmth.

Sir Winston Churchill, the newly appointed Prime Minister, encouraged the public not to be afraid of newcomers because with their help the British would be victorious. Despite Churchill's great rhetorical talent, not all the people were persuaded completely. On May 24, 1940, the Daily Mail published an article that complained about the presence of German, Austrian, and Czechoslovak refugees on the British Isles and called for their isolation in a remote part of the country and for their strict supervision.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, several men of influence from the British High Command held a similar attitude towards Czechoslovaks. There is no clear reason, why the British did not trust Czechoslovaks. Possible causes for distrust could be apparent similarities with Germans such as shared history, traditions, language, or simply British skepticism and uncertainty.<sup>122</sup>

The spread of fear among people was ceased by Sir Winston Churchill, who turned the arrival of thousands of servicemen into a political tool. British used Czechoslovaks as a

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<sup>119</sup> "How Britain Hoped to Avoid War with Germany in the 1930s", Imperial War Museum, accessed April 2, 2023, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/how-britain-hoped-to-avoid-war-with-germany-in-the-1930s#:~:text=Instituted%20in%20the%20hope%20of,as%20a%20policy%20of%20weakness.>

<sup>120</sup> Karel Černý and Jiří Rajlich, *Pilotem krále Anglie* (Brno: Tváře, 2018), 24-26.

<sup>121</sup> Alan Clifford Browns, "The Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain" (PhD diss., University of Southampton, 1998), 32.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 5.

means of international propaganda. Czechoslovak representatives also took advantage of this international propaganda and used it as means of gaining prestige and influence while in exile.<sup>123</sup> Some Czechoslovak soldiers were even used as models for the propagandistic posters.

The fear of Czechoslovaks eventually vanished, and the integration into the RAF went smoothly. Memoirs of Czechoslovak pilots rarely mentioned any issues during their service in the RAF and Johana Křusek argues that the reason for it was Anglophilia. The exiles' writing often includes admiration of English people, culture, and language. Anglophilia could be noticed in three major newspapers that were published by Czechoslovaks in exile in London. The three newspapers were *Čechoslovák*, *Mladé/Nové Československo*, and *Nová Svoboda*. Similar to magazines published by Czechoslovak soldiers, the magazines published by exiles were under the censorship of the Ministry of Information that would immediately erase any anti-war or anti-British opinions. After the German Luftwaffe started with the extensive bombing of London, the Anglophilia of Czechoslovak newspapers became much stronger.<sup>124</sup> The Czechoslovak admiration for the British nation intensified together with their passion to fight for this country.

#### 4.1 Czechoslovaks and Poles

Interestingly, Polish refugees did not encounter such suspicion and fear. Both nations were given privileges and better positions while Czechoslovaks fought with lower ranks and under British command.<sup>125</sup> Both nations arrived in England after their homelands fell under Nazi control. The only difference between the invasion of the Czechoslovak Republic and Poland was that Czechoslovaks were not able to fight for their country and did not receive any help from other nations while Poland could at least try to resist the German army with the help of the Allied powers. Czechoslovaks and Poles further migrated together to France and later, after the change of the refugee policy, to Great Britain.

Similar language, similar history, and Slavic origin, and still, Poles received better treatment than the Czechoslovaks. The Polish government gained recognition already in

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<sup>123</sup> Alan Clifford Browns, "The Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain" (PhD diss., University of Southampton, 1998), 2.

<sup>124</sup> Johana Křusek, "Our Second Capital on the Banks of the Thames: The Evolution of the Anglophilia of Czechoslovak Exiles in Britain During the Second World War," *Central Europe* 20, no. 1 (2022): 29-31.

<sup>125</sup> Ladislav Kudrna, *Když nelétali: Život našich letců v Polsku, Francii a Británii za 2. světové války* (Prague: Libri, 2003), 64-70.

France in October 1939 and thus the representative body of the Polish nation could freely act after the arrival in England. The already-established Polish government enabled quick agreement with the United Kingdom about the engagement of Polish servicemen in the RAF. Polish representatives received an agreement with similar conditions as the Czechoslovaks, but Poles managed to renegotiate several norms and agreed that the Polish pilots were recognized as members of the RAF but also as the members of Polish Air Force.<sup>126</sup>

The Czechoslovak government-in-exile gained its recognition on July 1940. Similar to the Polish representatives, Czechoslovaks strove for a Czechoslovak air force that would operate in cooperation with the RAF and not as a part of it. However, their efforts were not successful, and remained under the control of the RAF.

The inequality between Czechoslovaks and Poles could be caused by several reasons. The first and most logical reason is that the number of Poles in the RAF outnumbered Czechoslovaks by a factor of seven, meaning that there were about one thousand Czechoslovaks in the RAF in the summer of 1940, while the number of Poles in that summer was 6,500.<sup>127</sup> More men who were able to fight meant greater support for Great Britain. In order to keep this massive number of servicemen, who fought voluntarily for Great Britain, it was more convenient to satisfy the Polish requests rather than the Czechoslovak ones.

Another reason for the endorsement of Poles was mistrust that arose in several highly ranked men in the British Command who saw in the Czechoslovaks a possible threat. Resistance in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was created after the Munich betrayal of 1938 but no major actions against the Nazi regime were taken.<sup>128</sup> Some British leaders perceived this passive resistance as a sign of reluctance and suspected Czechoslovaks of collaboration with Germans.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Aleš Binar, "Czechoslovak and Poles in Royal Air Force During the Battle of Britain," *Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal* 13, no. 1, (2021): 74.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>128</sup> "70<sup>th</sup>-anniversary special – the Czech resistance during World War II", Radio Prague International, last modified August 5, 2015, <https://english.radio.cz/70th-anniversary-special-czech-resistance-during-world-war-ii-8260872>.

<sup>129</sup> Alan Clifford Browns, "The Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain" (PhD diss., University of Southampton, 1998), 33.

## 4.2 Recognition of the Czechoslovak Government-in-exile

The Czechoslovak pilots contributed not only to the defence of the British Isles and the encouragement of the resistance in their homeland but also to the formation of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile.

The Czechoslovak government-in-exile officially gained recognition at the end of July 1940. The fight for recognition took a considerable amount of time and it would not be presumably successful without the contribution of the Czechoslovak pilots. Their duty in the Royal Air Force and especially their combat successes in the Battle of Britain helped to increase the prestige of the Czechoslovak foreign resistance and thus to establish a strong argument for the recognition. Moreover, the Czechoslovak pilots were considered to be the most active component of the Czechoslovak foreign resistance.<sup>130</sup> Ladislav Kudrna in the article *We Fight to Rebuild* claims that the Czechoslovak airmen and the Czechoslovak Legion, which were volunteer armed forces that fought in World War I and contributed to the establishment of the First Czechoslovak Republic,<sup>131</sup> were given equal importance. However, the recognition of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile was not beneficial only for the Czechoslovak nation but also for the British who used the act of recognition for propagandistic reasons. It enabled Great Britain to be viewed as a nation that is supported by governments in exile from numerous European countries which were occupied by Nazis.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Ladislav Kudrna, "We fight to Rebuild: Podíl letců na uznání exilové vlády," *Paměť a dějiny* 8, no.2 (2014): 9.

<sup>131</sup> "The Czechoslovak Legions: Myth, Reality, Gold and Glory," Radio Prague International, last modified August 18, 2010, <https://english.radio.cz/czechoslovak-legions-myth-reality-gold-and-glory-8571034>.

<sup>132</sup> Ladislav Kudrna, "We fight to Rebuild: Podíl letců na uznání exilové vlády," *Paměť a dějiny* 8, no.2 (2014): 7.

## CONCLUSION

Czechoslovak airmen did not give up in their efforts to fight for their homeland and did everything necessary to appear in combat against the Luftwaffe despite the hostile attitude of other nations. Firstly, they had to leave neighbouring Poland due to the Polish refusal to accept Czechoslovaks on its territory. Secondly, the French denial of the formation of Czechoslovak units in France forced Czechoslovak soldiers to apply and serve in the French Foreign Legion, and lastly, British non-acceptance of the formation of independent Czechoslovak units caused their permanent subordination to the British Command. Although Czechoslovaks were not the most successful nation in the Royal Air Force, their help during the defence of the British Isles was more than needed. Moreover, the involvement of the Czechoslovaks, and other foreign nations, in the RAF served as a demonstration of unity and was used by the British government as a propagandistic tool that depicted Great Britain as a power that was supported by a variety of different nations. On the other hand, the Czechoslovak government-in-exile used the participation of its citizens in the British Army as a means of gaining prestige.

The number of Czechoslovaks was not spectacular, neither were their victories. Nevertheless, their dogged determination to fight for the occupied country, despite many obstacles they had to overcome on the way to the RAF and later in the service in the RAF, served as a presentation of the strong Czechoslovak spirit and patriotism which played an important role as a mean of encouragement for the home resistance. Additionally, their duty as RAF aviators helped the Czechoslovak government-in-exile gain recognition and thus formed the basis for post-war Czechoslovakia.



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