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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

The Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain, 1940-1945

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS

HISTORY

Doctor of Philosophy

THE CZECHOSLOVAK AIR FORCE IN BRITAIN, 1940-1945

by Alan Clifford Brown, B.A.(Hons) Cert.Ed.

After the defeat of France in 1940, the surviving service personnel of several occupied European nations were evacuated to Britain where they reconstituted air and army units under the military control of the Allied High Command. Politically, however, they were the responsibility of their own national governments which were also exiled as Germany consolidated its gains in Europe, and this diversity of interests often produced sharp conflict. This study examines the political, military and social experiences of one such unit.

The central thesis is that the Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain was first and last a political tool to be used by the governments of both nations; first by the British as a means of international propaganda; then by the Czechoslovaks as a means of gaining prestige and influence while in exile; and last by the British again as a foil to the Soviets. To test the thesis, the study is divided into three parts, each of which is sub-divided into a series of themes through which the émigré experience can be explored.

Part One examines the escape of the air personnel from France; the serious effect their arrival had upon the political relationship between the British Government and the Czechoslovak National Committee headed by Edvard Beneš; the complex development of a military agreement between the two parties; the formation of the first two fighter squadrons; and the internal dissent and rebellion within the air contingent itself.

Part Two examines the social and practical aspects of émigré life, concentrating on the provisions made by the Air Ministry and the British Council for the training and welfare of the men. Also examined are the two primary problems which faced the Czechoslovak Air Force throughout the war: the lack of recruitment and the quest for fully independent status.

Part Three is concerned with the Czechoslovaks' attempts to break free from British control and return to their homeland; first as combatants in the Slovak Uprising of 1944, and second as heroes returning to liberated Czechoslovakia in 1945. On both occasions, the British raised obstacles, and the section concludes with an examination of the British efforts to use the air contingent to gain a political foothold in the post-war Soviet sphere of influence.

Overall, the study demonstrates that the British political and military establishments maintained an attitude of distrust and sometimes contempt for the Czechoslovaks. Political friction often affected the military context, and examples of hypocrisy and blatant deceit illustrate that the public and private views of this small Allied force were sharply at variance. The study also demonstrates that the existing interpretations of the recognition of the Provisional Czechoslovak Government in 1940 are flawed in that they do not sufficiently take into account the military pressures of the time.

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*In remembrance of Bob Brown , 1879476 Royal Engineers,
who served his country throughout the Second World War.
Born in 1919, laid to rest in 1985.*

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ABBREVIATIONS

(n.b. In nearly all cases within the text, the abbreviated form is given after the first mention of the full title, rank or name, therefore this list is for occasional reference only.)

2TAF	Second Tactical Air Force
AA	Air Attaché
AACU	Army Air Co-Operation Unit
AC2	Aircrafthand (Second Class)
AC	Air Commodore
ACAS	Assistant Chief of the Air Staff + (P) Policy; (I) Intelligence; (O) Operations
ACM	Air Chief Marshal
ADC	Aide-de-Camp
ADGB	Air Defence of Great Britain
ALG	Advanced Landing Ground
AFC	Air Force Cross
AFOSC	Allied Forces (Official) Sub-Committee
AG	Air Gunner
AM	Air Marshal
AMP	Air Member for Personnel
AMPC	Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps
AMRD	Air Member for Research and Development
AMT	Air Member for Training
AMSO	Air Member for Supply and Organisation
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
ATAF	Allied Tactical Air Force
ATFERO	Atlantic Ferry Organisation
AVM	Air Vice-Marshal
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BMR	British Military Representative
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
CB	Companion of the Order of the Bath
CBE	Commander of the British Empire
CIGS	Commander of the Imperial General Staff
CNC	Czechoslovak National Committee
CO	Commanding Officer
COS	Chiefs of Staff
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
ČsL VB	Czechoslovak Air Force in Great Britain
DAAC	Director(ate) of Allied Air Co-Operation

DAFL	Director(ate) of Allied Air Co-Operation and Foreign Liaison
DCAS	Deputy Chief of the Air Staff
DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross
DGO	Director General of Organisation
D of O(I)	Director of Operations (Intelligence)
D of M	Director of Manning
D of O	Director of Organisation
D of Plans	Director of Plans
D of P	Director of Postings
DPS	Director of Personal Services
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
EATS	Empire Air Training Scheme
ERPC	Expansion and Re-Equipment Policy Committee
F/Lt	Flight Lieutenant
FO	Foreign Office (British)
F/Sgt	Flight Sergeant
GCB	Knight Grand Cross Order of the Bath
GDB	General Duties Branch
GCMG	Knight Grand Cross of St.Michael and St.George
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GC (G/C)	Group Captain
GR	General Reconnaissance
GRU	General Reconnaissance Unit
HFU	Home Ferry Unit
HO	Home Office (British)
JIC	Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee
KG	Knight of the Garter
KGMG	Knight Commander of St.Michael and St.George
LAC	Leading Aircraftman
LB	Light Bomber
MAC	Mediterranean Air Command
MAP	Ministry of Aircraft Production
MC	Military Cross
MNO	Ministry of National Defence (Czechoslovak)
MO	Medical Officer
MP	Member of Parliament (British)
MRAF	Marshal of the Royal Air Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NFU	Night Fighter Unit
OC	Officer Commanding
ORB	Operational Record Book
OTU	Operational Training Unit
PAF	Polish Air Force
PCG	Provisional Czechoslovak Government
PM	Prime Minister
PO	Pilot Officer
POL	Petrol, Oil and Lubricants
POTU	Polish Operational Training Unit
POW	Prisoner(s) of War
PRO	Public Record Office (London)
PRU	Photographic Reconnaissance Unit
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAFVR	Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RT	Radio Telephonist
SAO	Senior Air Officer
SASO	Senior Air Staff Officer
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force
SHAPE	Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe
SEF	Single-engined fighter
Sgt	Sergeant
S/Ldr	Squadron Leader
Sqdn	Squadron
TEB	Twin-engined bomber
TEF	Twin-engined fighter
UK	United Kingdom
USAAF	United States Army Air Force
USAF	United States Air Force
VC	Victoria Cross
VCAS	Vice Chief of the Air Staff
VE	Victory in Europe
VHA	Military Historical Archive (Prague)
VKPR	Military Office of the President (Czechoslovak)
Wg Cdr	Wing Commander
WO	Wireless Operator

INTRODUCTION

This study is concerned with the émigré Czechoslovak Air Force which served in Britain under Allied High Command during the Second World War. The primary focus is upon the 'visible' air contingent; that is, the four squadrons formed between July 10th 1940 and May 10th 1941.¹ These were the units which received most of the political and military attention and 'flew the flag' for the troubled Republic of Czechoslovakia. There were, however, other Czech and Slovak nationals who served in small groups (as with the specialist night-fighters in 68 Squadron) or as individuals in British or other Allied units. There was also a small contingent sent to the Soviet Union in early 1944. Few in number, these men and their activities fall outside the scope of this volume, though occasional references are made to their existence and their duties. Omission, though, should not imply an ignorance of their efforts or their sacrifices, but it is to be hoped that the story to be told here will demonstrate why only the main four squadrons have been given prominence.

The exiles arrived in the summer of 1940 between the defeat of the French and the Battle of Britain, the vast majority of them rescued from continental shores as the Germans consolidated their victory. However, it was a difficult time for the British to receive so many uninvited guests, for not only did Czechoslovaks arrive at this time, so too did thousands of service personnel from Poland, France, Belgium and Holland. The British policy towards foreign nationals of all kinds was confused. It had moved from a general pre-war policy of no internment of alien refugees; to a selective system of internment mainly concentrated on German and Austrian nationals; then to a much wider policy which saw the deportation of some 8000 enemy aliens to the Dominions.² Thousands more were 'encouraged' to emigrate or continue their journeys to other countries (particularly the USA), but it was the disaster of the *Arandora Star* which caused a groundswell of public and parliamentary opinion against the Government's

1 These were 311 (Bomber) and 310, 312, 313 (Fighter) squadrons.

2 The time-scale for this shift of policy extended from the early months of 1939 to the summer of 1940, though it should not be inferred that camp-based internment was widespread. By January 1940, only 528 enemy aliens were detained; a further 8,356 were placed under various restrictions, while approximately 60,000 were free of detention or restriction. [Figures from: Holmes C: *John Bull's Island* (Macmillan 1988) p187.]

overall policy.³ Even so, the official attitude regarding Germans and Austrians also included Czech and Slovak nationals for a while. The day following the outbreak of war, the British Home Secretary announced that tribunals would review the individual cases of refugees from all of these areas to determine whether internment should apply.⁴ To an extent, the incoming Czechoslovaks in the summer of 1940 were subject to the remnants of this policy, and their presence on British soil required a sudden change of attitude on the part of some people within the Home and Foreign Offices.

The British action against alien refugees, especially during May 1940, had been insensitive and heavy-handed, but although it is possible to condemn the theory and practice from the safe vantage point of modern times, still the real fear of invasion and collaboration felt by the people of the day should not be overlooked. As Colin Holmes phrased it: "It is important to give due weight to the social context in which the policy was introduced when an isolated and weakly-defended Britain faced a triumphant and still impressively strong Germany."⁵ Foreigners of all kinds were therefore suspect, and though the arrival of the military evacuees was greeted with some fanfare, senior military figures within the British High Command retained their doubts. But this view was not confined only to the military, for even by July, a Gallup Poll indicated that 43% of the public still wanted all aliens interned, so when the foreign service personnel began to stream into the country during that same month, the British Government had a major dilemma before it.⁶ On the one hand, it could scarcely leave so many to the mercy of the Germans; but on the other hand, the absorption of tens of thousands of foreigners - some of whom might well have been enemy agents - conflicted strongly with the current policy of 'safety first'. It was to be Churchill who provided the leadership when required, and it will be seen that it was he who was the engine behind the assimilation of the troops and airmen. Nevertheless, as the present study will demonstrate, the suspicions and fears concerning the political allegiances of certain nationalities, and particularly the Czechoslovaks, impacted hard upon the decision-making process to the extent that a policy of selective rescue was momentarily considered.

3 The *Arandora Star* was torpedoed and sunk off the coast of Ireland on July 2nd 1940 with a loss of 714 lives. The ship had been carrying a cargo of German, Austrian and Italian refugees bound for Canada. 868 people survived. [Gilbert M: *Second World War* (Fontana 1990) p106.]

4 Hirschfeld G (ed): *Exile in Great Britain* (Berg 1984): Wasserstein B: 'The British Government and the German Immigration 1933-1945'; p77. As the editor makes clear in his Introduction to this volume of essays, "British immigration policy on the whole must be seen as an alloy of xenophobic restrictionism and the liberal hospitality traditional (at different periods) in British politics." [*ibid.* p5.] The accuracy of this observation will become apparent when the policies and attitudes are examined in the main text of the present study.

5 Holmes, *op.cit.*, p191.

6 Figures quoted in Calder A: *The People's War* (Jonathan Cape 1969) p132.]

Another aspect which deserves a mention at this point was the real and powerful sense of relief felt by many in Britain in the aftermath of the French collapse and the successful evacuations from Dunkirk. As King George VI wrote to his mother: "Personally, I feel happier now that we have no allies to be polite to and to pamper."⁷ Scarcely had the King penned these words when upwards of 60,000 new 'allies' arrived in his realm, each bringing with them governments or representative committees with a glorious array of internecine quibbles and grudges to settle. Still, however, the mood of the country was gay, almost sanguine. But as Angus Calder makes clear, not far beneath the apparent composure, "people grew used to the sense of imminent peril."⁸ Calder developed the theme in a later work, choosing to focus upon details omitted from the popular view of Britain 'alone' against the Third Reich.⁹ To be sure, there are two sides to every coin, but in his search to expose alternative realities he missed the essential point that Churchill's vision of Britain at war in 1940 was reality in itself to ordinary people who felt threatened by what seemed to be an all-conquering military machine a few miles across the English Channel. That the British people truly believed in this vision is indicated by the figures quoted by Calder himself; that by May 1940 only 3% of the British people thought that they might lose the war, but by the end of 1940 "the proportion was so small that it could not be measured."¹⁰ Myth or otherwise, those figures demonstrate that Churchill had achieved his aim of unity in the nation; he had inspired them to believe in victory, and irrespective of whether it was a fantasy or not, it was that belief which carried the nation through.

Besides, no worthwhile inspiration is wholly objective, certainly not as objective as a historian, and we must not forget that the French, in the words of A.J.P. Taylor, "had limped regretfully after their ally" when they declared war six hours after Britain in 1939.¹¹ When that country had been defeated, and so swiftly too, control of the war passed into the hands of the British Government. At last there were to be no more compromises; victory or defeat lay in the lap of one nation and its far-flung empire. To emphasise this, and to cast a rod towards the USA, Churchill moved quickly to ensure that the new influx of 'aliens' would be transformed into fighting allies in the minds of the people; a foreign legion of many flags which would demonstrate to the world, and particularly to the Americans, that Britain could and would stand fast with allies large

7 Quoted in Horne A: *To Lose A Battle* (Macmillan 1969) p510. Also in Calder, *op.cit.*, p113. Horne also provides us with a glimpse of the public view by quoting a newspaper-vendor's sign of the period: "FRENCH SIGN PEACE TREATY: WE'RE IN THE FINALS." (Horne, *op.cit.*, p507).

8 Calder, *op.cit.*, p112.

9 Calder A: *The Myth of the Blitz* (Pimlico 1995), *passim*.

10 Calder A: *The Myth of the Blitz*, p28.

11 Taylor A.J.P: *English History, 1914-1945* (OUP 1988) p452.

and small. The people of Britain in that summer of 1940 were, as we have seen, in the spirit to believe that they could prevail. Churchill had inculcated a vision of victory, and the Czechoslovaks who came to Britain in 1940 were a part of this vision, and they benefited in the social sense along with the many more Poles who came with them. Far from being the 'aliens' of the spring, they were the heroes of the summer, lauded by the press and political establishment alike, at least in its public voice.

And yet there is a third dimension which requires attention, and this concerns the relationship between the British Government and the group of Czech and Slovak political representatives headed by Edvard Beneš.¹² Here the matter becomes much more complex, for although Beneš had received a good press at the time of the Munich Agreement, and in the public eye he was one of the men who saved Europe from war in 1938, in the privacy of Whitehall he was not considered to be a trustworthy individual. He used the collapse of France to restore his own political fortunes, and in doing so he attracted the enmity of many in the Foreign Office who saw him as a schemer and a manipulator. The difficulty for the British was that they now had to accommodate and employ several thousand Czechoslovak servicemen, including a few hundred airmen who were potentially of great value in the rapidly developing air war over Britain. His Majesty's Government was thus compelled to put aside previously held objections to Beneš as leader of the Czechoslovak cause and grant him, somewhat reluctantly, a degree of political legitimacy. This study will demonstrate that it was the arrival of the Czechoslovak troops and air crews which forced the British hand, and not some kind of sentimental compensation for Munich. Even recent studies have failed to make the vital connection between the arrival of the service personnel and the recognition of the Provisional Government, and aside from smaller considerations which were ignored rather than resolved, it was this single event which led to the semi-official restoration of Beneš as the Czechoslovak leader.¹³ In order to accomplish this, the British

12 Dr. Eduard (Edvard) Beneš (1884-1948) was the son of a Czech farmer educated at Prague, Sorbonne, Berlin and London universities; Professor of Political Economy and of Sociology aged 36; General-Secretary of the Czechoslovak National Council in Paris 1917; Minister of Foreign Affairs 1918-1935; President 1935-1938, 1945-1948; resigned Presidency and died in 1948.

13 The most recent work on the subject is Zbyněk Zeman's *The Life of Edvard Beneš, 1884-1948* (OUP 1997). Zeman handles the period of British exile well, though much of the primary material is drawn from the Czech Archives rather than the British sources (as with the present study). This meant that he was dealing largely with official communiqués rather than the internal correspondence of the Foreign Office, and it is this which truly illuminates the debates and the doubts prevalent at the time. Zeman notes that the servicemen arrived in June and July 1940, and that "Beneš straightaway linked military with political negotiations." [p171] This is true, but then he had no choice in the matter, and a casual reader of Zeman's text might infer that to do so was a tactical move on behalf of Beneš. On the issue of the actual point of recognition itself, Zeman is seriously economical with the details:

"Beneš was acquainted with the British reservations on 6 July; when he visited William Strang on 9 July, he declared that the conditions for recognition had been fulfilled, and

Government had to re-examine its position in respect of the puppet government in Prague which, although clearly in office only by dint of German permission, nevertheless held out the best prospects for maintaining what existed in terms of home resistance.

These three dimensions - the aura of distrust, the public acceptance and political friction - form the context into which the Czechoslovak troops and air crews were propelled by the events in France in 1940. The air personnel were by far the most visible and successful, not least because they were the first of the Czechoslovak evacuees to be armed and then swiftly prepared for the most immediate battle in the air over Britain. Their success, and the overall victory of the RAF in the conflict, made air power the élite weapon, and as such it drew considerable amounts of public praise and attention. This was not lost on Beneš who saw political advantages to be gained in such a small yet high-profile force, but his ideas were sharply at variance with reality. From the British point of view, or at least that of the RAF, the Czechoslovak Air Force was almost a liability; something to be tolerated rather than nurtured. In purely political terms, it was the focus for some unsavoury opinions expressed by the British and often the subject of intense political manoeuvring. Therefore the over-arching thesis to be tested in this study is that the air contingent which found itself in Britain after the collapse of France was first and last a political tool to be used by the governments of both nations; first by the British as a means of international propaganda; then by the Czechoslovaks as a means of gaining prestige and influence while in exile; and last by the British again as a foil to the Soviets.

The text is divided into three parts, each of which deals with a short series of themes through which the complex relationships of the émigré experience can be explored; and through this exploration the thesis is tested. Each theme represents a point of contact between various permutations of (primarily) the Air Ministry, the Foreign Office, the Czechoslovak Ministry of National Defence and the Military Office of the President, though evidence from other Czechoslovak and British administrative and executive offices is used on frequent occasions. The themes are dealt with chronologically as far as possible, though sometimes there is some overlap to enable the subject to be fully considered.

notified him that the national council had decided to transform itself into a provisional government, and set up the system of the new state organization. The reply from Halifax, dated 18 July, allowed that HM Government in principle recognized the provisional government, but restated its former reservations and failed to address Beneš as 'president'."

[*loc. cit.*]

The reader may choose to refer back to this extract after examining the evidence contained in the present study.

The study was inspired by Czech historians at Palacký University in the Moravian city of Olomouc in the Czech Republic. Though well-acquainted with the combat records, movement dates, commanding-officers and so on, students of this part of Czechoslovak history were denied the resources and the liberty to research the subject from the British point of view based primarily on British military and historical documents. Until very recently, Czech and Slovak academics have been forced to rely on the memoirs and testimonies of veterans who, having survived the war, also survived the post-1948 purges. Those men who either stayed in Britain, or returned to this country before the Iron Curtain descended, had to wait until 1971 before any significant material was made accessible to the public, and by that time many did not have the funds, the health, or perhaps even the interest, to conduct a thorough examination of the official documents.¹⁴ Of those who went to the United States, most produced autobiographical memoirs, again based on personal experiences, and only in recent years have papers been written addressing wider military issues.¹⁵ As a result, most of the Czechoslovak Air Force histories produced thus far have tended to view the subject from the inside looking out, whereas the study in hand has been specifically designed to reverse this perspective.

It is for this reason that the study has concentrated on the official documents rather than personal testimony. Access to the military archives in Prague is now available to all historians, and much can be discovered to illuminate the views of the Czechoslovaks themselves in regard to the problems of exile. Even so, the archives are not complete by any means, and though scarcely any files remain closed (in contrast to some of the material held in London) this is because the archive was subject to a *skartace* ('editing') in 1951 during which many documents were removed and presumably destroyed. Thus what remains today was not considered in the early fifties to be sensitive and worthy of continued protection from the public eye.

The extent of this action can be clearly appreciated by monitoring the document nomenclature as one proceeds with research. Most documents were filed with an ordinal reference number, and in theory a complete collection should begin with 1 and

14 Some Czech military historians, such as Miroslav Pajer, Jiří Rajlich and Jiří Sehnal, *have* studied papers in and from London, but they have tended to specialise in certain areas such as the AIR 27 series of squadron records. Lack of funds and the prohibitively high costs of even a short stay in Britain has forced many such able historians from eastern Europe to sample rather than trawl the wealth of material in the AIR category.

15 A particularly excellent example is the two-volume series entitled *On All Fronts: Czechoslovaks in World War Two*, edited by Lewis M. White, produced by the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences and published in America under the masthead of East European Monographs. Volume 1 was published in 1991 with Volume 2 appearing in 1995. Although most of the essays are in the form of personal memoirs, some use documentary evidence to integrate the subject matter into the wider military scenario.

end at *N* within any given box or file group. This is never the case, however, and it is generally accepted that the gaps so produced - and some of these are quite large - are the result of the 1951 expurgation. The collection most deeply affected by this is the archive of the *Vojenská kancelář presidenta republiky* (VKPR - The Military Office of the President), as it was through this office that the military and political thinkers exchanged ideas and formulated policy. The introduction to the main VKPR index warns the student that the files were "roughly treated" in 1951, and many papers also became confused or mixed with other collections. As a result, files were no longer classified by subject but by type, meaning that papers were designated either as 'minutes' or 'personal', and these categories were sub-divided into 'open access', 'confidential' or 'secret' (reflecting the security measures of the time). The average VKPR file will therefore contain documents on dozens of subjects, broadly arranged in chronological order but all classified as 'secret minutes', 'confidential correspondence' and so on. Indeed, many papers appear in files with no dates and no addressees. Some have had signatures and carbon-copy references removed altogether.

Yet it should not be supposed that little of value can be found in the VKPR archive. On the contrary, more than enough material remains for the historian to get a substantial grip on the relationship between the political administration and the military leadership. Similarly, although the archive of the *Ministerstvo národní obrany* (MNO - Ministry of National Defence) also exhibits the same deficiencies as the VKPR class, much useful documentary material concerning the administration of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces in Britain is contained in its numerous files. The MNO in London was formed on July 22nd 1940, and in many respects resembled the pre-Munich ministry it was designed to replace while in exile. It was split into four sections which dealt with specific areas of administration: (1) = personnel, ceremonials, awards and contact with other offices of state, such as the VKPR; (2) military intelligence, both internal and external, under the command of General František Moravec; (3) the general administration of the Armed Forces, including propaganda, education and records; and (4) the financial and legal matters affecting all aspects of the military relationships created and sustained by the Czechoslovak forces with those of other nations. As well as these four, a study group under the State Secretary of Defence which concerned post-war plans and research operated as a subsidiary to the ministry. A Secretariat kept overall control of the details. The study group was disbanded on January 15th 1943 and replaced by the *Štáb pro vybudování československé branné moci* (ŠVBM - The Committee for the Redevelopment and Establishment of the Armed Forces). This had as its brief the study of likely post-war problems and their solutions, and many of its papers and correspondence are collected into a separate archive class. After the new

Government took charge in liberated Czechoslovakia, the new State MNO took over from the war-time version which was officially dissolved in 1946.

One other class in the Prague Archives was consulted extensively for this study, the files of the Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain (ČsL VB). This class contains the majority of the papers and correspondence of the Czechoslovak Air Force Inspectorate which was formed in September 1940 to supervise and administer the affairs of the air contingent. Few original policy documents emerged from the Inspectorate during the war since its rôle was to implement rather than formulate policy. However, many Inspectorate reports provided for the use of the VKPR and MNO are especially enlightening in regard to the daily condition of the air contingent, its operations and deployment, the administration of the personnel, education, training and demobilisation. Copies of the correspondence between the Inspectorate and the other departments are also in these files, often filling some of the gaps left in the VKPR and MNO collections. This is because the Inspectorate records were filed during the war according to the British system, grouped largely by subject rather than date. This led to the 'bunching' of papers in the files, and it is not unusual to find correspondence of 1940 dealing with training next to a series of minutes from a meeting on a similar subject in 1945. The Communist auditors of 1951 were therefore faced with an unfamiliar system and many papers escaped their attention as a result. Moreover, it was not until the end of the 1950s that the full amount of material was returned by the British, not because of any political restrictions but simply because some papers were still held within the Air Ministry and had been overlooked until requested by the Czechoslovakian authorities. The net result is that the ČsL VB archive, though it mainly contains lists, numbers and other administrative data, nevertheless escaped more lightly than the others and remains a useful, if somewhat cluttered, source of material for the historian.

These three collections supplied the bulk of the Czechoslovak information used in the present study.¹⁶ In London, the majority of the material used was drawn from the Air Ministry and Foreign Office classes (respectively AIR and FO), and this in itself reflects the intensely political nature of the study and its subject matter. As with the Prague Archives, most of the documents are available to the researcher, the only exceptions being files containing personal details of individuals or, in rare cases, records of Government policy which are still regarded as sensitive. The primary aim of the study was thus to use the evidence lying in these two great archives and attempt to

16 Other minor archives were also consulted, particularly files '20' and '27' which were artificial collections by theme arranged in the 1960s at the request of the Czechoslovak Government. Also, the Beneš Archive of the Institute of Thomas G. Masaryk (AÚTGM) is held by the VHA in Prague, though the documents within it are almost entirely political, and as such most military matters were handled by the VKPR. Papers used in this study from this archive are prefixed 'BA'.

construct a political context for the period when the Czech and Slovak exiles fought their corner of the war from British soil.¹⁷ One should note here also a division of the two nationalities, for it will become apparent that, on occasions, differences were drawn between the two, mainly for political reasons and almost always by the Czechoslovak Government.

Part One of the study concentrates on the period of the most intense activity: June to December 1940. It was in this period that the air crews arrived and were assessed before one bomber and two fighter squadrons were formed and deployed. This activity was the responsibility of the Air Ministry, but the responsibility to ensure the legitimacy of the action, and the task of striking a political balance with the Czechoslovaks, fell to the British Foreign Office. There was therefore a great deal happening, especially until the Battle of Britain was won, and it was happening in two distinct arenas, involving military men and diplomats, who each had to wrestle with the unique obstacles thrown up by the situation. From the point of view of the RAF, the major hurdles to be overcome were centred on language and training; but from the perspective of the Foreign Office, it was how to deal again with a man who had all but been forgotten until the outbreak of war; a man whose popularity was not especially high in the corridors of Whitehall.

Part Two is spread over three full years and is concerned mainly with the two major difficulties faced by the Czechoslovak Air Force throughout its time in Britain: low recruitment and the search for independent status. However, the section begins with a short examination of the social and welfare aspects of the émigré experience, and in particular the rather indifferent and often patronising attitude adopted by the RAF towards their new (but uninvited) allies. It took two years before the Air Ministry had gained enough experience with the foreign air crews to produce a general document on policy regarding them, and even then many of the clauses were broken in the case of the Czechoslovaks. Even so, the general administration of the air contingent remained with the RAF, and it was not the day-to-day life which worried Beneš and his military commanders. A greater problem for them was the embarrassing lack of volunteers who stepped forward to defend the Czechoslovak cause, something which did not go unnoticed by the British Government. More than this, Beneš relentlessly tried to enhance his prestige, both as an individual statesman and a leader of his nation, and he was sorely vexed by the British refusal to grant his Air Force the fully independent status which he demanded as a right. These two factors were millstones around his

17 Scarcely any material relevant to this study is held by the Royal Air Force Museum at Hendon, and though the staff there were enormously helpful in providing guidance, the majority of records are of a technical nature.

neck, but both - though nominally affairs of a military nature - were intensely political at their core.

Part Three deals with the last two years of the war, for as victory seemed assured, so did the Czechoslovaks attempt to break free of British influence and return home; first as air combatants in the Slovak Uprising, and second as airmen returning in triumph to their liberated homeland. On both occasions, the British made difficulties for them. In 1944, they used the excuse that the squadrons would, in effect, be impotent in the eastern theatre because neither the British or the Russians would be able to supply them. The underlying theme, however, is that the British were less keen to interfere in the Soviet zone, and this aspect was greatly amplified when the war ended. By insisting on Soviet permission for the squadrons to return to Prague, the British succeeded only in alienating substantial sections of the Czechoslovak High Command, and the former's desperate attempts to retrieve the situation and gain a political foothold in eastern Europe merely incensed the latter by equal proportions.

Throughout the thesis, it should become apparent that the men themselves - the officers, fliers, air crew and ground staff - were often oblivious to the events which so deeply shaped their experience in Britain, and at no time should the reader conceive of the thought that the vast majority of these men did anything other than their duty. Five hundred and thirty seven of them gave their lives in the war, and many more were injured, some gravely and permanently. Rather, this is a study of what was done in their name; of the friction between their political masters and their hosts; of the hypocritical and sometimes contemptuous attitude of the Air Ministry and lesser executives; and of the political manipulation which attended the first few weeks of the Cold War. The heroes were the Czech and Slovak men in uniform at RAF stations all around the British Isles, but the villains all wore suits or flew desks instead of Spitfires.

Finally, mention should be made of the opportunities which this study might well present to future researchers. Air power *per se* had enjoyed a sudden and almost exhilarating rise to eminency after the Battle of Britain (which in itself gave the Allied governments the pretext to promote their air forces as symbols of their own political validity and administrative success), and to some extent pushed land power in the west into the background until the major landings began in 1943. As a result, little has been written about the Czechoslovak Brigade which also mustered in Britain and saw some action in the Middle East and latterly after Operation *Overlord* in Europe, but although there are some small references to the Brigade in this study, a companion work using this unit as the hub of an examination of the relations between the Czechoslovak Government, the British Government and the War Office needs to be written at some

stage to balance the history of the whole exile force in Britain during the war.¹⁸ The initial indications are that the five thousand or so men involved were, somewhat like their colleagues in the air, simply viewed as a reserve force to be kept protected until the time came for their return home, and the Prague archives promise rich rewards for the researcher who chooses to embrace the topic. It is to be hoped that this present work inspires future research along these lines.¹⁹

18 To this day, it is still the air contingent which draws the attention of Czech and Slovak historians even though the force contained only one-third of the numbers who saw service in the Brigade.

19 The main class which deals with the Allied Armies - WO 178 - has yet to be received by the Public Record Office and remains with the Ministry of Defence. No date has been fixed for its release. As a result, the researcher will be largely dependent on the papers in the Czech Republic until the British material is at last made available.

PART ONE

1940

Escape from France to England

The history of the Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain during the Second World War has its origins in the collapse of France in June 1940. Before then, no organised units existed in Britain, and moves to establish a prototype squadron composed of redundant bomber personnel in France had actually been blocked.¹ The existing Agreement signed in October 1939 between the French, British and Polish authorities had allowed for the establishment of Polish units in Britain, but no such arrangement had been considered or foreseen for the Czechs and Slovaks then under French command.² It is therefore probable that, had the German invasion been resisted, the majority would have remained on the continent under the Franco-Czechoslovak Alliance of October 16th, 1925.³

But the French experience was not a good one for the Czechs, Slovaks or the Poles, the airmen in particular. More to the point, the attitude of the French High Command towards the Slavs in general closely foreshadowed that of the British when the time came to inherit the tens of thousands who survived the French *debâcle*. At a meeting of the Allied Military Committee in London on May 1st 1940, warm welcomes

1 See pages 23-25 for a fuller discussion of this refusal and the proposals which led to it.

2 300 Polish flying personnel and 2000 support staff had been detailed for UK service. The first of these arrived at Eastchurch on December 8th, 1939. The legal basis from the British perspective rested upon the Anglo-Polish Alliance of August 25th 1939. Eastchurch rapidly became "saturated" with Poles, and by February 1940 the British requested the French to halt the exodus until another station could be found. This, according to the Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Cyril Newall, would have "serious repercussions: (1) on the French, who want to get the Poles out of France; (2) on the Poles, who will become disheartened." [AIR/8/295: Newall to the Air Member for Supply and Organisation (Air Chief Marshal Sir C.L. Courtney) 26.2.40.]

Sir Cyril L.N. Newall (1886-1963) was CAS from 1937-1940; created Marshal of the Royal Air Force 1940; Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief New Zealand 1941-1946.

3 France had been angling for a treaty of some kind since 1921, but Edvard Beneš, then Foreign Minister, delayed progress so as to avoid antagonising Germany, Hungary and Italy. But after the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922 between Germany and the Soviet Union, Beneš permitted talks to proceed. The original Treaty of Alliance and Friendship with France (25.1.1924) only outlined the military dimensions, and merely committed the powers to "act in concert in foreign policy matters" and to "guarding the *status quo* in Europe." This held advantages for France, in that she now had an eastern ally of sorts, while Czechoslovakia gained a friend and avoided a sensitive entanglement. Attitudes changed after the Locarno Pact of 1925. The implication that Germany's eastern borders remained "negotiable" concentrated minds in Paris and Prague, thus a full alliance - The Franco-Czechoslovak Treaty of Mutual Assistance - was signed on October 16th, 1925. [Lukeš, I: *Czechoslovakia Between Stalin and Hitler* (OUP 1996) pp 33-36.]

and promises of close collaboration greeted Colonel Leon Mitkiewicz, the Polish representative, but the military realities on the continent suggested otherwise. The French had "received the Poles coldly", and blamed the defeat of Poland on "Polish inefficiency"; and although by the end of April approximately 8,000 Polish airmen were in France, of which 1,000 were pilots, only 150 flew in combat after the German attack in May. The rest were kept in idleness with no uniforms, obsolete equipment and no regular pay.⁴ Thus, when Colonel Mitkiewicz humbly admitted that Polish input to the war effort had been *perforce* rather limited, we can detect frustration, not apology, behind his words.⁵

The Czechoslovak contingent in France was not as large as the Polish, but some had been in the country longer. After the occupation by Germany of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, hundreds of men fled to Poland and attempted to enlist with the Polish forces, but their efforts met with rejection. Germany now viewed all Czechs as 'citizens of the Protectorate', and while the Poles did not go so far as to repatriate escapees, they had no intention of provoking the Germans by openly integrating them into their forces.⁶ This did not extend to preventing groups, large and small, from leaving the country and heading for France. Throughout the summer of 1939, service records show that men left the Polish camps by a variety of routes.⁷ Troops and airmen who had volunteered for service with the Red Army against the advice of the Czechoslovak Consulate in Poland, and as a result met with instant internment, were slowly released and, again, headed for France.⁸ The largest contingent of all, approximately 700 men, left Poland in late July 1939 aboard the Swedish passenger ship *Castelholm* and the Polish liner *Chrobry*, docking at Boulogne-sur-Mer on August 1st.⁹

4 The Polish Air Force (PAF) had been formally recreated on French soil under two Agreements signed in January and February 1940, largely through pressure brought to bear by General Wladyslaw Sikorski; but at the height of the battle the entire PAF in France consisted of seven squadrons (4 fighter, 2 reconnaissance and 1 bomber), the latter seeing no action at all. [Cynk J.B: *History of The Polish Air Force* (Osprey 1972): Ch 1 *passim*. Also Zamoyski A: *The Forgotten Few* (John Murray 1995) pp 44-56 - 'French Fiasco'.]

5 CAB 85/16: 1.5.40.

6 Čapka J: *Red Sky At Night* (Anthony Blond 1958) p23.

7 Service Records: Olomouc City Museum Archives, Czech Republic.

8 White L.M (ed.): *On All Fronts: Czechoslovaks in World War II, Volume 1* (Boulder 1991): Miloslav F.Kaspar: 'Polish Campaign 1939', pp 20-21. This also reveals the flexible attitude held by the USSR towards the Non-Aggression Pact with Germany. Kaspar also recalls two occasions when Czechoslovak troops encountered Red Army units without combat or capture, even though the fighting between Polish and Soviet forces was severe.

9 White L.M: *op.cit.*; Zdeněk Kordina: 'Those Months In France', pp 23-40 *passim*. Kordina had first-hand knowledge of much of the war as seen through Czechoslovak eyes in Britain. Born in 1913, he escaped to Poland, France and then England. He served in a variety of posts culminating in June 1945 with his appointment of Head of the Czechoslovak Military Mission in Italy. After the 1948 Communist coup in Czechoslovakia, he left for exile in West Germany.

But the attitude of the French authorities was little different to that of the Poles. France was not yet at war with Germany, and in the face of potential diplomatic protests from the German Government, the French told the Czechoslovaks that they would be temporarily enlisted in the Foreign Legion and that this was not an option - refusal to comply would mean expulsion to the Protectorate.¹⁰ Men were also told that they faced deportation to the Reich itself, and some later declared that they would not have left Krakow if they had known they were going to France.¹¹ Furthermore, the French held the Czechoslovak forces in little regard. A series of derogatory articles had been published in recent years through the military journal *Bulletin des armées étrangères* until General Faucher, a high-placed sympathiser, had them stopped.¹² A confidential report produced for the Czechoslovak Ministry of National Defence (MNO) suggested that the primary holding camp at Agde was little more than an internment area. Although they had enough food, they suffered from lack of accurate war information and the disdain of French officers to all things Czechoslovak.¹³ Ignorance rather than blatant contempt may have been the cause here, however. The Alliance of 1924 had allowed for Staff talks between the French and the Czechoslovaks, but there had been little consultation at a practical level. The French, it would seem, placed greater faith in Czechoslovakia's defensive capabilities rather than offensive strength.¹⁴

By most accounts, legion life was a grim experience. Units were sent to North Africa for training, much of it characteristically brutal, and some of it, perhaps by dint of malicious irony, under German NCOs.¹⁵ After the fall of Poland, limited active service was offered to both army and air personnel but, as with the Poles, the air contingent was sparingly used, joining combat as part of French Air Force detachments rather than as independent units. One reason was that Czechoslovak airmen, having

10 Čapka: *op.cit.*, p29. Also Darlington R: *Nighthawk* (William Kimber 1985) p25.

11 MNO 4/97/1940; Testimony of an unspecified number of NCOs in a report issued in early August 1940. It was claimed that many men went "hungry and poor" and that Czechoslovak officers showed little interest in the welfare of the troops. The report concluded that the French experience thus set the precedent for later disputes between officers and other ranks.

12 Chapman G: *Why France Collapsed* (Cassells 1968) p41.

13 MNO 5/810/1940: MNO report on conditions in France, 3.9.40. According to this report, a favourite French nickname for the Czechoslovaks was "*bandes Tchechoslovaques*." Another interesting comment featured in this report concerned the high number of Slovaks in the camp, certainly the majority, and how they were led by an agitator named Sivák. Apparently, he had asked the Petain Government to construct a separate Slovak camp at Vichy and arrange through the German Government safe passage home for all who wished to return. Neither Sivák nor the scheme reappear in the Prague Archives, but little details like this inform much of the later political disagreements.

14 Chapman, *loc.cit.*

15 Čapka: *op.cit.*, pp30/31; R.Darlington *op.cit.*, p26. These accounts were denied by M.A.Liškutín as "silly propaganda nonsense". [White: *op.cit.*; Liškutín M.A., 'The Czechoslovak Air Force In War', p127.]

completed basic Legion training, were posted to French colonial bases well away from the forthcoming front line on the Continent.

It was not until the outbreak of war with Germany that France utilised this manpower, but by then it was far too late to successfully integrate aircrews who had been lightly trained on outdated equipment.¹⁶ Of approximately 1000 airmen in France, one estimate places only 85 in combat rôles, with the others "kept well behind the lines."¹⁷ This conflicts with the official Czechoslovak tally of 123, but this figure also includes men who flew either individually or in small groups with French squadrons.¹⁸ Whichever figure is correct, it is clear that action was seen by very few. In itself, this would have been a grave disappointment to the Czechoslovaks. In a report drafted early in 1940, optimism for a fully independent force with at least one fighter squadron and two bomber squadrons ran high. Prestige was a major motivating factor:

The creation of an independent force within the French Air Force will have a very good impact on the ambitions of the individuals and their efforts to show in battle that our units are just as good as French units, thus individual pilots and whole units would bring friendly competition to its maximum impact.¹⁹

But it was not to be. Although a Franco-Czechoslovak Agreement was eventually signed in May, it was little more than window-dressing, and actual usage remained at the levels outlined above.

The undignified scramble which attended the defeat of France ultimately brought these men to England. On June 18th, the British Secretary of State for War, Anthony Eden, drew the attention of the War Cabinet to the cold fact that 12,000 Czechoslovak troops were in or near Marseilles and requested evacuation, information supplied by Beneš through the Czechoslovak National Committee in London. Though "things would be difficult to arrange", Eden agreed to speak to the Admiralty.²⁰ The following day, Prime Minister Winston Churchill stated that he had spoken with General Sikorski, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Forces, and assured him that "in any way possible", arrangements to embark his forces from the French coast would be made.²¹ Eden

16 White: *op.cit.*; Kordina: *op.cit.*, p25.

17 White: *op.cit.*; Liškutín: *op.cit.*, pp 127-8.

18 VKPR 27/3/1/5: Report of French Campaign, 20.4.42. In addition to the 123 pilots, around another 100 men were employed in the combat zones as ground crew, bringing the full total to 220-240. [VKPR 25/3/1/3: Summary of events of the Czechoslovak Air Force overseas produced in the summer of 1941.]

19 ČsL VB/124/CI-2d/1/75: MNO Report on Air Force establishment in France. The paper is undated, but its position in the file indicates that it was probably issued in March/April 1940.

20 CAB 65/7: War Cabinet, 18.6.40.

21 General Wladyslaw Sikorski (1881-1943); Lieutenant-Colonel of the Polish Legions during the Great War; Commander-in-Chief of the 5th and 3rd armies against the Bolsheviks, 1921-1924; Chief of the General Staff 1922-1923; Minister of Military Affairs 1923-1925; Prime Minister of the Polish

added that embarkation plans now existed for Bordeaux and Marseilles "to take off any Czechoslovak troops who wished to leave", but that "he would much prefer to embark Polish troops."²² This last comment reflects the instructions given to the British and French legations in Bucharest, as Poland was overrun, to assist with the forward transit of men who had escaped the German and Soviet forces. Yet it also indicates that rescue from the French beaches was not entirely conducted under a blanket policy; that if the situation became desperate, Polish personnel would have been given preferential treatment. Officially, of course, the Poles were full allies, so in effect, the evacuation of Polish personnel was a matter of policy and not choice.²³

Eden also spoke of those Czechoslovaks "who wished to leave", which begs the question, why should they not? In fact, a sizeable proportion did stay behind. Accurate figures for Czechoslovak casualties during the German offensive are difficult to establish due to the immense confusion, but one report estimated the May/June tally as 20 killed (of which only 8 died in combat, the others having perished in flying accidents or from unknown causes), 8 missing in action, and 4 unaccounted for during the evacuation to Britain.²⁴ Including dead and captured, one writer estimated that fully two-thirds of the Czechoslovak forces stayed in France, "and many of those chose voluntary demobilisation."²⁵ He also added "but very few officers chose to remain", and this undoubtedly gave rise to the command and recruitment problems which will be discussed later.

But exactly how many stayed behind? Consider the estimate placed before Eden by Beneš on the eve of the June evacuations - 12,000 men. This would seem to be an accurate figure, for of the two Czechoslovak holding camps in France, Agde and

Government and Commander-in-Chief Polish Forces 1939-1943; Knights Grand Cross (G.B.E.) 1940; Military Cross with four bars and many other decorations; died in air crash near Gibraltar.

22 CAB 65/7: War Cabinet, 19.6.40. This headlong retreat from the German advance was largely caught by a combined naval operation sometimes referred to as Operation *Aerial*, though in practice this is an umbrella term for many small, independently arranged sailings ranging from Cherbourg in the north down to the Bay of Biscay. The figures for *Aerial* are impressive - 163,225 servicemen and women evacuated from the French coasts in July 1940. While neither as large or as famous as *Dynamo* a month earlier, *Aerial* (and to a lesser extent its related operation *Cycle*) rescued what remained of the British forces on the Continent and the many tens of thousands of foreign personnel, principally French, Dutch, Belgian, Polish and Czechoslovak. [Report on Operations *Aerial* and *Cycle*: ADM 1/10481, 18.9.40. Also Gilbert. *op.cit.*, p98.]

23 Zamoyski, *op.cit.*, p38. The author also claims that the Allied authorities had been told to give priority to airmen.

24 MNO 5/931/1940: Summary of Czechoslovak action in France, 4.9.40.

25 White *op.cit.*; Jaroslav Němec: "The Crisis Of The Czechoslovak Army in England in the Second Half of 1940", p86. Jaroslav Němec (1910-1991) was an official of the Czechoslovak Military Court in France and the Soviet Union after 1943. He discovered that he had been designated "an enemy of the Soviet Union" in 1948 and escaped first to West Germany in 1950, then to the USA in 1952.

Merignac, the former held approximately 11,000 men, mainly army.²⁶ The latter held approximately 1000 men who were mainly air personnel.²⁷ Yet on July 26th, the War Cabinet read the Chiefs-of-Staffs report which detailed the numbers of foreign personnel "now maintained in this country by the exiled governments and other friendly authorities." The Czechoslovak tally was just 4000, and this would appear to confirm Němec's figure.²⁸ But although the arrivals in the summer of 1940 did not represent the total number of men who sooner or later saw service with the British forces, this still indicates that several thousand decided against evacuation and sought reasonable treatment at the hands of the new authorities. A few Czechs went home to the Protectorate and many more Slovaks returned to Slovakia.²⁹ A further consideration is that Slovaks made up by far the largest proportion of the ground forces in France. The low number of Slovaks who left France was ultimately reflected in the Czech-Slovak ratio within the exiled Air Force. One writer has calculated that a grand total of 3,256 Czech and Slovak airmen served with the force throughout the war, yet only 14% of them were Slovaks, and the majority of these fought with 311 (Bomber) Squadron mainly as air gunners, radio operators and ground crew.³⁰ As a result, the Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain was severely imbalanced as regards national

26 White: *op.cit.*; Kaspar *op.cit.*, pp 16-17. This figure contrasts somewhat with the recollections of General František Moravec, the Intelligence chief, who stated in his memoirs that the total number of Army personnel in France was 100,000. [Moravec F: *Master of Spies* (The Bodley Head 1975) p165.] Either Moravec was guilty of an inconceivable exaggeration or it was simply a printer's error.

27 White *op.cit.*; Zdenek Kordina: 'The 1940 Evacuation of Czechoslovak Armed Forces from France', pp 63-82, *passim*.

28 WP(40)281: 24.7.40. It would be useful here to consider the comparative figures of the other major nationalities *as of* 24.7.40: Polish 14,000, 'anti-Nazi' Germans 3000, French 2000, Norwegians 1000, Dutch 1000, Belgians 500, giving a total of 25,500. [Prime Minister to General Ismay for Chiefs-of-Staff WP(40)281.] It should also be noted that some of these figures rose substantially as late arrivals in Britain continued throughout the rest of 1940 and the first half of 1941.

29 Mentioned by Kordina (*op.cit.*, p77). The author also notes that some Czechs were interrogated by the Gestapo for escape information and command structures, then offered a deal whereby they would spread anti-Allied propaganda at home in return for no punishment. This is also mentioned in the MNO report of 3.9.40. Furthermore, many Slovaks who had settled in France between the wars had built homes and families there, and one estimate - though perhaps not entirely reliable - is that 60-65% chose to stay, many of whom were in reserved occupations and were consequently unwilling to enlist. [FO 371/24287: Record of a conversation between Robert Bruce Lockhart and Milan Hodža, 19.2.40.]

It is also worth recording that a considerable number of Poles stayed behind too. From a total cohort of 83,000, 23.5% (27,614) reached England in the main wave; 16,092 were captured, and 54,647 either (a) remained in France; (b) were seeking alternative routes through Spain; or (c) were stranded in Switzerland attached to a retreating French Corps. This latter number is probably in the region of 11,000 or so. [Figures quoted in Prazmowska A: *Britain and Poland 1939-1943* (Cambridge 1995), p26.] A contemporary guess for the Swiss contingent was 25,000. [WO 216/52: 20.6.40.] Even so, the number of 'first-wave' evacuees is sharply at variance with the figures given in the Chiefs of Staffs report noted above.

30 Rajlich J, Sehnal J: *Slovenští Letci* [Slovak Airmen] (Label 1991) p7.

representation, something to bear in mind when the political dimensions are discussed later in this section. The MNO report of September 1940 declared that the majority of Slovaks had a negative attitude to Czechoslovak resistance and displayed severe defeatism. The same report suggested that by August 3rd 1940 approximately 4000 men still awaited evacuation from France, but less than 600 other ranks chose this option, the rest accepting demobilisation.³¹

There was also a precedent which may have informed Eden's comments and doubts later expressed by some of the Army chiefs. Beginning in January 1940, the Foreign Office had hosted a series of inter-departmental conferences aimed at establishing a working procedure regarding the organisation of allied contingents on British territory.³² The requests had come from Sikorski in France and Beneš in England, and both intended to enlist nationals living in Britain for service on the continent. From the outset, the British position regarding the Czechoslovaks was one of facilitation - they were prepared to assist with registration, travel arrangements and embarkation centres, but it was to be clearly understood that no units would actually be created in this country.

Almost immediately the question of conscription arose, and with it some significant distinctions which threw the Czechoslovaks into a poor light. A spokesman for the Home Office, E.N.Cooper, insisted that "some measure of compulsion was more necessary for the Czechs than the Poles", mainly because of the circumstances under which they lived in Britain. He argued that many of the Poles had been settled in this country for some time and most had secure occupations, whereas "the majority of the Czechs were refugees, some of whom had subversive tendencies."³³ Speaking for the War Office, a Colonel Pigott suggested that a number of Czechs and Slovaks could be transported to Palestine where the Pioneer Companies were drastically undermanned. Cooper concurred, adding that the Home Office "were anxious to get rid of as many Czech and Slovak refugees as possible."³⁴ A sticking-point was the question of sanctions for a refusal to serve. The Poles could withdraw rights of nationality, but the

31 MNO 5/810/1940: Defence Ministry report on conditions in France, 3.9.40. According to this source, the French military were prepared to demobilise all service personnel who declared their intention to return to their former occupations on French territory.

32 FO 371/24365: C/1419/1419/62 *et al*: 26.1.40. The delegates at the first meeting included E.N.Cooper for the Home Office, three War Office representatives, and a brace of spokesmen from the Colonial Office. This meeting (and all subsequent ones) was chaired by Roger Makins.

Roger Mellor Makins CMG was educated at Winchester and Christ Church, Oxford; appointed to the Foreign Office 1928; promoted 2nd Secretary 1933; Acting 1st Secretary 1939; Acting Counsellor 1940; Counsellor 1942; knighted January 1st, 1944.

33 *ibid*. The original text is reproduced here. In the final draft of the minutes for circulation, "had" was replaced by "were reported to have".

34 *ibid*. Again, "get rid of" was replaced by "emigrate" in the final text.

Czechoslovaks could not because they were not recognised as a legitimate government. Deportation was not an option since there was nowhere to deport them to, so Cooper suggested an approach to the Czechoslovak Refugee Trust Fund to see if they would be prepared to threaten withdrawal of benefits from those who refused to enlist. The Home Office on its part might "adopt a stiffer attitude towards the Czechs [than] the Poles as regards the issue of exit permits for places abroad." The meeting approved these suggestions.

It would be too harsh to conclude from this that the Czechs and Slovaks were going to be driven from British territory, but it is plain that they were not welcome and that men of influence were prepared to employ some unpalatable tactics to relocate as many as possible. In the event, the Fund was not asked to withdraw benefits because this would simply mean that the British tax-payer would pick up the bill.³⁵ However, the Fund agreed to help organise recruitment, and the figures returned sent some appalling signals to the War Office. At one enlistment drive in the north of England, 450 local Czechs and Slovaks were "invited" to attend. Of these, only 150 turned up. Of the 150, only 90 volunteered, and of the 90 only 65 were passed as medically fit.³⁶ At the last meeting of its kind before the French collapse, Pigott stated that of the 2000 potential recruits in the country when the drive began, only 139 had gone to France and another 105 were due to embark within two weeks - in short, a little over 10% of the entire cohort. Worse still, the meeting was informed by Cooper that the Chairman of the Trust Fund, Sir Malcolm Delevingne, had told him that "evidence was accumulating that agitators had been at work among the refugees, a great many of whom seemed definitely opposed to the Allied war effort."³⁷

35 FO 371/24365: 29.4.40. A long series of minutes, some unsigned, examined the range of options before His Majesty's Government. One records that Cooper favoured "the passage of legislation to enforce conscription...to get as many of the Czech refugees over to France as quickly as possible." This was rejected because it would give Beneš' National Committee "an importance which at present would be wholly undesirable."

36 FO 371/24365: 29.4.40. It should be noted that of the 300 who did not attend the meeting at all, it was estimated that two-thirds were probably Sudeten-Germans, and it was unanimously agreed that no pressure was to be brought by the British on this group to enlist with the Czechoslovak units.

37 FO 371/24365: Inter-departmental meeting of 11.6.40. It is unclear from the document exactly what kind of "agitators" were active among the refugees, though later events indicated that the main political thrust was pro-Communist.

It was also believed that around 200 Sudeten-Germans had volunteered for service with the British forces. These figures are sharply at odds with those claimed by the Czechoslovaks. In a Home Office meeting on the day of the German march into Prague, Vojtech Jansa said that 1200 men had "already signified their willingness to serve" by contacting the Czech Legation in London, 500 of whom had been passed as medically fit. Since the attack on France had not been launched by the time the travelling recruitment office had begun its work, we cannot presume that German successes forced a change of mind in these men. It is much more likely that Jansa was exaggerating for the benefit of his British audience. [FO 371/24365 (186): Record of Home Office meeting of 15.2.40.] By a further note of 17.6.40, Roberts advocated changing "a great many of whom" for "a proportion of whom". The

There was also a political dimension which did not escape the consideration of the Foreign Office. Beneš had reminded the British authorities that he had declared "general mobilisation" of all Czechoslovak nationals living abroad as early as November 17th 1939, and that the National Committee intended to announce compulsory enlistment for all such nationals living in Britain, a clear challenge to the Government's position on conscription. To support his case, he used some unfortunate language when he quoted the existing arrangements with the French; recalcitrants, he said, "would be provisionally interned in a concentration camp", as would all those who were politically unacceptable.³⁸ The British took refuge behind diplomatic accuracy and simply restated their commitment to lend all possible assistance to Czechoslovak recruitment in the United Kingdom.³⁹ A few days later, Frank Roberts recorded his thoughts with great clarity:

Dr. Beneš persists in making a mountain out of a molehill of Czechoslovak recruitment in this country. The object is, of course, clearly to arrive at some arrangement which will enhance the authority of the Czechoslovak National Committee and give it the prestige of a Provisional Government.⁴⁰

Taking all of these aspects together, from the point of view of the British authorities the incoming Czechoslovak servicemen of June 1940 were part of a deeply flawed force and responsible to a political leader with suspect motives, and this assessment can be plainly illustrated to a further degree.

As noted above, a suggestion had been tabled in the British Air Ministry before the final French collapse that a Czechoslovak bomber unit could be formed in Britain from personnel then standing idle in France. The idea had been proposed on May 23rd by Lt. Colonel Josef Kalla, the Czechoslovak Air Attaché in London, his central argument being that the specialised geographical knowledge of these crews would render them ideal for bombing raids on enemy locations in the Protectorate.⁴¹ In

idea originally came from Cooper. [FO 371/24365: 17.6.40.]

38 FO 371/24365: Memorandum by Beneš to the Foreign Office, 26.4.40.

39 *ibid.* Comment on Beneš's memorandum from Roberts to Cooper.

40 FO 371/24365: 3.5.40. Roberts was commenting on the proposals and options discussed in the minutes of 29.4.40.

Frank Roberts (born 1907) was knighted in 1953. From 1940 to 1943 he worked under William Strang in the Central Department of the Foreign Office. The Central Department had eleven countries within its brief, plus colonial possessions. In 1943 he became Chargé d'Affaires to the Czechoslovak Government, then Minister to Moscow 1945-1947, Parliamentary Private Secretary to Ernest Bevin from 1947-1949, and Deputy High-Commissioner to India 1949-1951.

41 AIR/2/5153: Kalla to Air Ministry 23.5.40. During January 12th and 13th 1940, leaflet-drops by Whitley bombers had been conducted over Prague and Vienna, the planes flying from forward French airfields. By the time of this correspondence, however, such missions were hardly practical. [Everitt C, Middlebrook M: *The Bomber Command War Diaries 1939-45* (Midland Publishing, 1995) p28.]

forwarding the proposal to the Director of Intelligence on May 28th, Wing Commander Porri agreed that it would be wrong to "leave such potentially useful war personnel idle at this moment." His suggestion envisaged the transfer of 70 or 80 pilots for absorption into long-distance squadrons as second pilots or observers, but the reply from the Head of Security within the Air Ministry, Archibald Boyle, was unequivocal:

I very much doubt if this is worth pursuing. We don't know (1) whether there are any pilots worthy of the name and if they are available; (2) their integrity (I am doubtful of many Czechs); (3) whether their terms of agreement with the French makes them available. ⁴²

But he did not reject the suggestion out-of-hand. He advised Porri to canvass Kalla on the full availability of pilots currently in the United Kingdom, particularly those trained on fighters, and to explore the possibility of their incorporation into home squadrons.

Porri took this for what it was worth and acted swiftly. On June 10th he replied to Boyle, having first interviewed Colonel Kalla who assured him that the men in the Marseilles camp were fully trained and experienced personnel, and that he was confident of their integrity. Porri, sensitive to the earlier criticism, did not overstate his case, recommending that only 30 of the best pilots, plus 30 of the wireless operators, air-gunners and observers should be sent "after their integrity has been certified by the Czech Legation." After a period of OTU (Operational Training Unit) service, they would be posted to long-distance bomber squadrons with a minimum of four crews to each, "to form flights if possible." As regards usage of the home knowledge of the men, he reaffirmed the suggestion that action over the Protectorate would go some way to reducing enemy capacity - understood to be extensive - to train and manufacture units in that territory. He added that Colonel Kalla foresaw no difficulties in arranging matters with the French.⁴³

42 AIR/2/5153: Boyle to Porri 2.6.40. Major Boyle was the RAF's representative on the Joint Intelligence Committee. A former Army officer, he had won the MC and Bar with the Argyle & Sutherland Highlanders in WW1. He had had earlier dealings with the Polish contingent detailed for Eastchurch. When that station rapidly overflowed with transferees from France, Boyle promoted a suggestion that half the 2000 be absorbed into maintenance units, though he accepted that this was a deviation from the original agreement. [AIR/8/295: 29.2.40.]

Boyle held a position of considerable power within the Air Ministry as Director of Intelligence. His brief, according to Air Marshal Sir Victor Goddard, who knew him well, "was assessing the attitudes of people, including the shady ones and the twisters, British and foreign, who had associations with air power." [Goddard V: *Skies to Dunkirk* (William Kimber 1982) pp25-26.] Boyle's first point resonates with an opinion ventured by Colonel Charles Lindbergh over dinner with Air Marshal Sir John Slessor at the height of the Munich Crisis in 1938. Having recently returned from Czechoslovakia, Lindbergh was asked what he thought of the situation and the defences. "The Czechs", he said, "grand spirit, but in the air - *nothing*." [original emphasis] This comment was omitted by Slessor in the typed versions he later circulated. [AIR/75/2: 22.9.38.]

43 AIR/2/5153: Porri to Boyle 10.6.40.

To support his case still further, he enlisted the assistance of a man of some influence. Group-Captain Frank Beaumont, the former British Air Attaché to Prague, submitted a lengthy statement entitled 'Use of Czech Air Force Personnel in the RAF' which fully endorsed the scheme, believing that the men under discussion "rank[ed] with the best" in terms of training. He suggested possible targets within the Protectorate, emphasised the positive effects such attacks would have on civilian morale, and boldly declared that "the 100% nationalist population" would "swiftly and safely absorb agents, saboteurs and equipment."⁴⁴ Neither did he shy from the political dimension when he reminded his readers that Norway, Denmark and Holland, "who were not prepared to meet the German onslaught", were now considered allies:

...whereas the Czech Army was prepared in '38 & equipped in a manor [*sic*] unsurpassed on the continent [but] had to give up its armaments under the urgent advice from the allies. By giving this proved gallant people a chance to fight for the common cause & in the service of the RAF a great impotus [*sic*] would be given to the Czech people who up to date have shown wholeheartedly & without exception they support us. No doubts need ever be feared as to the results & achievements of such units, especially by those who know the fibre, efficiency & indomitable spirit of the Czech people.

We do not know if these sentiments had any effect on the opinions held at the Directorate of Intelligence because by this time the French surrender was imminent. A quick response merely stated that the matter had been forwarded to the Deputy Chief of Air Staff (DCAS), for a policy decision.⁴⁵ A further note dated June 17th effectively shelved the issue altogether:

I am afraid that although I had intended to send this matter forward to the DCAS, the present situation in France renders it unwise to cross any lines and you must, therefore, keep the matter in suspense and find out from Kalla in due course what is being done about the evacuation of the Czech personnel from the south of France. ⁴⁶

Clearly, the impending French collapse saved some high-ranking members of the Royal Air Force from a potentially embarrassing decision, but events had overtaken them, both in France and at home. Beneš had already written to the new Secretary of State for

44 AIR/2/5153: Statement of Group Captain Beaumont. The targets he mentioned were the Luftwaffe training-grounds at Hradec Kralové and Milovice in Bohemia and Vyškov in Moravia. Given some of the negative views expressed within the Air Ministry, it is not difficult to imagine that some might have thought that Beaumont had 'gone native'.

45 The then DCAS, Air Vice-Marshal Sir W. Sholto-Douglas GCB KCB CB MC DFC, was educated at Tonbridge School and Lincoln College, Oxford; RFC 1917; RAF 1918; Director of Staff Duties, Air Ministry, 1936-1937; ACAS 1938-1940; DCAS 1940; AOC Fighter Command 1940-1942; AOC Middle East Command 1943-1944; AOC Coastal Command 1944-1945; AOC British Air Forces of Occupation in Germany 1945-1946; Marshal of the Royal Air Force 1946; C-in-C and Military Governor, British Zone of Germany 1946-1947; retired 1948; created First Baron of Dornock 1948; decorated by more than thirteen countries.

46 AIR/2/5153: Directorate of Intelligence to Porri 17.6.40

Air, Sir Archibald Sinclair, requesting help in evacuating army and air personnel, adding that the first group of 30 pilots had landed at Hendon the previous night; so, whether the Air Ministry wanted them or not, essentially they were already at the door.⁴⁷

Nor were the Czechoslovaks the only contingent to be so coarsely assessed. Also present at that first meeting of the Allied Military Committee on May 1st was Air Commodore Sir Charles Medhurst, soon to be given the task of heading the Directorate of Allied Air Co-Operation (DAAC).⁴⁸ When it became clear at the end of June that very large numbers of Czechoslovak and Polish servicemen would shortly be arriving in the country, not by choice or invitation but by force of circumstances, attitudes changed sharply. Medhurst, writing to the DCAS on July 3rd, warned that nearly 10,000 Polish airmen would soon be arriving and forecast intense political pressure upon the RAF to form an independent Polish Air Force "entirely under Polish control." The Army, he said, had already agreed on its part, so such pressure would be hard to resist. He strongly advocated that the RAF must insist on any units formed being incorporated into the home force and falling directly under British command. Neither did he express his opinion of the newcomers in ambivalent terms:

An additional reason for attempting to secure this principle is that the senior Polish Air Force officers, I have been reliably informed, are completely useless and are only out to line their pockets in filling cushy jobs.⁴⁹

He suggested that a definite number of Polish squadrons should be decided upon at that moment, thus limiting places and avoiding "the unskilled and inferior material" who might be retrained for service with Army Air Co-Operation Units (AACU) or ferrying

47 AIR/2/5153: Letter from Beneš to Sinclair, received at Air Ministry 18.6.40.

Sir Archibald Henry Macdonald Sinclair (1890-1970) was educated at Eton and Sandhurst; at 22 he inherited a baronetcy and 100,000 acres of Scottish farmland; experimental aviator and great friend of Churchill's; served on the Western Front throughout the Great War; entered Parliament in 1922 as a Liberal; chairman of the Parliamentary Liberal Party in 1935; Secretary of State for Air under Churchill 1940-1945; lost Commons seat in 1950.

48 The DAAC became the Directorate of Allied Air Co-Operation and Foreign Liaison (DAFL) early in 1941.

49 AIR/2/5153: Medhurst to Sholto-Douglas 3.7.40. Medhurst's anxieties about independence were soon justified. On July 12th, Newall wrote to the C-in-C Polish Forces (General K. Sosnkowski) informing him that the legal status of the Polish Air Force would "be the same as that of the Polish land forces and the Polish Navy." In reply, the General accepted the logic of having the Polish squadrons organised on RAF lines, but still the principle of Polish independence was established by this exchange. [AIR/8/295: 16.7.40.]

Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Edward Hasting Medhurst KCB CB OBE MC (1896-1954) was educated at Rossall, St. Peter's at York and Sandhurst; served on the Western Front 1915-1918; RAF 1919; RAF Staff College 1931-1933; Deputy Director of Intelligence 1934-1937; Air Attaché Rome, Berlin, Berne and Athens 1937-1940; Director of Allied Air Co-Operation 1940; Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (Intelligence) 1941; ACAS (Policy) 1942; Commandant RAF Staff College 1943-1944; AOC C-in-C RAF Mediterranean and Middle East 1945-1948; retired 1950. Medhurst was also awarded the Czechoslovak White Lion, Class II, in 1944 for services to the Allied Air Forces.

duties. He estimated that no more than 40% of the influx would be "really good material" and surplus stock should be handed over to the Polish Army for absorption. Although Medhurst's comments on the Czechoslovak contingent are not noted, it might be reasonably assumed that he held them in no higher regard. In any event, he was either seriously ill-informed or just blind to existing arrangements because plans had been laid as early as May 1939 to absorb some Polish air personnel into the RAF, specifically navigators.⁵⁰

On that same day, July 3rd, also going to the office of the DCAS in response to a conference minute of June 29th, was a meticulous assessment of the Czechoslovak personnel lately arrived in England, coupled with proposals for their employment. An immediate problem was that, of the 327 flying personnel, approximately 50% were officers, and of the 177 ground crew only 2 were of commissioned rank. Their numbers would soon be swollen by another 300 mechanics then in transit.⁵¹ Here is an indication of the command problems created by the absence of those other ranks who chose demobilisation in France.⁵²

A further conference, again on July 3rd between Porri, Kalla, General Karel Janoušek and Lt.Colonel Alois Kubita established that each man should, if possible, be employed within the next ten days.⁵³ It was agreed that enough sufficiently trained personnel were available to form one fighter and one light-bomber squadron immediately, if only to maintain what was described as excellent morale. It was proposed that the whole of the Czechoslovak contingent be sent at once to a flying station (RAF Cosford) with such Army personnel selected for defence and non-technical duties as required. Group-Captain Beaumont, presumably because of his earlier enthusiasm, was nominated as Commanding Officer. Four training aircraft were to be supplied immediately, a small cohort of British NCOs; and in a revival of the earlier scheme, surplus personnel would be allocated for OTU training with the ultimate

50 Zamoyski *op.cit.*, p38.

51 AIR/2/5153: Porri to DCAS 3.7.40: 'Employment of Czech Air Personnel'.

52 This inevitably caused difficulties. The immediate lack of ground crews and technical support called for the detachment of surplus Czechoslovak Army personnel to fill the gaps. The surplus of officers, however, meant the freezing of promotion prospects "and from [this] stemmed a noticeable danger to the morale of Czechoslovak operating squadrons. This unsatisfactory state of affairs existed for a short while. Later operational losses helped in creating a more equitable situation." [Liškutín M.A: *Challenge In The Air* (Kimber 1988), pp176-177.] Also, interviews (Autumn 1993).

53 Air Marshal Sir Karel Janoušek KCB PhD served in Italy and with the Czechoslovak Legion in Russia during the Great War; graduated from the Military College in Prague 1923; joined the Czechoslovak Air Force 1924; promoted to Brigadier-General 1937; Inspector-General of the Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain 1940; promoted to Air Vice-Marshal 1941; promoted Air Marshal 1945; after the 1948 Communist coup, he served 11 years in prison as 'an enemy of the state'.

aim of transference to long-range bomber squadrons for raids on enemy bases within the Protectorate.

Men still without work after these selections would be trained for ferrying duties. It was agreed that every effort should be made to find a station in the south-east, and if this could not be achieved the formations should at least be posted to existing British stations to fly bombing raids over the French coast with their own fighter support: "This would let them function with the least delay and minimise problems such as language."⁵⁴ This last point was rejected by the DCAS with the comment: "We cannot have the Czechs conducting separate little operations of their own."⁵⁵

A charitable interpretation of this remark might be that Sholto-Douglas preferred to hold the new units rigidly under British command. Much more likely is that it represented the prevailing spirit of distrust, for on July 5th he implicitly confirmed Medhurst's anxieties concerning the Polish influx. The latter's suggestion for a limited formation of units found expression in the decision of the DCAS to create two fighter and two bomber squadrons, and that the Directorate of Organisation (D of O) should deal with locations and equipment. Clearly, this would leave a vast amount of men awaiting employment from a contingent of 10,000, though it was felt that "we must also keep our hands on sufficient pilots and crews to be trained in due course as replacements for operational squadrons."⁵⁶ All skilled mechanics, too, should be kept within reach. Medhurst's comments as to the quality of the men were neither refuted or rebuked.

It was the opinion of the D of O that the two existing Polish 'Battle' squadrons have their British personnel replaced by Poles.⁵⁷ This carried a disadvantage in that these otherwise front-line units would be lost while being made operationally fit, but with the addition of the two new squadrons at least all four Polish bomber units would be in the same group. This had mainly administrative advantages, but a sarcastic quip revealed a minor dividend: "This would also satisfy Polish aspirations since it would go a little way towards their wish to have the squadrons grouped in what they are pleased to call 'a unique command.'"⁵⁸ To some extent this was an unfair comment, notwithstanding the natural desires for the Poles to retain their independence. The war had been scarcely three weeks' old when Newall wrote to the Polish Military Mission,

54 AIR/2/5153: Conference Minutes to DCAS 3.7.40.

55 AIR/2/5153: DCAS to Medhurst 6.7.40.

56 AIR/2/5153: DCAS to Medhurst 5.7.40.

57 This refers to 300 and 301 Polish light-bomber squadrons equipped with Fairey Battle aircraft. In point of fact, 301 did not technically exist at this time since it was officially established on July 26th, 1940. Both squadrons were initially based at Bramcote.

58 AIR/2/5153: Directorate of Organisation to DCAS 6.7.40.

newly arrived in London, and expressed the earnest hope that he would soon "see members of the Polish Air Force beside us in the Royal Air Force", a phrase which deeply implied independent status and one which set a clear precedent from the viewpoint of the Poles.⁵⁹

Medhurst's principal concern was "the anxiety and trouble" it would cause station commanders who would have to administer the Czechs and Poles in their early days as RAF units since dedicated stations could not be allocated at that point in time. His remedy was to supply liaison officers, one to each unit, with four or five interpreters. He would call for a full list of surplus personnel for AACUs and ferrying duties. In his opinion, "armed with this information we shall be able to pick out the best of the available material at one picking and grade the rest for future use if and when we want them." ⁶⁰

Medhurst was clearly a man of flexible attitudes. A few days later on July 16th, he wrote to the Polish Military and Air Attaché and assured him that "we are, as you know, very eager to give all possible recognition to the Polish Air Force as having the status of an independent allied Air Force", and he reinforced his satisfaction by offering to release from the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR) all previously commissioned and enlisted personnel "if the Polish Government feels it to be desirable", which it most certainly did.⁶¹

Also on July 16th, he wrote to the relevant departments within the Air Ministry outlining the present situation as he saw it, emphasising that "the political importance of preserving the appearance of a fully independent Polish Air Force will be strongly pressed."⁶² In the same document, he listed the major and minor implications of absorbing the Polish influx one way or another. By allowing an independent force, the RAF risked losing control of the Polish crews, or would at least "be limited to exercising authority only through Polish officers." In a concluding paragraph, he argued against Polish autonomy for the reason that it would be:

59 In this note to General Norwid-Neugebaur, Newall offered the usual "wholehearted welcome" and looked forward to the defeat of the common enemy. In addition to the phrase quoted above, he added: "Need I say that I shall count it as an honour to have them thus with us." [AIR/8/295: 21.9.39.]

60 AIR/2/5153: Medhurst to the Directorate of Organisation, 7.7.40.

61 AIR/8/295: 16.7.40. Medhurst to Colonel B.J.Kwiecinski. The main point of the note was to bring to the Colonel's attention the delay in forming the new Polish squadrons, attributed to "other subsidiary points." Medhurst was well aware of the real problem, however. In his note of the same day to the relevant departments within the Air Ministry, he complained that General Kajac of the Polish Air Force had blocked any further registration of men with the RAFVR, and those already in it should be withdrawn forthwith. He had attempted to persuade Kajac to "rescind his order provisionally", but since he had not, Medhurst thus referred the problem back to the Polish High Command, having had his hand forced by Kajac. [AIR/8/295: 16.7.40.]

62 *ibid.* Note here Medhurst's stress upon the word "appearance".

...detrimental to efficiency, and to national security, to permit Polish units to serve in the complex RAF organisation unless the RAF has full operational and disciplinary control over the Polish personnel. It is undesirable from every point of view to sacrifice operational efficiency to a point of prestige; the latter may be satisfied in many ways, the former must run no risk.⁶³

Then, in direct contrast to his other correspondence of the day, he insisted on the principle of RAFVR enlistment, accepting that "it should be left to a higher authority to overrule this view if it is considered politically necessary."⁶⁴ Finally, and perhaps with a thought to the Czechoslovak case, he added, "the establishment of this precedent will undoubtedly cause trouble with the other foreign contingents, and possibly also the dominions."

A great deal, therefore, had occurred in 38 days. The period began with some senior members of the Air Ministry holding a strong aversion to the creation of even a token Czechoslovak bomber squadron in Britain, and it ended with the establishment of 310 (Czechoslovak) fighter squadron at Duxford in Cambridgeshire on July 10th 1940. Similarly, "completely useless" Polish officers had, in the space of a week, been placed in positions of responsibility with dual command over hastily selected personnel. From the comments and decisions examined, it is clear that there had been no sea-change of opinion within the Air Ministry during that time, and, bluntly put, the Royal Air Force had been presented with reinforcements it did not want and did not trust. No one at that point in time had any clear idea of what was to be done with these men, and the criticism did not stop there, as we shall see.

But the source of their torment was the Prime Minister himself, for it was Winston Churchill who was, and remained, the advocate behind the assimilation of the foreign servicemen. During the days of the French collapse, his voice was repeatedly heard in the War Cabinet urging whatever measures were necessary to save all personnel, regardless of their nationality, then converging on foreign ports. On June 20th, the First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, acting in reply to the selective proposals made by Eden the previous day, spoke of the

63 *ibid.* Medhurst's comment here on "national security" alone indicates the concern which many members of the British High Command held in regard to the evacuees.

64 *ibid.* Medhurst's argument for the enlistment of Allied air crews into the RAFVR rested upon the question of discipline. Independence would permit the application of Polish Air Force law - "probably different from our own" - whereas incorporation into the Volunteer Reserve would make the men subject to RAF procedures. Two days later, July 18th, he would minute the same departments to inform them that an agreement had been reached and that "in future, the Poles in this country should form an Air Force not incorporated in the RAFVR." He could take *some* pleasure, however, in the fact that the Poles had also agreed to full operational control remaining with the British. [AIR/8/295: 18.7.40.]

measures being taken to evacuate Polish troops from St.Malo. Churchill responded by urging the Admiralty:

...to make it their aim to evacuate as many as possible, not only of these Polish troops, but of the far larger bodies who were trying to make their way to the French coast. This should be regarded as an objective of the utmost importance.⁶⁵

This statement ended any further talk of selective evacuation. He envisaged a British Foreign Legion composed of anyone and everyone who could be trusted to serve honourably within it. It was "unjust", he said, "to treat our friends as foes".⁶⁶ He was aware that arming such a force was not immediately feasible, but that "it would be well to have these men under discipline in the meantime." The Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, agreed that there "were strong political arguments in favour of a quick comb-out of those aliens who were willing to fight for us."

Halifax's choice of words are interesting. A little over a month before, in response to a statement by Halifax that the German advance into Holland had been aided by sympathisers, Churchill noted certain groups then within the UK whom he considered worthy of close scrutiny. In his opinion, British fascists and communists, Dutch and Belgian refugees, any and all Italians, "and Czech refugees who were not enemy aliens ...should be behind barbed wire."⁶⁷ Leaving aside the domestic element, fears were high that these groups could contain active German spies or persons otherwise sympathetic to the Axis cause. Now, in late June, according to the then current estimates, a further 60,000 citizens of occupied states would be on British soil, a potential security problem of the first magnitude.⁶⁸

In fairness to the Government, however, it must be recalled that the military refugees from France arrived at a time when Britain was suffering from 'Fifth Column fever'. Churchill's request for a general round-up in May was provoked by a report from Sir Nevile Bland (the British Minister to the Dutch Government) unambiguously entitled "The Fifth Column Menace". This was discussed in the War Cabinet of May 15th and was followed on the 17th by a Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee (JIC) report, endorsed by the Chiefs of Staff, advocating the internment of all aliens between the ages

65 CAB 65/7: War Cabinet, 20.6.40.

66 CAB 65/7: War Cabinet, 21.6.40.

67 Gilbert M: *Winston S. Churchill; Volume 6 1939-1941* (Heinemann 1983) p342. Churchill's choice of phrase regarding the Czechs appears confusing, but taken literally it would seem to imply that he wanted *all* Czech refugees - irrespective of their classification as aliens - to be interned.

68 Estimates of the numbers awaiting evacuation varied wildly during the crisis. The minutes for the War Cabinets of June 18th-25th 1940 show how little more than guesses were made at how many were in what place or heading towards which port. The Polish tally at one point reached more than 42,000. Nevertheless, such figures were the reality of the hour.

of 16 and 70.⁶⁹ On May 24th, the *Daily Mail*, in a somewhat hysterical tone, made a critical connection when it cried that "all refugees from Austria, Germany and Czechoslovakia, men and women alike, should be drafted without delay to a remote part of the country and kept under strict supervision."⁷⁰

Nor was this opinion confined to the popular press. At the end of May, the JIC produced a memorandum concerning the employment of aliens by the military. The situation as it stood allowed for non-enemy aliens to be employed in barracks or official quarters if they had first been cleared by MI5, but things changed if the potential employment was offered in non-military areas. No restrictions at all were in force under these circumstances, even if the employees were from designated enemy territories, thus the memo concluded that this was "insufficient". To rectify this possible weakness in security, the Committee proposed that:

...all members of the Services and officials of Government Departments should be forbidden to employ enemy (i.e. German, Austrian and ~~Czech~~) aliens in any circumstances.⁷¹

In the original document, as reproduced here, the words "and Czech" had been struck through in blue ink, but it is important to note that this amendment did not occur at the time, and neither was it an afterthought on behalf of the Committee before the paper was assessed.

The answer lies in a letter of September 14th (when 310, 311 and 312 Czechoslovak squadrons were already formed and operational) from the Home Office to the Foreign Office, a copy of which was placed in the JIC files. Referring to an earlier War Office minute of June 10th, which accepted the recommendations of the JIC, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State (Sir Alexander Maxwell) wrote:

My attention has been drawn to a document...in which it is stated that "it has been decided that all Germans, Austrians and Czechs and Italians at present in the employ of military personnel are to be dismissed forthwith and that no aliens of these nationalities are to be employed by military personnel in the future under any circumstances". The document then proceeds to say what is to be done about "other aliens".

69 Gillman P & L: *Collar The Lot* (Quartet 1980), pp 107-108, p113. The JIC report was seen by Sir Alexander Cadogan who noted in his diary that the War Cabinet of May 18th discussed "what we do if France collapses and - most of the time - what we do anyhow now about aliens." [Dilks D (ed): *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945* (Cassells 1971) p286.]

Sir Alexander Cadogan (1884-1968) was educated at Eton and Oxford and joined the Diplomatic Service in 1908; Minister to Peking 1932-36; Permanent Under-Secretary to the Foreign Office 1938-45.

70 Article by G.Ward Price: *Daily Mail*, 24.5.40. The headline reflected the tone of the piece - "Act! Act! Act! - Do It Now!"

71 CAB 81/97: (J.I.C. (40) 86): 30.5.40. The original document was signed by Cavendish-Bentinck, J.H.Godfrey, F.G.Beaumont-Nesbitt, Archibald Boyle and H.I.Allen.

You will see that in this instruction, Czechs are included with Germans, Austrians and Italians as if they were aliens of enemy nationality which of course they are not. There may be some Sudeten Czechs who are German rather than Czech in sympathy and in whose cases it is necessary to take special care, but as a general rule it will I am afraid create grave difficulties - and I am sure the Foreign Office will support me in this - if we treat our allies as enemies. With the recent establishment of a Czech Provisional Government in England...it has become even more imperative not to discourage those whose co-operation is necessary to us by labelling them or treating them as "enemies".⁷²

Here is clear evidence that substantial sections of the British High Command - including men of real influence and power - were quite content to bracket Czechs and Slovaks with those nationalities who were obviously under suspicion.⁷³ Small wonder, then, that Boyle wrote what he did in answer to Porri's enquiry of May 28th. Within the space of a few weeks, large numbers of these "enemies" had arrived in Britain, and attitudes simply do not change that fast.⁷⁴

From this small selection of material, we can see clearly that the political realities in the summer of 1940 outweighed the potential military value which the incoming Poles and Czechoslovaks promised to the British. Britain, we must remember, was famously 'alone', and to some extent she actually enjoyed the sensation.⁷⁵ Suddenly, that sense of splendid isolation was shattered, but not by a powerful ally such as the USA, which would have been welcomed with open arms, but by a seemingly motley band of defeated nations which fetched up upon British shores expecting to be fed, armed and thrown back into the fight. With the French in particular, this was the case;

72 CAB 81/98: Home Office to Foreign Office, 14.9.40.

73 It can be reasonably assumed that this referred to Czechs *and* Slovaks (a) because very few official documents bothered to make the distinction, using the term 'Czech' to mean Czechs and Slovaks; and (b) because Slovakia, technically at least, was perceived to be in the Axis camp anyway.

74 The attitude of the JIC changed very slowly indeed. Towards the end of 1940, when the invasion scare was over, the Committee considered one of a series of intriguing papers entitled "Rumours of a Military Nature Intended to Mystify and Mislead the Enemy." These were suggestions put forward by the various service and security departments to the Inter-Service Security Board (ISSB) for realistic assessment. If considered feasible, the "rumour" would be made public. One such rumour was designed to scare the Italians by threatening to bomb Vesuvius "to see what would happen", in the hope that the awestruck peasants would panic and demand protection. To this idea, the ISSB concurred. Another involved 50 Nazi rats which had been infected with the Plague prior to being dropped over England on rat-sized parachutes. The rumour, aimed at weakening German public morale, would suggest that these rats had gone missing in Germany and that the authorities were falling over themselves trying to find them. To this, the ISSB said, "we have no comment". Finally, MI5 had suggested spreading a tale of ten Luftwaffe pilots who had baled out over Britain and been interned. Pledging to strike back against their former masters, they were now flying Hurricanes in Polish squadrons operating from Britain. Said the ISSB: "We are not enamoured with this rumour...particularly the reference to the Polish squadrons in the final sentence." [CAB 81/97: (JIC (40) 386), 23.11.40.]

75 'Alone', of course, is a word which tends to obscure the fact that a substantial Empire stood in the wings, but if the word is used in the context of the country's proximity to the German advance across Europe, then Britain was alone indeed.

but with the Slavs, however, a strong spirit of distrust prevailed, and apart from Churchill who foresaw the propaganda rewards which might accrue from their assimilation into the ranks, few others seemed prepared to give them the benefit of the doubt and treat them as genuine allies.

The Provisional Czechoslovak Government

Aside from the political dimensions, the evacuation of so many people was causing problems, not least among them that a considerable number of foreign troops were arriving unarmed. On June 24th, the newly-appointed Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Lieutenant-General Sir John Dill, noted that "we might shortly find ourselves rearming them in greater numbers than we can employ", behind which we may detect concern that a sizeable armed surplus might constitute a threat. Churchill was already on the next rung of the ladder. "If these Allied troops arrived unarmed," he argued, "and were unsuitable for employment, arrangements could always be made to send them on elsewhere."⁷⁶ He did not specify exactly where "elsewhere" was, and no one queried the point, but before most of them had even disembarked, the agile mind of the Prime Minister had formed an army, selected its complement and shunted the surplus off to an uncertain fate.⁷⁷ Typically, Churchill was being driven by an idea which he had not entirely thought through; he could see the end result but was content to leave the details to others. Dill, however, persisted in airing his worries. On June 25th, he promised a statement of known numbers soon, but on first reports it seemed that the Polish troops were "generally of good quality" and could be armed with rifles received from the United States, but "the Czechs would have to be carefully sorted out before rearming, thereby echoing Halifax's concerns on the 21st."⁷⁸ He also added that "the disposal of unsuitable elements might prove difficult." The language is bleak and laden with doubt, and we may note that Dill wished to complete the selection process before giving them guns.

Another problem which swiftly emerged was the legal status of the various exile governments in general and the Czechoslovak National Committee in particular. Lord Halifax, alert to this difficulty, assured the War Cabinet on June 27th that he would bring the matter forward for full discussion as soon as possible.⁷⁹ Six days later on July

76 CAB 65/7: War Cabinet, 24.6.40.

77 "Elsewhere" was probably Canada or, less likely, the Isle of Man or Australia. For a thorough account of the Canadian proposals, see Gillman P & L, *op.cit.*, pp 161-171.

78 CAB 65/7: War Cabinet, 25.6.40.

79 CAB 65/7: War Cabinet, 27.6.40.

3rd, the Cabinet considered the paper he had prepared.⁸⁰ The political obstacles which had previously hindered formal recognition had now, said Halifax, been affected by recent developments. One aspect of the earlier assessment, however, that Beneš had been unable to secure Czech and Slovak unity abroad, had not been radically altered by the new scenario.⁸¹

From early February to mid-April 1940, British Government records trace a bitter, sometimes petty, dispute between Beneš and Milan Hodža, former Czechoslovak Prime Minister and now self-appointed spokesman for Slovaks abroad. Aspects of this dispute, and the British perception of it, warrant closer examination. It also bears upon the later full recognition of the Czechoslovak Government in 1941, following which Beneš's position as the internationally-recognised President inspired him to use the Czechoslovak Army, and particularly the Air Force, to further his political ambitions. As will be seen later in this study, the entire Anglo-Czechoslovak political relationship impacted directly on the deployment and utilisation of the Air Force contingent.

In the first instance, the British Government had recognised the Czechoslovak National Committee on December 20th 1939 as a practical measure only, with the oft-added proviso that no commitment was or would be made to the reconstitution of the Czechoslovak state "since we are not at all sure that when the time comes that the Czechs and Slovaks will necessarily wish to be reunited in a single State."⁸² The same writer also believed that this would not "indispose the Prague Government towards the western powers", a clear indication of where British priorities lay at this early stage in the war in that they wished to keep the Hácha Government in the western camp in spirit if not in body. To some extent, the British had to do *something*, not in the sense of showing solidarity with the French but because Chamberlain had already provided a precedent with a speech outlining British war aims in 1939 in which he hoped that "the Czechoslovak *people* would be freed from foreign domination."⁸³ In the desperately

80 CAB 67/7: WP(G)40(168).

81 This comment relates to the tensions caused between Prague and Bratislava in 1938-9 when Andrej Hlinka, leader of the Slovak Populists, took advantage of the *Anschluss* and the growing Sudeten problem to secure autonomy for Slovakia, a demand he had made at Versailles. Beneš had been willing to grant concessions to Bratislava consistent with those he might have had to make to the Sudetenlanders, but upon Hlinka's death in August 1938, his successor, Father Josef Tiso, pushed for greater autonomy. Hitler absorbed Bohemia and Moravia seven months later. "From the point-of-view of Beneš, and of the many Czechs who worked with him during the wartime struggle to reassert Czechoslovak independence, the actions of the Slovaks were at best damaging, at worst destructive. There might have to be some kind of federation after the war, but disunity before it had undermined independence, and all talk of a new Czech-Slovak relationship had to be set aside until well into the war". [Wallace W.V: 'Czechs and Slovaks': Dunn S & Fraser T.G. (eds): *Europe and Ethnicity* (Routledge 1996) p59.]

82 FO 371/24287 (70): Unsigned minute of 6.12.39, though possibly by Frank Roberts.

83 FO 371/24287 (70): 6.12.39 and FO 371 (24288) 60.

pedantic world of Czechoslovak politics at the time, the lack of the plural could have implied a unified liberation, and this seems to have been noticed by the men in the Central Department who ensured that the 's' was added to 'people' in all future correspondence. Indeed, this was openly stated in a communication to the British Embassy in Budapest which confirmed that the use of the plural was to "leave open the question of the future status and mutual relations of Czechs and Slovaks."⁸⁴

British wariness seemed amply justified when evidence of a serious schism emerged in the early months of 1940. Milan Hodža threatened Beneš with a rival political formation composed of some dire characters indeed. The threat was seen by the Beneš group and some members of the Foreign Office as a bluff, simply a means by which Hodža could regain some of his former prestige. Nevertheless, it served to confirm the prevailing British view that the situation was politically volatile and potentially dangerous if the wrong people wriggled their way into positions of influence.⁸⁵

Using a series of memoranda compiled by Robert Bruce Lockhart, Sir Alexander Cadogan summarised the position to the Central Department of the Foreign Office in June 1940.⁸⁶ After some prompting by Beneš, the British Government followed the

84 FO 371/24287 (3): 13.11.39. Telegram from Foreign Office to British Embassy in Budapest in response to a Hungarian request for the "clarification of the British position."

85 Hodža's group contained persons with some strange allegiances. Of these, Petr Pridavok was considered to be "one of the most unreliable Slovaks now dabbling in politics" who was "known to have taken money from the Germans and negotiated behind Hodža's back with Tiso"; František Schwarz, a "turbulent malcontent" who moved from socialism to semi-fascism then became a National Democrat; and Vladimír Ležák-Borín, a Ruthenian and former Communist. Having been "bought with hard cash" by the Agrarian Party to spy on the communists, he then joined Beneš's National Socialist Party and spied on them for the Agrarians. By 1938 he was discredited across the entire political spectrum and formed a Czech Fascist group upon Hitler's arrival. When war broke out he 'escaped' through Belgrade to Paris, though at least two messages from Prague to London warned that he was in the pay of the Gestapo and it was they who had provided his documents. Denounced as an agent of the Gestapo, he eventually found himself in Lingfield Internment Camp from where he bombarded the British Government with letters of protest. Though Bruce Lockhart considered Hodža's committee to be "surreal in its oddity", he felt that Hodža's inclusion in the Czechoslovak National Committee would be essentially "harmless"; but "whether Dr Hodža joins the Committee or not, Czechs and Slovaks will continue to wrangle." Of Pridavok and Ležák-Borín, Bruce Lockhart thought that they "would be a dangerous pair to be entrusted with the funds of even a small working-men's goose club." [Memoranda by Bruce Lockhart: FO 371/24287 (95-108): 9.2.40; FO 371/24288 (199): 30.6.40; FO 371/24288 (17): 31.3.40.]

86 Sir Robert Hamilton Bruce Lockhart (1877-1970) was an author, diplomat, spy and *bon viveur* who narrowly escaped execution at the hands of the Bolsheviks for supposed conspiracy in 1918; attached to the British Legation in Prague, 1919; lived and worked in Central Europe throughout the 1920s; appointed British representative to the Provisional Czechoslovak Government, 1940; became head of the Political Warfare Executive 1941; knighted 1943; remained close friends with Beneš and Jan Masaryk until their deaths. His opinion of the Foreign Office at this time was not a favourable one, for he told his diary that it was "a decrepit, indecisive and cautious collection of tame cats today." [Bruce Lockhart R.H: *Diaries (Vol 2)*: entry for 1.6.40.]

French lead of November 1939, "one reason being", wrote Cadogan, "that the recognition of the National Committee would better enable us to resist pressure to recognise a provisional government." Letters were thus exchanged in December 1939 with the British explicitly stating that the Committee was "qualified to represent the Czechoslovak peoples"; that is, not the Czechoslovak state.⁸⁷

Beneš had argued for full recognition using three principles which he hoped would convince the British to offer greater commitment. First, he asserted that "the Government in Prague no longer exercises any real power", a somewhat facile statement which had no effect on Whitehall minds.⁸⁸ Second, he justified the need for a properly empowered organisation "which would have diplomatic and juridical authority abroad" by drawing attention to the fact that Czechoslovaks "could not at present be compelled to join the armed forces".⁸⁹ This was a contentious point with the British, and one which is examined in greater depth below. Finally, prestige reared up again when he stated, almost plaintively, that "at present, Czechoslovaks could not treat on equal terms with the Poles who had a properly constituted government and were even represented on the Supreme War Council."⁹⁰ Cadogan effectively swept these points aside, arguing that recognition of a Provisional Government would cause "indignation"

87 FO 371/24288: Minute from Cadogan to Central Dept. 29.6.40. Attached to the letter of December 1939 was the additional clause that "in particular" the National Committee was also qualified to reorganise Czechoslovak forces both in France and Britain. An earlier exchange between Beneš and Orme Sargent made it absolutely clear that, while Czechoslovak nationals in Britain could be enlisted, this was *not* to imply that any Czechoslovak military formation would be permitted on British soil. [FO 371/24287 (13): 6.1.40]

Sir Orme Garton Moley Sargent (1884-1962) had been with the Foreign Office since 1906, serving briefly as Assistant Under-Secretary from 1938 to 1939. After the war, he replaced Cadogan as Permanent Under-Secretary from 1946 to 1949.

88 The point has been made by another writer that Beneš, to a certain degree, recognised the Government in Prague also. By fostering political and intelligence contacts between Prague and London - communications of which the Germans were well aware - he let it be known that he expected the immediate resignation of the Hácha Government "whenever they could do more to help the Czechs out of office than in it." In that sense, therefore, he was recognising that the Prague administration was serving a useful, if severely constrained, rôle in managing the mundane affairs of the Protectorate. [Mountfield D: *The Partisans* (Hamlyn 1979) p27.]

89 The issue of authority and, more precisely, juridical continuity was of great importance to Beneš. His claim to be the true representative of Czechoslovak interests in part rested on his insistence that the State and his office as President had never ceased to exist despite British recognition of the Hácha Administration and Beneš's own resignation after Munich. It was a flimsy argument, and one which made little impact in Paris or London. Recent work by Jan Kuklík on this subject has been published in *Česky Časopis Historický*. Kuklík pays considerable attention to the divisions within the exile group and demonstrates that Beneš was repeatedly criticised for attempting to rescue his position as President when he had taken an unforced decision to stand down in favour of a successor, albeit under German pressure. Kuklík draws the conclusion that this resistance to his constitutional claims for continuity severely obstructed attempts by Beneš to restore absolute unity, not only in 1940, but until 1943 when the war began to turn in favour of the Allies. [*Česky Časopis Historický*, 95/1997 Číslo 2: Kuklík J, 'Problémy kontinuity Benešovy prezidentské funkce, 1938-1943', *passim*.]

90 FO 371/24288: Minute from Cadogan to Central Dept. 29.6.40.

in Hungary "where even the recognition of the National Committee was resented"; that it would "annoy the Poles, who have no brief with Dr Beneš"; and that Beneš and Hodža had been "unable to sink their differences", and thus the proposed administration would be devoid of any unity. Finally, on a more practical level, Cadogan considered the military dimension. His comments are worth noting carefully:

There is, as far as I am aware, no evidence that the Czechoslovak Government [in Prague] cannot continue to carry out its task of organising sabotage and preparing resistance in Czechoslovakia, though the lack of spectacular Allied success has damaged morale. To recognise Dr Beneš, if the Prague Government are in fact doing their work efficiently, would be a gratuitous affront.

Apart from putting heart into the Czechoslovak population by granting recognition to any government of some sort, however unrepresentative, I do not see that recognition would bring any practical benefits. The organisation of the Czechoslovak forces in this country is proceeding satisfactorily...and recognition would not enable us to deal with them any more efficiently than we are doing at present.⁹¹

Frank Roberts appended his own thoughts to these, agreeing with Cadogan. Referring to reports that the Czechoslovaks were "rather discouraged", he believed that "it is Allied inaction and not recognition of a Beneš government which would remedy this situation". He also added that he foresaw no need for "desperate remedies."⁹²

With the British Foreign Office steering clear of the rocks and urging only unity, Beneš slowly moved towards a compromise with the establishment of a *Narodní Rada* (National Council) with Hodža as Vice-President.⁹³ This body would be composed of all national parties and would advise the Committee headed by Beneš. Things slowly moved in his direction, largely as a result of information supplied by some new escapees from the Protectorate. In January 1940, Jaromír Nečas, a former Minister of Social Welfare, arrived in Britain and was interviewed by Bruce Lockhart. It was claimed by Nečas that 95% of the home Czechs were behind Beneš, and since this statement was repeated in later correspondence, it seems that Bruce Lockhart for one believed him.⁹⁴

91 *ibid.* An article in *The Times* of 7.3.40 indicated that Hungary was implacably opposed to the reconstruction of the Czechoslovak state.

92 *ibid.* Roberts also believed that Dr Beneš was "opening his mouth far too wide, and my opinion coincides with that of Mr Bruce Lockhart...namely that the necessary intermediate step must be the formation of a national council fully representative of all elements of Czech and Slovak action abroad." In a later conversation with Bruce Lockhart, Roberts noted that he "generally agreed" with these minutes, but he "would like the reply to Dr Beneš to be wrapped up as kindly as possible, as he feels that the Czechs need encouragement quite apart from Dr Beneš's personal position." [FO 371/24288: Minute to file by Roberts, 9.4.40.]

93 This was first brought to the attention of the Foreign Office by Bruce Lockhart on March 18th. [FO 371/24287 (258-260)]. The National Council was to have as its President Monsignor Jan Šrámek and would represent all political parties. In Bruce Lockhart's view, both Hodža and Osuský were "petty" and were also possibly dangerous "because of their nuisance value."

94 Nečas had the right credentials to be a reliable witness. Aside from Minister of State, he was also Chairman of the Price Control Board in the Protectorate and had been offered the position of

In the spring of 1940, members of the Czech 'Maffie' reached Britain and told similar tales.⁹⁵ Beneš, however, complicated the issue unnecessarily when he met Bruce Lockhart in April "and descanted at some length of the difficult nature of [the Slovaks] and their political immaturity", prompting Bruce Lockhart to report that "much of the old jealousy and hostility still persisted."⁹⁶

Things gathered pace once the attack on France had appeared so devastating, and by May the Foreign Secretary had become a visible participant in the discussions. He wrote to Sir Ronald Campbell in Paris and asked for the French Government's views on the matter, emphasising the need for some kind of judicial and diplomatic authority for the émigré Czechs and Slovaks. Within three days he received a response: Beneš had not approached the French with any similar proposals, but they agreed that demonstrable unity had to be the cornerstone of any political initiative. More worrying for Halifax was the extra information supplied by the French, that there were "many undesirables - even members of a Fifth Column - among the Czechs and Slovaks", an accusation put before Stefan Osuský, and one which he did not deny.⁹⁷

Cadogan had interviewed Beneš on April 26th to clarify the situation.⁹⁸ While Beneš held forth in his usual manner, Cadogan made notes on the glaring discrepancies between what he heard and what he knew. For instance, Beneš told him that the delay in recognition might "easily weaken the people's power of resistance", whereas Cadogan noted that "our information suggests that the Czechs are demoralised by the

Prime Minister by the Germans on pain of death if he refused. [FO 371/24287 (209-212): 20/2/40.] He had long been in secret contact with the London group. He had escaped with Ladislav Feierabend, the Minister of Agriculture, and both men had been active in the political wing of the resistance movement, the *Politické Ustředí*. [Mamatey & Luža (eds): *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1914-1948* (Princeton UP 1973): Gotthold Rhode: 'The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia', p306.]

95 Bruce Lockhart conducted the interviews and heard that most home Czechs had "forgotten the past in the hope of a better future" because "they feel themselves bound to the Allied war chariot." [FO 371/24288: 30.4.40.] He concluded that "action in the Protectorate will be of far greater military value than the Czechoslovak Army abroad."

The Czech 'Maffie' [pronounced 'maff-ee-eh'] should not be confused with the Sicilian variety. The term derives from a group of loyal supporters of Thomas Masaryk who acted as his eyes and ears in Prague after his flight from the Austrian authorities in 1914. Beneš himself had been a member during the Great War. [Zeman, Z: *The Masaryks* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1976) pp 75-76.]

96 FO 371/24288 (66-70): 19.4.40. Memorandum from Bruce Lockhart to the Foreign Office. Beneš had met him to discuss the slackers in Britain who lived "in comparative comfort and refused to join the Army." He also raised the niggling condition that recognition would allow him to "speak to the Poles as an equal." What Beneš never fully understood was that the *British* did not see the Poles and Czechoslovaks as equals.

97 FO 371/24288 (71-73): 15-18.5.40. Correspondence between Halifax and Campbell.

Sir Ronald H. Campbell (1883-1956) was Minister in Paris 1929-1935; at Belgrade 1939-41; Ambassador to France 1939-1940; Ambassador to Portugal 1940-1945.

98 Cadogan described the 26th in his diary as "a pretty awful day. Cabinet in the morning, at which it was decided that we must clear out of Norway...Beneš at 4 - for an hour and a quarter! - on necessity for setting up and recognising a Cz Government." [Dilks, *op.cit.*, p273.]

absence of allied military successes, but the ability of the Prague Government to conduct and maintain underground anti-German activities has...not previously been questioned." He then added:

Dr.Beneš [went] on to make the much more questionable assertion that the whole of the Czech people and the majority of the Slovak people stand without exception behind the Czecho-Slovak political émigrés in Britain, France and the United States, behind the Czechoslovak National Committee, and behind Dr.Beneš, who is fully recognised in his own country as the leader of this national resistance. A glance through the files recording Mr Lockhart's efforts to bring Dr.Beneš and Dr.Hodža together is sufficient to refute this assertion. ⁹⁹

Cadogan ended his survey with the warning that, if recognition proceeded, other countries might infer a commitment to the reconstitution of Czechoslovakia post-war, "and this impression might well have results which did not agree with our diplomatic and strategic objectives."

Beneš's reputation as a politician of integrity survived one of the more bizarre attacks upon him in early May, but the British took no chances and monitored incoming and outgoing transmissions from the Czechoslovak offices.¹⁰⁰ One such intercept to Sweden, writer unknown, suggested that "some sort of substitute for Parliament" might shortly be established.¹⁰¹ But the situation began to crystallise on the day that Paris fell. Bruce Lockhart, by then at the Political Intelligence Department, summarised the Czechoslovak position in a concise memorandum. The British attitude, he argued, should be governed by two considerations:

(1) the potential of active help that we can receive from the Czechs and Slovaks during the present war and (2) the amount of actual harm that Czechs and Slovaks might do the

99 FO 371/24288 (83-84): 3.5.40. Cadogan continued: "Dr.Beneš attempts to get round the difficulty of disunity by the thesis that such disunity is natural among émigrés and can only be brought to an end by the establishment and recognition of a co-ordinating authority. Although there is admittedly something to be said for this thesis, still we are justified in holding out for more."

100 During May 1940, a Professor Dvořník, "a Czech divine", harangued the British with stories of Communist infiltration, Nazi collaboration, pseudo-dictatorship, and most other forms of heresy, all traceable to Beneš or his cronies. The problem seemed to be the removal of a monthly support grant of £80 from Dvořník by Beneš when the latter's funds began to run low. Dvořník, a Czech priest, had had a "violent quarrel" with Monsignor Šrámek, leader of the Czech Catholic Party. Since Šrámek had been retained by Beneš at the heart of the National Committee, Dvořník took umbrage with Beneš and threw in his lot with the Hodža faction. All in all a pathetic tale, yet it serves to indicate the bitter jealousies and the festering grudges with which Beneš had to cope. What the British made of it, as France collapsed before their eyes, is impossible to tell from the diplomatic exchanges alone. [FO 371/24288 (105-108, 110-120.)]

101 FO 371/24288 (130-131): 7.5.40. By "substitute", the writer presumably meant an unelected, but broadly representative, body which would act as a debating chamber. The writer also believed that "at home, the President and Government are obliged to go too far in the service of the Germans in order to save lives and estates, but today this is becoming dangerous, therefore no consideration can be shown for Prague." This was probably a fair assessment.

Allied cause if they became completely disillusioned about the sincerity of our intentions to restore their independence.¹⁰²

As to the first point, he discounted any idea of an internal uprising as both unfeasible and undesirable. A passive resistance group named 'Švejkovina', after the Good Soldier who "has many imitators among the Czech population", seemed capable of organising covert action of an obstructive kind. Active resistance was "difficult to gauge", but he believed that the home Czechs would view the situation pragmatically, that having had Munich imposed upon them by the French and British, they would be unlikely to risk their lives now that those two countries were in difficulties.

Regarding the second point, he foresaw the complete disintegration of the pro-Allied movement in the Protectorate if (a) the Allies appeared to be folding on the battlefield and (b) the apparent lack "of more tangible support" for the Czechoslovak National Committee convinced the home population that nothing more could be expected from the west. In such a scenario, he believed that the Czech middle-class would strike terms with the Germans and that the workers would look to the east for rescue. Jan Masaryk at that time was in America, and Bruce Lockhart believed he would need "super-human restraint" not to mention to Roosevelt (who counted himself as a friend of Masaryk) the prevarication of the European Allies in respect of the National Committee. As the well of American sympathy ran dry, public opinion would harden still further against the Allies when the need was most desperate. "The time has come", concluded Bruce Lockhart, "to adopt a more active policy...or run the risk of the disintegration to which I have referred."¹⁰³

This "active policy" could follow one of two routes. First, the British could immediately recognise a Provisional Czechoslovak Government and ignore the international consequences which, he believed, would now be minimal given the grave war situation.¹⁰⁴ Second, recognition could be dangled as bait before Beneš with lots of preliminary talks, giving him time to reconstitute what could reasonably pass as a united Government. Overall, he felt that recognition in some degree would give heart to the home population and stimulate active resistance. "Nor should it be forgotten", he

102 FO 371/24288 (148-149): 14.6.40.

103 Jan Masaryk was, it should be recalled, half-American on his mother's side. Described once by Bruce Lockhart as "the most honest Czech I know", he had a deep trough of goodwill in America. He had served his country there as part of the diplomatic corps 1919-1920, and had spent ten years of his youth living from hand-to-mouth while establishing his reputation as a slightly feckless playboy. In short, he knew the American mind very well indeed, and to Bruce Lockhart in particular, this was one resource that should not be squandered. [Zeman, *op.cit.*, pp 172-175.]

104 He also wrote off any likely effects in Prague. On June 5th, according to a clipping from *Der Neue Tag*, President Hácha had sent Hitler a telegram of congratulations on his victory in France. This, said Bruce Lockhart, made any home objections "irrelevant".

added, "that the Protectorate is one of the Reich's arsenals and therefore offers a wide target to skilful saboteurs."

Bruce Lockhart's document was thus an important one. It focused minds and offered practical solutions to a problem which in hindsight has all the appearance of being an irritance rather than a necessity. Furthermore, Bruce Lockhart's 'friendship' with Beneš has often been overstated, and it is highly unlikely that the former recommended positive action to the British Government simply through loyalty to a man he had known for fifteen years.¹⁰⁵

The debate became public as the evacuees began to stream in from the Continent. Letters from private individuals urged recognition, and Beneš gained a substantial ally in the form of the British Empire Union. The General Secretary, Reginald Wilson, argued that "400,000 Germans and 100,000 Gestapo" were employed in subjugating Bohemia and Moravia, and if the citizens lost heart and ceased resistance, those forces could be deployed in the west.¹⁰⁶ Geoffrey Mander MP, a firm advocate of the Czechoslovak cause in the House of Commons, conducted a succinct correspondence with Richard ('Rab') Butler at the Foreign Office urging recognition to "place all the Allies on the same political footing." In another letter, he queried why the British Government was concentrating its energies on Bohemia and Moravia only when Chamberlain's statement had clearly promised liberation to the Slovaks too. Butler replied that of the two legally constituted governments in the Protectorate and Slovakia, "the former at least does not appear ill-disposed to the Allied cause."¹⁰⁷

The position at the end of June 1940 was therefore one of confusion and a degree of indecision.¹⁰⁸ We can see from the evidence that some influential members of the

105 Bruce Lockhart admired Beneš for his political tenacity and diplomatic skills, but his real friendship was with Jan Masaryk. Bruce Lockhart described Beneš as "slippery but able", a man who knows "how to meet guile with guile", and if any bias is apparent, it is because he promoted the cause of the Czechs as opposed to the cause of Beneš who was merely the conduit. [FO 371/24288 (105-107) and (155): Memoranda of 21.5.40 and 15.6.40.] In his own words, though, Bruce Lockhart described "this great little man" as one "who had never let me down in the twenty six years I had known him", and that Jan Masaryk had told him that he was the only English friend that Beneš ever had. [Bruce Lockhart R.H: *Diaries (Vol 2)*; Entry for 17.2.45.]

106 FO 371/24288 (156): 19.6.40. This, of course, was a sound argument, but it is doubtful if Wilson's numbers were anything more than guesses.

107 FO 371/24288 (163) and (161): 16.6.40, 26.6.40. Butler at this time was Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. He also told Mander that there were "obvious difficulties" in granting recognition to a government "formed only from émigrés abroad" who were "far from united."

108 A stray minute in the correspondence files reveals the position of Roger Makins. Writing on June 24th, he argued against recognition on the grounds that "Dr Beneš is a somewhat tarnished figure", unable to secure unity. Drawing attention to the evacuee forces now entering the country, he added, "our own position has changed for the worse, and, having less to lose, we can perhaps afford to take on the Czechs." A comment by William Strang written on the 25th reads: "I am coming round to the view that we should act as Mr Makins suggests." [FO 371/24289 (2): 24-25.6.40.]

William Strang (1893-1978) was Head of the Central Department of the Foreign Office from

Foreign Office were divided in their attitudes towards the Beneš group; divided in their opinions regarding the practical advantages recognition would deliver; and divided in their levels of trust in respect of the individuals concerned. If we now return to the War Cabinet of July 3rd 1940 when Halifax presented his paper on recognition, we may see clearly that the catalyst for eventual recognition was the arrival of the Czechoslovak contingent from France.

In essence, the whole issue of unity was now to be ignored.¹⁰⁹ Even so, Halifax felt that German successes had impressed the governments in Prague and Bratislava to such an extent that "some further gesture of encouragement might now be required to strengthen their will to resist." This conflicts with the previous judgement that the sympathies of the Czech people lay with the Allies anyway, thus "no further degree of recognition seemed necessary to encourage them to resist the Germans."¹¹⁰ Clearly, the degree of collaboration in the Protectorate since 1939 had raised fears in Britain that Czechs in particular were, if not willingly submitting to German rule, then accepting it with resignation and preparing to make the best of the situation.¹¹¹

Earlier recognition had also foundered on French objections and the possibility that Hungary and Poland may have been offended, a reference to the former's claims upon Slovakia and the latter's upon Těšín, seized at the time of the Munich dismemberment.¹¹² Now, in the light of the French defeat, the sensitivities of that

1937-1939; Assistant Under-Secretary 1939-1943; the British Representative on the European Advisory Commission 1943-1945; the political adviser to the Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in Germany 1945-1947; and Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office 1949-1953. He was much disliked by Bruce Lockhart who wrote of him: "He is a poor creature - gutless and second-rate. The young men like Roberts are good but suffer from the inaction and caution of their superiors." [Bruce Lockhart R.H: *Diaries (Vol 2)*: entry for 25.5.40.]

109 A comment by Bruce Lockhart some months before is worthy of note. He had conducted a series of interviews with the most prominent Slovaks in the Beneš group - Hodža, Osuský, Slávik and General Viest - all of whom maintained that Beneš was monopolising Czech policy and denying them the right of airing the Slovak view. They insisted that the French were prepared to restore the Republic "but not a Beneš Republic", and to this Bruce Lockhart added: "It will now be necessary for us to be more careful than ever to maintain some distinction between Czechs and Slovaks." [FO 371 [24287] 218-223: 26.2.40]. Without doubt, this was still the prevailing view of the Foreign Office at the time of the French defeat.

110 CAB 67/7: (WP(G)40(168)).

111 Vojtech Mastný's superior work *The Czechs Under Nazi Rule* (Colombia UP 1971) reveals that the Prague Government, believing that the occupation would be brief, encouraged acceptance rather than rejection of the Nazi hegemony. The Hácha Government, while never totally collaborationist in the purest sense, preached co-operation to a population which was largely prepared to wait upon events. [See also Mamatey & Luža: *op.cit.*; Rhode: *op.cit.*; *passim.*]

112 The French attitude to the Beneš Committee was lukewarm at best. With so many Slovaks in the Czechoslovak Army in France, the French tended to indulge their political views if only to avoid widespread mutiny. [FO 371 [24287] 197: French Embassy to Foreign Office 20.2.40; also FO 371/24287 (218-233) 26.2.40.] We must also note that Beneš ran his Committee from London even while it was in Paris, a situation which caused some pleasure in the Whitehall because Beneš was "a source of information and the intrigues" from France. [FO 371/24287 (258-260): Memo by Bruce

country and those of the Hungarians, who had moved into the German orbit, were no longer considerations. Poland had now been brought closer to the Czechoslovaks through circumstances of "common adversity", and thus was unlikely to raise sustainable objections.¹¹³ Another significant difficulty was that Britain had refused to commit herself to the implied demands made by the Beneš group for the post-war reconstitution of Czechoslovakia. It had been previously argued that "in the fluid situation which might emerge from the war, it seemed undesirable to undertake any definite commitments...regarding the reconstitution of Czechoslovakia."¹¹⁴ This was clearly in line with the similar position taken in regard to Polish demands, and in the military agreements made with both exile governments the British consistently refused to acknowledge or condone post-war territorial or political claims.

But if these points represented surmountable obstacles, paving the way for recognition, where were the advantages? An interesting exchange occurred in the House of Commons a week later on July 10th. In asking why the Czechoslovak national anthem was not being played by the BBC before the evening news, Geoffrey Mander was told by the Minister of Information, Duff Cooper, that "for reasons of procedure we cannot include Czecho-Slovakia as a recognised country and a recognised Ally", and this drew a response from Daniel Lipson which came dangerously close to revealing the whole point of the exercise:

Does not my right honourable friend, in his capacity as Minister of Information, realise that it is important from the point of view of propaganda that this recognition should be granted without delay?

Lockhart 18.3.40.] The Daladier Government in France would have nothing to do with Beneš, at one point even urging his "complete elimination from any role in the Czechoslovak liberation movement." [Taborský E: *op.cit.*; p38.] Embarrassed over Munich and fearful of provoking the Germans, Daladier even refused to receive Beneš when the latter went to Paris in October 1939 for negotiations concerning recognition.

113 On July 12th, the Polish Government expressed its "unease" at the impending recognition in a Note to the Foreign Office. While taking pains to assure the British that they bore no hostility to the Czechs and that relations were cordial, they pointed out that a legally constituted government already existed in the Protectorate and recognition of the Beneš group "would give a handle to German propaganda [and] would increase their pressure upon occupied Czech territory." [FO 371 (24289) 24]. This was probably a fair assessment at the time, but it serves more to highlight the sensitivity of the Poles to any action by the British which might erode their perceived status as principal ally.

114 Apparently the French held the same attitude. In a loose minute to the Central Department of the Foreign Office, the British Embassy in Paris noted that the Czechoslovak National Committee had run out of money and had approached the French for a loan, which would be forthcoming upon an itemised budget and the enlargement of the Committee "to make it more representative." According to this report, "the French Government's aim was to keep all the Czech and Slovak cards in play but at the same time reserve a completely free hand in regard to the post-war settlement in Eastern Europe." [FO 371/24288: Minute to file by Makins, 8.5.40.]

Lipson was told simply that the matter was "under consideration."¹¹⁵

Increased levels of resistance in the Protectorate were unlikely to have any measurable effect on the British war effort, but it is clear from other points raised by the Foreign Secretary that more direct benefits could be obtained. Echoing Churchill, Halifax noted that "placing the Czechs on the same footing as the Poles, Norwegians etc., should have a good effect in the United States where the cause is popular."¹¹⁶ Most significantly of all, he added that "the possibility exists that if we do not support Dr Beneš and his followers, the Czechs and Slovaks may look solely to the USSR for salvation."¹¹⁷

But these were not the practical considerations at the time. Uppermost in Halifax's mind was the raw fact that a sizeable part of the Czechoslovak Army and Air Force in France, plus refugees, were now the responsibility of His Majesty's Government, hence it was to the latter's advantage to bestow the necessary authority upon Beneš and his Committee to control this influx, and to restore and secure political unity between the Czechs and Slovaks if possible.¹¹⁸ Halifax suggested that Beneš be told that, if he "could secure the collaboration of [certain] persons", negotiations could begin "when the necessary collaboration had been achieved", yet we have seen that

115 *Parliamentary Debates; 5th Series; Vol. 364, Col 1137/8.* 10.7.40. Sir Geoffrey le Mesurier Mander M.A. (1882-1962) was educated at Harrow and Trinity College Cambridge; High Sheriff of Staffordshire 1921; Liberal M.P. for East Wolverhampton 1929-1945; Parliamentary Private Secretary to Sir Archibald Sinclair (Secretary of State for Air) 1942-1945; Knighthood 1945; Barrister and J.P.

Daniel Leopold Lipson was an accomplished teacher and headmaster who became the Independent Conservative MP for Cheltenham in 1937.

116 A circulated Memorandum from the Ministry of Information was considered by members of the Foreign Office on April 12th. Describing the Czechoslovak organisation in the USA as "excellent", it recommended that other governments, notably the Poles, strive for such political and cultural recognition. Honorary members of 'The Friends of Czechoslovakia' included Mrs F.D.Roosevelt, former President Herbert Hoover and a variety of ambassadors to the USA, not that this impressed the document's critics. The author considered the Czechoslovaks to be "spoilt little darlings", their country but a novelty having sprung "like Athena from the forehead of Mr Woodrow Wilson, shop-new and in full working order" and now "adopted" by the Americans as "a noble little country destroyed in 1938 by perfidious Albion". [FO 371/24288 (26-31): 12.4.40.] Bigotry aside, this review alone indicates why Churchill and Halifax placed such importance on the propaganda impact that recognition of the Provisional Government and utilisation of the armed forces would have in the United States. Beneš himself had been thoroughly fêted on his lecture tour to the USA in 1939. At a reception in New York City Hall, Mayor La Guardia told cheering crowds how the representatives of "two decadent European democracies and two violent dictatorships meeting at Munich decided that instead of politics they would perform common butchery. They laid a small fettered State on their operating table and with merciless treachery began to cut it up. Today we welcome the President of this State in New York [and] here in the United States we will always assist his brave Nation." [Beneš E: *Memoirs*, p61]. Beneš records his discomfiture at being expected to reply in similar terms, thus he hurried to Chicago and avoided political pronouncements in public.

117 Beneš had hinted as much in a letter to the Foreign Office on June 1st when he argued that the Czechs at home "might look east for salvation if western Europe was seen to have abandoned them." [FO 371/24289 (9).]

118 CAB 67/7: WP(G)40(168): Paragraph 5.

unity was not to be forthcoming in the immediate future and it is most unlikely that Halifax did not know this. Indeed, the proposed Czechoslovak National Council was not in existence when these points were made, thus any talk of unity at the high table was probably meant for the ears of Cabinet sceptics than represented as a serious pre-condition.

Halifax's observations were supported by the pragmatic statement that these people would have to be looked after "whether or not" recognition was accorded to Dr Beneš and his Committee. An added consideration was that the £7,000,000 of Czechoslovakian gold currently frozen in British banks might be used as security for any loan.¹¹⁹ Recognition, concluded Halifax, should be extended upon these principles and within certain conditions: - political unity within the National Committee itself, "the relinquishment on the part of Dr Beneš of any claim to exercise legislative authority over Czech nationals or property in this country", and "a satisfactory arrangement concerning the gold".¹²⁰ The War Cabinet of July 3rd authorised Halifax to proceed subject to the concurrence of Dr Beneš with these conditions.¹²¹

Edvard Beneš would thus gain official recognition for his Provisional Government not for his merits as a national leader, or even the abilities of his colleagues to administer Czechoslovak affairs efficiently, but simply because the prevailing circumstances made the decision much less onerous than before, and that it was infinitely better to have him within the Allied sphere of influence than without. This illustrates that Beneš was not seen as a 'friend' of the British Government but more as a tolerated associate.¹²² This attitude may be explained in part by reflection upon the

119 *ibid.* Paragraph 5. This gold caused a few headaches in Whitehall during the recognition period. Legal ownership of the gold resided with the official government of Czechoslovakia, now the Hácha Administration in the Protectorate duly recognised by Britain after Munich. Near the end of June, the Treasury decided that the gold was actually owned by the Czechoslovak National Bank, and since that Bank was now in enemy territory, it followed that the gold should be vested with the Custodian of Enemy Property who would sell it to the Bank of England in return for sterling which would then be held in trust for the Czechoslovak Bank until after the war when - presumably - a new government would assume control. This mechanism would provide the security for any credits, though a glaring loophole was that the Beneš Government would be only recognised as provisional and therefore not necessarily the new government of the liberated state. [FO 372 (24288) Memoranda 20-26.6.40]. In his Note to the Foreign Office of June 21st, Beneš promised that he would not spend any assets, but merely use them as security.

120 CAB 67/7: (WP(G)40(168)): Paragraph 6.

121 WC 192 (40) 11: War Cabinet, 3.7.40.

122 In fact, it was difficult even then to discern exactly what diplomatic position Beneš held. In a minute to file in July 1940, Strang recorded his thoughts upon the correct method of addressing Beneš in future correspondence. Strang favoured "Your Excellency", but Beneš referred to himself as "President of the Republic" or "Second President of Czechoslovakia." Wrote Strang:

"This raises a problem...[for] what we are recognising is the Czecho-Slovak Provisional Government, not the provisional Government of the Czecho-Slovak State or Czecho-Slovakia. We have a completely open mind as to what the Czecho-Slovak State of

Sudetenland Crisis of less than two years before when he in particular was undoubtedly perceived by many as an obstruction to the appeasement of Europe. But his persistent courtship of the East, and the stigma of duplicity which attached itself to some of his successors, probably contributed to the sense of wariness at worst, or indifference at best, felt by senior members of the British Government.¹²³

At the core of these deliberations was the problem of authority. The British wanted to ensure that armed foreign troops, some of them from nations whose attitude to the Axis Powers were not considered entirely wholesome, remained firmly within the military and civil jurisdiction of the United Kingdom. Military control would be established by Agreements with the respective and recognised powers, hence the above discussion, but the question of civil control met with constitutional difficulties. The presence of foreign armies on British soil, each governed by their own military codes, raised the possibility that a civil crime committed by a foreign serviceman may warrant or receive different treatment than if a similar crime was committed by a British subject. To resolve the issue, an Act of Parliament was required before any of the proposed Agreements could take effect, and before the Allied contingents could be legally deployed.

The subsequent debates brought into the public domain matters and opinions which tarnished rather than enhanced the reputations of Britain's new 'allies'. In the War Cabinet of July 26th, the Home Secretary, Sir John Anderson, noted that "certain disorders" had occurred in the Czechoslovak camp in Cheshire requiring the intervention of civil authorities and the isolation of 250 men.¹²⁴ What he failed to

Czecho-Slovakia, should be after the war; and though we do not recognise the existing situation there as having any legal basis, no such State as Czecho-Slovakia exists in fact nor (probably) in law. We shall therefore have to avoid calling Dr Beneš "President of Czecho-Slovakia". We might call him "President Beneš, head of the Czecho-Slovak Provisional Government" or "the Czecho-Slovak President" (much as we used to refer to "the French King" instead of "The King of France" so long as we laid claim to the throne."

[FO 371/24289: Strang, minute to file, 19.7.40.] If we reflect upon these thought processes, little more evidence is required to illustrate that, in some sections of the Foreign Office, Czechoslovakia was virtually a 'non-State', and was seen as such before the war, during it, and to some extent was going to be viewed thus after it as well, all deliberations upon its post-war status being left until the conflict was over. This attitude, so typical of 1940, is worth bearing in mind when we come to the post-war relationship in Part Three.

123 And other governments also. The US Ambassador to Brussels reported to his Department of State on May 17th 1939 that General Jan Syrový, Beneš's successor in Prague, had twice been sent to Moscow by the Germans to revive and establish military contacts. [Davies J: *Mission To Moscow* (New York 1941) Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, J.W: *Munich*, p400.]

124 CAB 65/7: War Cabinet 26.7.40. The troubles in Cholmondeley Camp are well documented in the works cited below, thus need no extensive analysis here. Even so, accounts vary as to who was involved in the troubles and the numbers detained. Němec wholly blames the Communist *Španelaci*, former volunteers with the International Brigade who had left Spain after Franco's victory. "They

raise, however, was that conditions in the Camp itself were in themselves highly conducive to a breakdown of order and morale. In a stray minute in the British Council files for early August 1940, it was noted that there were nearly 4000 men in the Camp with only one small radio on site "which does not work very well." The Council had received a request from Jan Kraus within the Provisional Government to set up a tannoy system, for it was generally agreed that the men were "cut off from news, and rumours which are difficult to contradict are rife."¹²⁵

Ignoring these very real obstacles to a smooth assimilation of the Czech contingent, the Home Office expressed its rather more self-centred doubts in a paper considered by the Allied Forces (Official) Sub-Committee (AFOSC) at a later date:

asserted that our officers were mostly fascists, reactionaries, antisemites, unfair and cruel." Refusing to serve in the Czechoslovak Army and fight "a capitalist war", Beneš had them stripped of their ranks and interned. [White: *op.cit.*; Němec *op.cit.*, pp86-89]. Liškutin concurs, extending the difficulties to the RAF camp at Cosford: "These people were very dangerous to our morale with their insidious and subversive political preaching." [Liškutin: *Challenge In The Air*, pp 66-69.] Kulka, however, focuses more upon the anti-Semitism, claiming that Beneš dictated an explicit order forbidding racial harassment when he visited the camp on July 26th. He claims that 539 men were taken to the internment camp at Oswestry, most of whom were Communists, but another 150 Jews - who "refused to tolerate the anti-Semitism any longer" - left with them. [Dagan A *et al*: *The Jews of Czechoslovakia* (The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1984); Erich Kulka: 'Jews in the Czechoslovak Armed Forces During World War II', pp371-376.] Another account, forming part of a War Office diary, placed the figure at 550 men: "Morale was greatly affected by experiences in France. There was apprehension lest the British should direct them as the French had done, giving them equipment at the last minute and fling them into the line." [WO 178/21: War Diaries of No.22 Military Mission to the Czechoslovak Land Forces, 22.8.40.]

The Czechoslovak position was slightly more disturbing. Responding to a complaint from five Jews at Cholmondeley concerning antisemitism, an unsigned draft letter considered the problem to be historical rather than current. Arguing that the Jews had dominated much of the wealth in pre-war Czechoslovakia, the author wrote: "Surely it's common knowledge that the employers in Czechoslovakia were Jews, and in an unequal ratio to the rest of the population" [and that the sense of dislike and distrust] "is a natural reaction of negativity of the poor towards the rich." After continuing at some length in this vein, the author added: "I am only giving these reasons in order to illuminate the negative views of certain Czech people towards the Jews." The final letter sent to the Camp was substantially toned down, yet both papers in the Archive are unsigned. Almost certainly, Ingr either wrote or approved them, however, first as Minister of National Defence, and second as head of the Army. [MNO 8/2120/1940: 23.68.40.]

General Sergěj Ingr was Commander-in-Chief of the Czechoslovak Forces in Great Britain. In the Great War, he initially fought with the Austro-Hungarian Army until captured in Russia, thereafter changing sides; promoted to Brigadier-General in 1933; remained in the Protectorate until June 1939 when summoned by Beneš to the west; implacable opponent of the pro-Communist General Ludvík Svoboda who operated in the east, and as a result he was branded "an enemy of the Soviet Union"; became Czechoslovak Minister at The Hague; after the coup of 1948, he remained in the west as an exile.

Sir John Anderson (1882-1958) was educated in Edinburgh and Leipzig and was Permanent Under-Secretary to the Home Office from 1922 to 1932, then the Governor of Bengal, then a member of the War Cabinet (Home Secretary and later Chancellor of the Exchequer) from 1940 to 1945. He was recommended by Churchill as Prime Minister in the event of his and Eden's death.

125 BW 27/3: 8.8.40. British Council minute by the Secretary.

[It was] anxious that no allied military personnel should be demobilised, denationalised, or otherwise thrown back into civilian life. They [the Allied forces] certainly included some undesirable elements and the Home Office view was that it would be preferable to keep them in an organised body and to apply some sort of collective treatment.¹²⁶

The Cabinet invited Anderson to discuss with the relevant persons ways in which the Allied authorities could legally exercise control over their own servicemen. These discussions, within a month, led directly to the Allied Forces Act of 1940.

The legislation was pushed through the Commons in a single day, August 21st. Officially stated, its purpose was "to empower His Majesty's Government to conclude agreements with [these] governments or forces, defining the scope and limits of their respective jurisdictions over their own military forces."¹²⁷ The Joint-Undersecretary of State for War, Sir Edward Grigg, summarised the position and then re-stated the aims of the instrument; broadly, that His Majesty's Government sought to give legal establishment to the six foreign armies then on British soil.¹²⁸ The Act would confer powers of authority upon "the sovereign governments in this country which we have recognised as allies" or "the foreign authority which we have recognised as being in general control." This was a critical distinction in the case of the Beneš group, now recognised as the Provisional Czechoslovak Government since July 21st. The framework for the new law was to be the Visiting Forces (Commonwealth) Act which, modified according to the present circumstances, would adequately serve the present purpose. It is unnecessary to trace the course of the full debate here, but a broad summary of the issues raised will convey an impression of the complexity of the matter and, more importantly, shed light on some of the problems which had to be addressed if integration was going to work.

The question of crimes committed against the home population by foreign servicemen was a minor point of contention. It was accepted beyond sustainable

126 CAB/85/19: Allied Forces (Official) Sub-Committee, 6th Meeting, 15.8.40. The "collective treatment" meant nothing more sinister than enrolment in the Auxiliary Pioneer Corps.

127 CAB/85/19: Allied Forces (Official) Sub-Committee, 4th Meeting, 6.8.40.

128 *Parliamentary Debates; 5th Series; Vol. 364, cols 1350-1414*. All subsequent references to the debate are drawn from this source unless otherwise indicated. The "foreign armies" were the forces of France, Belgium, Norway, Holland, Poland and Czechoslovakia. In a seminal document which outlined the fundamentals of British propaganda, supplied by Lord Macmillan, then Minister of Information, to Neville Chamberlain in December 1939, one paragraph proposed to illustrate "the way of life and the human values to which Nazi theory and practice are inimical. This should be illustrated not only or chiefly from our own country but from the life and institutions of the Empire, of France, the Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, Holland, Belgium and the USA." Thus Britain gathered around her actual or potential allies. Neither Poland nor Czechoslovakia was mentioned, even though the Polish air contingent had begun to arrive two weeks before this document was issued. [PREM/1/441].

Grigg pitched the concept to the House thus: "We wish them [the foreign governments] to be our honoured partners in this enterprise, not only in winning the war, but in building up a better Europe after the war."

argument that the civil courts would have supremacy. Other topics, however, were not so lightly dealt with, and parity of punishment stands as an example. The debate revealed that the penalty for desertion or self-wounding in the Polish forces was death, prompting Hastings Lees-Smith to demand that "penalties which we could not tolerate being carried out on British soil" - and by this he meant flogging - would be outlawed.¹²⁹ It was an issue which had no practical base in that Grigg assured the House that each Allied government would be requested (not instructed) to pledge that no executions would be sanctioned or carried out without reference to the home authorities.¹³⁰ With this statement he forestalled an Amendment, and he added that His Majesty's Government had been assured that corporal punishment would not be applied.

The question of racial and religious discrimination within each force, once raised, refused to lie down until the committee stage, as did the issue of conscriptive powers. Grigg, having emphatically confirmed that no Allied government was to be given the right to demand military service from nationals living in Britain, was then informed that the Dutch government had done precisely that on August 9th, threatening the man with imprisonment if he refused to comply. The Member for Colchester, Oswald Lewis, argued that such a refusal smacked of cowardice, an observation which received no recorded support.¹³¹ Undeterred, he later reinforced the Prime Minister's call for a foreign legion and added that conscription rights should be granted if only to prevent the idle and weak from evading the colours.¹³²

The temper of the debate became more sensitive when minds turned to the Jewish question. The Member for Newcastle-Under-Lyme, Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, declared that the Polish Army in France had been recruited "more or less under duress", noting that Jews had been given the choice of internment or service.¹³³ He then made the stinging comment that the Polish and German attitudes towards Jews were

129 The Right Honourable Hastings Bertrand Lees-Smith (1878-1941) was Labour MP for Keighley 1922-1923, 1924-1931 and 1935-1941.

130 This principle was extended to a formal conclusion in mid-September when Strang asked the Provisional Government if it would "undertake that no sentence of death passed by a court-martial on a Czechoslovak national for an offence for which a British subject could not so be sentenced by a British court should be carried into execution without concurrence of the Secretary of State." [CAB 85/19: Strang to Ripka, 25.9.40.] The Czechoslovak Administration agreed to the pledge without reservation. [CAB 85/19: Ripka to Strang, 10.10.40.]

131 Oswald Lewis (1887-1966) was Conservative MP for Colchester, 1929-1945.

132 The conscription issue in the case of the Czechoslovaks was extremely sensitive in the absence of any real unity between the two factions. Any attempt by Beneš to conscript Slovaks to fight for 'Czechoslovakia' would have been met with considerable resistance.

133 Colonel Josiah Clement Wedgwood (1872-1943) was a distinguished naval officer and former commander in the Royal Naval Air Service; Magistrate in the Transvaal, 1902-1904; Served in European War 1914-1916 (Antwerp, France and the Dardanelles); D.S.O. 1915; Labour (previously Liberal) M.P. for Newcastle-under-Lyme 1905-1942; Vice-Chairman of the Labour Party 1921-1924; Mayor of Newcastle 1930-1932; a Trustee for the History of Parliament.

comparable, and that many had "learnt from bitter experience what it is to be under the Polish or Nazi heel." Supporting Colonel Wedgwood, the Member for Nelson & Colne, Sydney Silverman, added that "there is something on the Czech side too which needs a certain amount of care and attention."¹³⁴ In an attempt to soothe the Members' concerns, Grigg only fanned the flames by quoting from a specific order issued by General Sikorski forbidding any anti-Jewish behaviour "humiliating to human dignity...upon pain of severe punishment".¹³⁵ An earlier call from the Member for Leeds Central, Richard Denman, for an independent Jewish force was rejected by Grigg on grounds that they had no military system, codes or national government.

But it was a combination of two elements - the constitution of the governments concerned and the penalties they would be authorised to inflict - which raised the final, and perhaps most important, issue. As part of the debate for an Amendment prohibiting the death penalty, Sir Joseph Nall had earlier made the point that the exiled politicians in this country were "societies or assemblies of friendly foreigners" but were "in no way the properly constituted governments of the countries they represent". This, as we have

134 The available evidence promotes conflicting assessments of Czech and Slovak anti-Semitism. In a despatch from Prague in 1939, George F. Kennan noted that "the mass of the [Czech] people appear to have little or no interest in anti-Semitism", whereas the Jews "are the object of widespread resentment on the part of the Slovak population". Bearing a tendency to look to either Hungary or Germany for cultural influences, Jews in Slovakia were seen as "having always sided with the oppressors of the Slovaks, against the native population." [Kennan G F: *From Prague After Munich: Diplomatic Papers 1938-1940* (Princeton UP 1968): 'Despatch of February 1, 1939 to the Department of State on the Jewish problem in the new Czechoslovakia', *passim*.]

On the other hand, an article dealing exclusively with Jews in the Czechoslovak armed forces examines a range of testimonies which indicate that antisemitic behaviour on behalf of the officer corps was rife, pointing the finger especially at General Sergěj Ingr (Chief-of-Staff of the Czechoslovak Army in the UK and later Minister of National Defence in the Government-in-Exile). [Kulka *op.cit.*, p347]. Moreover, a series of notes passing through the British Foreign Office in early July 1940 refer to some 350-500 Czechoslovaks stranded in Lisbon. Britain agreed to supply entry visas to 13 persons, officials and their wives, while the rest were refused on the grounds that "this country cannot be overburdened with refugees". Beneš concurred. A "considerable percentage" of the remainder were Jewish. [FO 371 [24288] Memoranda 1-4.7.40]. Sydney Silverman had extensive contacts with the Czechoslovak authorities later in the war as a representative of the London section of the World Jewish Congress.

Sydney Silverman (1895-1968) was an MP, lawyer and penal reformer who devoted much of his time to Jewish issues; a conscientious objector in the Great War; politically active in 1932 and entered Parliament for Labour in 1935; chairman of the British section of the World Jewish Congress; a senior figure in the abolition of the death penalty in Britain.

135 Antisemitism in the Polish forces is admirably reviewed by David Engel who also examines the impact of *Jestem Polakiem*, a rightist periodical published by a faction within the Polish Government, which had strong antisemitic undertones and attracted criticism from the British popular press and various religious newspapers. During the Commons debate, Sydney Silverman observed that credits granted by the British presumably paid for the publication. Engel draws the valid conclusion that this and other evidence of antisemitic attitudes made the Polish Government "concerned about their negative public image in England and its possible political repercussions ever since the first month of the war." The British Government held similar views. [Engel D: *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939-1942*. (University of North Carolina, 1987) pp 70-77.]

seen, was a sensitive area for the British Government, and Grigg swiftly refuted the comment: "they are the properly constituted governments and we have recognised them as such." Unabashed, Nall retaliated by insisting that "some of them are not even a quorum of the governments which existed at the time when their countries were overrun." The Member for Finsbury, the Reverend George Woods, added detail to this by stating that within the Czechoslovak contingent there were certain numbers who held "misgivings in regard to the constitution of their National Committee", and then tellingly:

If this Bill goes through as it stands, we may be endangering the lives of some of these men if they insist on their desire to fight against Nazi Germany. I should like an assurance from the Minister that if the Amendment is withdrawn, it will not be possible to bring compulsion on those men to accept the discipline of the Czech military authorities. There would be considerable feeling of indignation in this country if any legislation passed by this House made it possible for these men to be compelled to submit to discipline and possibly shot, merely because they are not satisfied that the Czech National Committee is 100 per cent anti-Fascist and in line with popular feeling in this country on freedom and democracy for people of their own country and Europe.

This statement by Woods contains some truth but was probably made with very little hard information concerning the political orientation of the Provisional Government. There is no evidence to suggest even remotely that any of its members were pro-Axis or that any individual was in direct personal danger if he joined the Allied cause. Even so, Woods' comment adequately reflects the confusion felt by many as to the general views held by the Czechoslovak émigrés, and it can be said with certainty that most Slovaks were anxious to restore or retain their national independence even if that meant fighting in the name of the Czechoslovak state.

What muddied the issue was the relationship of Slovakia with the Reich. The British Government had no illusions about Slovakia as a sovereign power, but in being forced to deal with Beneš as the representative, no matter how superficial, of a 'Czecho-Slovak' authority, the British had to determine (a) if the Slovak contingent was genuinely dedicated to the overthrow of Nazism; and (b) it would work towards that aim without weakening the recognised government beyond credible levels. In short, both the political and racial dimensions contributed to the overall attitude of the British Government and the military in respect of all the Slavs - Polish, Czech and Slovak.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ For example, General Sikorski, on arrival in Britain, found himself in a deep political crisis with several members of the former Sanacja government, to the point where he was dismissed from the post of Prime Minister by President Raczkiwicz and was only reinstated a month later (July 1940) after several officers threatened his 'successor', Zaleski, with violence. The crisis "signalled to British civil servants and politicians the need to pay attention to Sikorski's relations with the Army. It also alerted them to [his] precarious position within his own government." [Prazmowska A: *op.cit.*, p64.] Also, in keeping with the present discussion, the same author draws our attention to the fears of Polish

The Anglo-Czechoslovak Military Agreement

The Government had no doubt that the Allied Forces Act would pass into law with few, if any, amendments, and in fact there were none. However, running parallel to this public acknowledgement of British commitment to the joint war effort were the various discussions concerning the specific military agreements with each individual Allied legation. Recognition of the Provisional Czechoslovak Government was, as we have seen, largely a matter of course, swiftly enacted once decided upon. This cannot be said of the military Agreement itself. What complicated the issue was the necessary merger of political and military objectives it needed to contain if it was to function in the manner desired; that is, as a binding instrument which conferred powers of discipline on the one hand (thereby relieving the British of the burden), and a commitment to serve under the Allied High Command on the other.

But the pressures for national independence were acute, particularly from the French, Poles and the Czechs. As noted below, General De Gaulle had already staked his claim for an independent French Air Force by the middle of July, and the British agreed. The major haggles in establishing the French Agreement concerned pay and conditions, not political autonomy as such. The Polish Agreement was to be based on the existing Naval Protocols agreed and signed on November 18th 1939 with modifications inserted for the new Air and Army dimensions, and the new version was signed on August 5th 1940.

No such precedent, however, existed in regard to the Czechoslovak forces. Having been granted a form of independence by the French, largely impotent though it may have been, quite naturally the Czechoslovaks looked to the British for similar terms. In a memo to the Air Ministry drafted three days before recognition was granted to the Provisional Government, they themselves opened the debate by calling for the "rapid formation of Czechoslovak air establishments/air bases provided with British instructors and technical advisers." These units would serve "in co-operation with the RAF"; in other words, not as part of it.¹³⁷ Claiming one hundred victories for only twenty casualties - a highly unlikely statistic given the amount of action - they

Jews resident in the UK that the exile Government might be empowered to conscript. Their passports had not been renewed "as part of the antisemitic policies of the Sanacja government", and their appeals to the British to allow them to join British units "only made the matter more embarrassing." [*ibid.* p72]. It is also worth noting that Beneš himself believed the West to be contemptuous of the Slavs as a race. In 1944 he wrote, "neither the Slavs as a whole nor individual Slav nations *per se* were valued as much as they rightfully deserved." [Quoted in Taborský *op.cit.*, p19.]

137 AIR/2/5162: Memo from Czechoslovak National Committee to Air Ministry: 18.7.40.

supported their argument by enclosing a copy of the French Agreement, with commentary, Article 1 of which read: "The creation of independent Czechoslovak fighter and bomber units is permitted within the framework of the French Air Force", together with the full retention of original rank. An added opinion was that language difficulties would make it impracticable for the men to be directly drafted into the RAF, thus independent bases and command would be the only sensible option. Ensuring that their ideas were not misunderstood, the memo was terminated with an unequivocal statement:

This [French] Agreement in its completeness met the needs of the Czechoslovak Air Force and justified itself in practice. It would therefore perhaps be appropriate if the situation of the Czechoslovak Air Force in England were regulated by an Agreement of similar type. ¹³⁸

But if the Czechoslovaks wanted independence, the British Government and the Air Ministry were determined to prevent this wish from being realised, insisting from the outset that all personnel were to be enrolled in the RAFVR.¹³⁹

On July 9th, the day prior to the establishment of 310 Fighter squadron, Wing-Commander Porri despatched a note to all relevant departments in which he expressed his concern regarding the proposed employment of the men on active service and under what terms they would serve. As there was "no real Czechoslovak government in this country", he wrote, this presented a problem as to "with which exact authority" the necessary service Agreement should be arranged.¹⁴⁰ Lt.Colonel Kalla had asked for such an Agreement to be drawn up, and Porri's proposal for the moment was to follow the recently concluded draft with the Poles as a working guideline. Twelve days later on July 21st, he received a reply together with a rough draft of the proposed Agreement and instructions to wait until the Foreign Office gave permission before any further discussions took place. More significantly, he was to stress "the great practical convenience of enrolment in the RAFVR" in all future communications with the Czechoslovaks. There seemed little doubt that the aircraft and basic equipment could be found "if the Czechs have the men", but "it may be favourable for training purposes

138 AIR/2/5162: 18.7.40: Summary of the Franco-Czechoslovak Air Force Agreement. A point of contention which surfaced here would remain contentious throughout the war, the wearing of French Air Force uniform but with Czechoslovak badges of rank. Please see Part Two for a fuller discussion.

139 In his biography of Karel Kuttelwascher, Roger Darlington clings to the view that the decision to place the men into the RAFVR was taken for reasons of urgency due to the war situation, whereas the discussions examined here clearly illustrate that distrust, not immediacy, was the prime motive. [Darlington R: *op.cit.*, p38.]

140 AIR/2/5162: Internal Air Ministry memorandum 9.7.40. The note made the additional point that "aerodromes may of course be a limiting factor." This was not without significance, and an examination of locations for the Czechoslovak contingent appears in Part Two of this study.

that they should, to begin with, be infiltrated into British squadrons".¹⁴¹ As we shall see shortly, his final point led to considerable objections.

But agreement was wholly dependent upon recognition. Though early drafts of an Agreement were made and circulated (but only within British offices), no decision or discussion could begin with the Czechoslovaks without a clear policy on recognition, though it was "important that agreement should be reached as soon as possible", a comment which reflects the haste with which the political and military dimensions were being forced to converge. It was also, somewhat reluctantly, accepted that political considerations might require a similar agreement with the Czechoslovaks as then existed with the Poles; i.e. "the recognition in principle of a Czechoslovak Air Force" whereby personnel would *not* be drafted into the RAFVR.¹⁴²

Also in train at the end of July was the practical amalgamation of the various inter-Allied political strands into one superseding body, the AFOSC. Designed to absorb the work of the Free French and Polish sub-committees, its first meeting took place on July 29th with William Strang from the Foreign Office as Chairman.¹⁴³ One of his first acts was to congratulate the RAF for its swift and efficient organisation in the establishment of the DAAC under Medhurst who, on this occasion, was represented by Porri. The second item on the agenda was the draft Agreement with the Provisional Czechoslovak Government. Introducing the document as essentially the Polish version "with certain deletions", Strang made a presumptive general statement:

The Provisional Czechoslovak Government would doubtless be content with a good deal less than the Polish Government, and there are certain issues, in particular the question of references to the Czechoslovak people and pre-war territory, which might if possible be left unexpressed. The Czechs are less obsessed with issues of prestige than are the Poles and were unlikely to put forward extravagant demands.¹⁴⁴

Two versions of the proposed Agreement were on the table; one which posited a Czechoslovak Air Force which would be incorporated into the RAF, and the other which would create an independent force with full political autonomy. The Committee

141 AIR/2/5162: Internal Air Ministry memorandum 21.7.40. This view was based on reports circulated by the Expansion and Re-Equipment Policy Committee.

142 AIR/2/5162: Internal Air Ministry memorandum 21.7.40.

143 The Polish Committee itself was the model for the French version, and given the range of nationalities now in the country, an umbrella body was the next logical step. [CAB/85/17: 1st Meeting, French Forces (Official) Sub-Committee: 4.7.40.]

144 CAB 85/19: Minutes AFOSC 29.7.40. William Strang had headed the Central European desk of the Foreign Office and had considerable influence upon the process of recognition of the Provisional Czechoslovak Government. This condescending statement was probably informed by his knowledge of the difficulties which Beneš had needed to overcome to form a stable administration - hence the references to nationality and frontiers - but it was essential for Beneš to maximise all the prestige he could to maintain unity. The only reason he would not "put forward extravagant demands" was because he knew they would not be met.

was advised that Option 1 should be considered first. Pre-empting the later comments in the parliamentary debates concerning the faith some men may not have had in the constitution of the Czechoslovak legation, Wing-Commander Porri noted that most of the pilots would prefer to remain under British command "rather than be transferred to the Czechoslovak authorities in whom they had some reason to place only qualified reliance." He added that morale may suffer should this policy be adopted. A subsequent Minute, struck out on the official record, reflects this opinion in unequivocal terms: "The Chairman said that if necessary pressure would be brought to bear upon President Beneš to obtain the concurrence of the Czechoslovak authorities with the existing arrangements."¹⁴⁵ Any hopes that the latter may have had for independence were effectively crushed by this statement.

The material differences between the two documents were few. Matters of organisation, discipline, administration etc., varied only in terminology and not substance. The real political weight was carried by the first sentence in each draft. In the "incorporation" version, air personnel would be selected for service with the RAF by mutual Anglo-Czechoslovak co-operation, while in the "independence" version the opening sentence read: "The Czechoslovak Air Force will be organised, and its officers and men of the Czechoslovak Air Force arriving in British territory" would be selected for service also by mutual consent. In effect, real discussion concerned these clauses only and not the entire texts.¹⁴⁶

The Czechoslovaks did not see it this way and prepared their own version of the Agreement, again using the French model as a basis with emphasis on the creation of a Czechoslovak Military Command with representative officers in the British equivalent (later reduced to an independent Inspectorate).¹⁴⁷ On August 14th the DAAC considered the proposals and rejected anything which hinted at independence while agreeing to relative trivialities such as an oath of allegiance to the Provisional Czechoslovak Government.¹⁴⁸

145 CAB 85/19: Minutes AFOSC 29.7.40. Strang had no love for Beneš, so bringing "pressure to bear" would have been no onerous task for him. In the final days of the Franco-German conflict, he had become angry with Beneš as the latter attempted to force his own concerns on to the agenda. Bruce Lockhart claimed Strang was "slightly hysterical" and shouted "Doesn't he realise the fate of the world - [of] the British Empire - is being settled in the next forty-eight hours?" [Bruce Lockhart R.H: *Diaries (Vol 2)*: entry for 13.6.40.] In a much more depressed tone in a later entry, Bruce Lockhart complained that Strang had "never once consulted [him] about Czech matters or shown the slightest interest in them. I insist always that the Czechs can help us during the war. But no one listens. No one cares." [*ibid.* Entry for 1.7.40.]

146 CAB 85/19: AFO (40) 3: Draft Agreement (UK version) 27.7.40.

147 The Czechoslovak Inspectorate was eventually operational from September 29th, 1940 under Establishment Number 'War Miscellaneous 13.' [AIR/2/5162: Note of 29.9.40.]

148 CAB 85/19: AFO (40) 20: 12.8.40: Draft Agreement (Czechoslovak version). Even the concession of the oath raised political eyebrows. In a letter to Porri dated December 11th, 1940,

The following day, Strang discussed the details with Dr Hubert Ripka and the former's earlier presumptions concerning the likely requirements of the Czechoslovaks were soon corrected. Ripka had no problems with the British proposals for the land forces, but he "attached the utmost importance for reasons of prestige to having a separate Air Force under their jurisdiction."¹⁴⁹ Strang noted that "they were anxious to have the same treatment as the Poles", and following a general reference to the lack of personnel available for such a project, he found it more convenient to refer Ripka back to the Air Ministry for further discussion, not that he would find any satisfaction there either. Amendments to the draft version of the Agreement clearly underlined the direction of Air Ministry thinking:

We agree that it should be pointed out to them that while we are willing in principle to recognise the existence of a Czechoslovak Air Force, many of the amendments which they wish to introduce are in fact impracticable without an amount of labour which would be unjustifiable for a force on the present scale. This is particularly true with regard to discipline, promotion procedure, qualification badges and pay.¹⁵⁰

It was certainly true at the time that the Czechoslovaks could have maintained a separate High Command from their officer corps - by their own figures the approximate ratio of officers to men was 1:4 - but the British would not (then or at any other time) countenance the establishment of such a top-heavy organisation.¹⁵¹

William Strang observed:

"The wording of the Czechoslovak oath is not ideal. The analogous Polish oath was more suitable; for example, while the Czechs are required to promise to obey the orders of commanding officers appointed by President Beneš and the Czechoslovak Government, which might theoretically involve them in a conflict of loyalties, the Polish oath simply referred to the orders of commanders and superiors without specifying their nationality."

Strang was probably delivering himself of a minor irritation. There is no record of a reply, and Strang, thinking aloud, admitted that the matter was of no real importance, adding that the British oath was "enough to safeguard our interests." [AIR/2/5162: Strang to Porri 11.12.40.] The emphasis is original. The principle and practice of a dual oath had been agreed as early as August 14th, 1940, though no precise wording had been discussed. [AIR/2/5162: 'Amendments to the Draft Agreement with the Provisional Czechoslovak Government': 14.8.40.]

149 CAB 85/19: 15.8.40. Dr Hubert Ripka was State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Provisional Czechoslovak Government, a position not to be confused with the British title of Secretary of State. The chief post, that of Minister of Foreign Affairs, was held by Jan Masaryk. Ripka was "the man who rated highest" with Beneš in the wartime government, but it was a relationship which blew hot and cold. The President once considered Ripka as a future Foreign Minister, but then invited the latter's anger by retaining Masaryk. [Taborský *op.cit.*, p22.]

150 AIR/2/5162: 14.8.40: Notes made by Porri to the draft appendix.

151 AIR/2/5162: 18.7.40: Memo from Czechoslovak National Committee to Air Ministry. The Czechoslovaks declared that the following numbers were available: Fighter pilots (208); Bomber pilots (90); Army Co-Operation pilots (45); Air-Gunners and Wireless Operators (27); Mechanics (208) and Ground Crew (73). Miscalculating (the actual sum is 651) they totalled 724 bodies including 175 officers. An Air Ministry summary of August 8th 1940 listed the full complement of Czechoslovak personnel as follows: At Duxford, 169; at Honington (where 311 Bomber Squadron was forming),

The AFOSC meeting on the 15th also considered the text of the Czechoslovak version and essentially rejected it with no discussion. According to Strang, the Czechoslovak document "was largely a matter of prestige and he understood that in practice satisfactory arrangements could probably be made with the Air Ministry."¹⁵² At a further meeting on the 23rd, Medhurst repeated the observation and added the equally unoriginal comment that he was "afraid for political reasons that the constitution of a Czechoslovak Air Force would be followed by a sharp decline in morale."¹⁵³ The final nails were driven in by the Committee's refusal to endorse Article 6 of the Czechoslovak draft which required British financial assistance in the transportation of future personnel from other territories. The ever-conciliatory Porri wrote to Kalla on the 27th with the 'argument' against independence:

We are inclined to agree that the recognition of the independent existence of the Czechoslovak Air Force follows naturally in principle from the recognition of a Provisional Czechoslovak Government, although this is of course a matter for the Foreign Office, and we are willing to include in the Agreement itself...any form of words which would give suitable recognition to this status....However, the problems are (1) unity of operational control; (2) equality of treatment for Czechoslovak personnel and the British officers and airmen by whose side they are fighting; (3) administrative simplicity.¹⁵⁴

245; at Cosford Depot, 481. With a further 6 in hospital, this gave an official total of 895 men in the RAFVVR with another 50 new arrivals currently being examined at the Camp in Cholmondeley Park. [AIR/2/5153: 7.8.40.]

152 CAB 85/19: 15.8.40: AFOSC Minutes.

153 CAB 85/19: 23.8.40: AFOSC Minutes.

154 AIR/2/5162: 27.8.40: Porri to Kalla. Wing-Commander Porri remained a firm advocate for the Czechoslovaks. Late in 1940, a minor dispute arose over the wearing of national flying badges by the Allied air crews. The argument centred on whether such a badge modified the RAF uniform (which was forbidden) or was worn in addition to it. Powerful men searched the Agreement for guidance, but it yielded none. There were real fears of starting a trend, "as we have hitherto debarred such badges and the ribbons of many foreign orders and decorations." Porri cautioned his readers to remember that Czechoslovakia was *occupied* [his emphasis], and that the badge was "one on which they set great store, so great indeed that any intimidation that they should remove it would certainly lead to the gravest discontent...with the consequent adverse effect on morale and efficiency in the war effort." By way of adding prime ministerial weight to his argument, he also wrote: "I may add that we have received indications from the highest Cabinet level that where concessions can be made without undue influence on our war effort most favourable consideration should be given to such matters."

After two weeks of silence and reflection, a haughty riposte suggested that "it might be thought that a distinguishing arm badge is sufficient", to which Porri replied: "The badge is an emblem of their national integrity", whereas the arm-band "can hardly be said to fulfil that purpose since it is largely only a means towards alleviating the language difficulty." This was the winning line. Appropriate documentation was prepared and sent to the King, who approved the matter on January 10th 1941. Porri's Department, however, did not escape entirely. The office of the Air Member for Personnel, into whose lap this had fallen, petulantly concluded that the DAAC had already given permission to wear the badge anyway, so they could hardly halt the practice now that it had started. Even so, the DAAC were solemnly warned that, in future, "they cannot commit the Air Council to authorising any deviation from RAF dress regulations." [AIR/2/10174: General correspondence 28.11.40 - 12.1.41]. The Dutch requested a similar concession in November 1943 and it was granted without discussion.

Porri added that all promotion would only be through RAF channels in terms of RAF qualifications and only for RAF vacancies. In the Czechoslovak Air Force, "promotion to rank [was] essentially a matter for the Czechoslovak authorities." Since the RAF did not intend to recognise Czechoslovak ranks anyway, this could hardly count as a concession.

The note represented the official end of the Czechoslovakian efforts for an independent Air Force. The issue of "unity of operational control" applied in equal measure to Poles and Czechs, as did "equality of treatment." Yet there was just enough substance in Porri's reasons to justify the inclusion of Czechoslovak airmen into the RAFVR. It is true that they were numerically inferior to the Poles (although within a week 312 fighter squadron had been formed from surplus personnel), but the contingent was *too* small to withstand sustained pressure for its inclusion in the RAFVR. By constantly reinforcing this point, the Air Ministry was spared the irritation of having to deal with another 'independent' air force on home soil.

But what really mattered was the political constitution of the Czechoslovak administration and the way in which it was perceived by the British authorities. Since the arrival of the evacuees from France, various incidents had erupted within the contingent which caused notable concern. As we have seen, on August 21st the AFOSC discussed the disturbances at Cholmondeley Camp, and agreed that an immediate effect was that the proportion of officers now in the UK was too high. But as the record states, "although the remaining rank-and-file appears to consist largely of Czech patriots, it includes strong elements with extreme left tendencies which do not appear to be in sympathy with the existing Higher Command who are accused of fascist inclinations."¹⁵⁵

This echoes the doubts expressed in the House of Commons, and also those voiced by Porri at the AFOSC meeting on July 29th. In short, not only was the British Government concerned about the political shades within the Czechoslovak administration, the men who would have to serve it had similar worries. The same Home Office report expanded on the theme:

Recruitment for the Czechoslovak Army in this country has always been difficult since the greater proportion of potential recruits consists of Czech and Sudeten refugees who emigrated from the Protectorate under the auspices of the Czechoslovak Trust Fund and are either unsuitable military material or are critical of the present political atmosphere in the Army. The Czechoslovak authorities have in the past wished to introduce the principle of conscription in this country, but His Majesty's Government have only agreed hitherto to do their best to encourage Czechoslovak nationals to enlist...If conditions are

155 CAB 85/19: (AFO(40)25): 21.8.40: AFOSC Minutes.

really as unsatisfactory as has been suggested, far-reaching measures of compulsion will be required to secure the enlistment of Czechoslovak nationals.¹⁵⁶

For this reason, the British Government were not going to accord conscription powers upon the Beneš administration. Furthermore, by lacking the power to conscript, the Provisional Government was forced to rely on voluntary service, and this dependency impacted hard to the Czechoslovak Army and the Air Force in the coming years.¹⁵⁷ Three weeks later, Beneš consented to the enlistment of some of the discontented elements in the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps (AMPC) upon certain conditions, the most substantive of which was that "no publicity should be given to these arrangements since this might give rise to a misunderstanding and create an unfortunate precedent affecting morale of the remaining Czechoslovak military forces."¹⁵⁸

The final draft of the Agreement was signed on October 25th 1940. Article 1 encompassed the whole Czechoslovak armed forces and stated that they shall "be organised and employed under British command", while Article 4 of the Appendix 1 (which related to the Czechoslovak Air Force) specifically anchored the contingent in the RAFVR "for the duration of the present war." Article 5 reflected the establishment difficulties by ensuring that men who could not immediately be employed in Czechoslovak squadrons would be "utilised individually in groups or units of the Royal Air Force until it becomes possible to absorb them into Czechoslovak squadrons", a point which was to have serious repercussions with Fighter Command as we shall see below.¹⁵⁹

156 CAB 85/19: (AFO(40)25): 23.8.40. The same paper acknowledged that "the natural course" of the negotiations concerning the military Agreement would be to follow the Polish model and allow the Provisional Government "to mobilise Czechoslovak nationals and have jurisdiction over Czechoslovak forces in this country." Given these political difficulties, however, the paper considered it "desirable...to lay down certain conditions to cover the situation."

Neither was this political friction wholly confined to the Czechoslovak contingent. A number of Polish personnel evacuated from France also found themselves in Scottish internment camps when it was considered that "the effect of their presence on the morale of their comrades was unsatisfactory." [AIR/8/370: Fifth Report of Allied Air Personnel: 12.8.40].

157 For a full discussion of this topic, see Part Two.

158 CAB 85/19: (AFO(40)46): AFOSC Minutes 16.9.40. Two other conditions, though minor, are of interest: (1) that conditions of service and pay in the Pioneers should not be more favourable than those in the Czechoslovak Army; and (2) that "this arrangement should not be regarded as creating any precedent for the further enlistment of Czechoslovak nationals in the Pioneer Corps in future." Beneš's hold on his forces in Britain was therefore tenuous, and later discussions in this thesis will demonstrate that this directly affected his policy-making in regard to the Czechoslovak exiles in Britain.

159 AIR/2/5162: Anglo-Czechoslovak Military Agreement of 25.10.40. Copies of the Agreement appear in various Air Ministry and Foreign Office files, and was presented for review by the Czechoslovaks in May 1943. The 1940 Agreement made weak concessions which allowed for the semblance of independence. "In principle", the Czechoslovak squadrons would be under the command of Czechoslovak officers, though it was to be a full year before any were formally established as such. Aircraft could display Czechoslovak fuselage markings (in practice a small roundel beneath the cockpit), and the national flag could be flown at stations along with the RAF ensign. Normal RAF

If we now lock together the British attitudes towards the Czechoslovak air contingent during the summer of 1940, the general bearing would seem to be one of grudging acceptance of a *fait accompli* by Beneš and his group. Once in Britain, the air crews would have to be supported or simply dumped into the Pioneer Corps, an act which would have had serious political repercussions and wrecked at a stroke all that marvellous publicity the arrival had generated. Even so, distrust of Beneš and the apparent *meleé* in which he operated meant that to bestow full independence upon the Czechoslovak Air Force would have signalled to other nations the possible willingness of the British to grant him full rights of recognition then or at some stage in the future. It was therefore convenient for the RAF to shunt the contingent sideways into the RAFVR, where every man was technically an individual who had volunteered for service and was not necessarily part of a national group if he chose not to be. The sheer lack of numbers provided the perfect excuse for the RAF and the British Government to do exactly this, thereby gaining for them the propaganda rewards without the additional cost of potentially embarrassing political commitment.

Further developments

As we have seen, Churchill's propaganda exercise had caused some ugly details to emerge while the various legal and military frameworks were being constructed. Nevertheless, he kept a discerning eye on all aspects of the integration programme. On July 12th, he placed his full weight behind the Allied Forces policy by writing to the Chiefs-of-Staff and reminding them of the importance of the project:

Mere questions of administrative convenience must not be allowed to stand in the way of this policy of the State. It is most necessary to give to the war which Great Britain is waging single-handed the broad international character which will add greatly to our strength and prestige.

To this, he added: "I hope I may receive assurances that this policy is being wholeheartedly pursued."¹⁶⁰ A later note from Churchill was also considered by the

uniform was to be worn with a small flash "Czechoslovakia" permitted on the upper sleeves. This last point is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, in a paper of June 30th 1940, drew attention to the capture of 90,000 British Army uniforms at Arras after Dunkirk. Concerned that the Germans might use these as disguise in the event of an invasion, and calling for ideas to solve the problem, a later paper suggested that foreign nationals should have the country name "in easily legible letters" on tunic and greatcoat shoulders. It is possible, therefore, that this nod to national status could possibly have been more in the interests of the British than the Czechoslovaks. [CAB/81/96: JIC Memoranda, Papers JIC(40)145: 30.6.40 and JIC(40)149: 3.7.40.]

The second point properly deserves treatment in Part Two when the Agreement was offered for review. Suffice to say at this stage that the shoulder flash was not worn by all Czechoslovak personnel. 160 AIR/8/370: Prime Minister to Chiefs-of-Staff via General Ismay 12.7.40. The same document

Chiefs-of-Staff. In this, he explicitly urged the rapid rearmament of the Poles and the French "as we may need them for foreign service in the near future." Giving them priority over the Home Guard, he concluded with the instruction that "the Polish units should be ripened as much as possible." Finally, he requested weekly reports of numbers and weapons to be sent to the War Cabinet.¹⁶¹

The first of these was dated July 22nd and will be considered shortly, but the Air Ministry had already compiled its own comprehensive report on July 14th, and immediately another problem became apparent, that of the independent status of the air contingents. Arrangements had been made to incorporate all incoming Poles into the RAFVR, but a communication received from the Polish Government that morning had demanded a fully independent force and thus all proceedings had been suspended pending a further policy decision.¹⁶²

By the time of the first full Chiefs-of-Staff report eight days later, that decision had been made. The principle of an independent Polish force had been accepted and two fighter squadrons were to be formed at the earliest opportunity. Medhurst chaired a conference to discuss the report and its implications at the Air Ministry on the same day, July 14th. Among those present for the discussions were Dowding and Nicholl for Fighter Command, Bottomley and Lees for Bomber Command, and, as liaison officers, Beaumont for the Czechoslovaks and Group-Captain A.P. Davidson for the Poles.¹⁶³

Medhurst briefly summarised the situation. There were at present 4,800 Polish air force personnel in the country, not including those previously incorporated into the force under the prior agreement, and a further 2,000 might be on their way from North Africa. There were "rather more" than 700 Czechoslovaks, again with an unspecified number in North Africa, but he appeared pleased with the percentage of skilled pilots and mechanics in the contingent. He also took pains to suggest that the conference

contained his (later published) remarks concerning the French and our need to "indulge their sentiments about the French flag etc."

161 AIR/8/370: WP(40)281. Although Churchill accepted that British units had overall priority, he still foresaw the need to maintain morale by ensuring that they had *some* weapons, hence "they ought to have a small proportion of Bren guns etc., even at the expense of our own men."

162 AIR/8/370: Internal Air Ministry memorandum 14.7.40. The Report also noted that General de Gaulle had "given his consent" to the employment of French air personnel within the RAFVR until such time that his own Air Force was established and "on condition that such personnel retain their French identity and fight in French uniform. These conditions have been agreed to." Small wonder, then, that the Poles - nominally an Ally of equal status - felt aggrieved.

163 AIR/8/370: Conference Minutes 14.7.40, *passim*. Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Caswall Tremenhare Dowding KCB GCB CB GCVO CMG (1882-1970) joined the RFC in 1914, then the RAF in 1918; Director of Training 1926-1929; C-in-C ADGB Fighting Area 1929-1930; Air Member for Research and Development 1930-1936; AOC Fighter Command 1936-1940; Principal Air ADC to The King 1937-1942; retired 1942; created First Baron of Bentley Priory 1943; President of the Battle of Britain Fighter Association 1958.

confine its deliberations to the deployment of these men, perhaps as a way of avoiding any unpleasant political observations. He noted that the Chief of Air Staff (Sir Cyril Newall) had agreed to the immediate formation of two fighter and two bomber squadrons for the Poles, and one of each for the Czechoslovaks. Reserves were to be set at 200% and the number of crews allocated to each bomber squadron would be raised from 20 to 30. Clearly, even this inflation was hardly sufficient to absorb the numbers available, but at this point Dowding intervened [reported speech]:

We must for the moment reserve judgement as to the practicability of introducing foreign personnel in Royal Air Force units. He regarded the high morale of RAF fighter pilots as one of the most priceless assets we possessed, and it would be vital to be assured of the fighting spirit as well as the flying proficiency of any foreign personnel before allowing them to be introduced. He could not take any chances, but as an experiment he would support the posting of trained allied personnel 'in sections' to units under his command.

This statement by the Commander-in-Chief warrants close analysis. Admittedly, he was under severe pressure at the time and, quite understandably, he would avoid anything which looked like a risk. Even so, during the week of this conference he had an establishment deficit of 115 pilots and would lose another 70 aircraft¹⁶⁴, yet he was clearly concerned at what he later called "the infiltration of foreign pilots into British squadrons."¹⁶⁵

Yet no one took issue with his statement on the 14th, and others suggested means whereby more of the surplus could be absorbed. Speaking for the Directorate of Postings, Group-Captain Hanson suggested the use of foreign pilots in AACUs, largely non-operational at the time due to the lack of a land battlefront. As a pragmatic addendum, or perhaps as a nod towards Beaumont and Davidson, the conference decided that it would be "short-sighted" to permanently despatch partly-trained Allied personnel to army formations unless procedures for emergency recall could be confirmed in advance. Any men left without a job after these manipulations would be posted to OTUs or formed into aerodrome guard companies.

164 Wood D, Dempster D: *The Narrow Margin* (Arrow Books, 1969) Appendices 11 and 13.

165 AIR/2/5196: Sholto-Douglas to the Vice-Chief of Air Staff (Air Marshal Sir Richard E.C.Pearse), referring to a meeting between Dowding and Archibald Sinclair. In *The Forgotten Few*, Zamoyski adduces Dowding's "infiltration" remark as a reason for the rapid establishment of independent Polish squadrons, leading to the formal Agreement of August 5th establishing the Polish Air Force on British soil. Although Zamoyski includes Dowding's succeeding remark that "apart from the language difficulty he [Dowding] is uncertain to the effect this will have on the morale of his squadrons", he dovetails this with his own observation that "the creditable conduct and above-average results of these pilots [and] their growing popularity with their British colleagues and commanders", leading to the inference that British morale would be sapped by having to fly with better men. In this, he somewhat misses the point that Dowding was pressing for national units for negative, not positive, reasons. This is clearly illustrated by Dowding's subsequent statements. [[Zamoyski *op.cit.*, pp 75-76].

Yet Dowding was not prepared to let his objections be smoothed away by these compromises. Furthermore, though he had spoken of "foreign personnel" and "foreign pilots", it soon became clear that he was using these terms diplomatically. Two weeks after the conference, Dowding met Sinclair and urged the Secretary of State to form additional Polish and Czech squadrons from partly-trained and surplus men "to thicken the line in the west." Referring to this meeting, Sholto-Douglas informed the VCAS (Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirse) that Dowding was prepared to accept 31 French pilots and 29 Belgians into fighter OTUs and transfer them to British squadrons when trained.¹⁶⁶ Those not fit for such service were to be sent, in order of preference, to Bomber Command, General Reconnaissance, Coastal Command, ferry or target-towing duties or, as a last resort, be sent back to their national organisations. What made the difference insofar as the other nationalities were concerned was his insistence that "no Poles or Czechs were to be included in this scheme." The only concession he would make was to agree that Slav personnel then in OTUs could, when trained, be transferred to British squadrons to make up losses, but even this course of action was valid "pending the settlement of the current question" - that is, the formation of new Czechoslovak and Polish squadrons.¹⁶⁷ So averse was he to including any more Slavs in his units, when faced with the counter-argument that this procedure would "do nothing to improve the position of pilot deficiencies in British fighter squadrons", he replied that he would be prepared to "make do" with his old establishment of 21 pilots per squadron. If the worst occurred and heavy casualties prevented even this number being available, he would "roll up" British units before he would accept the foreign pilots. Offering no comment, Sholto-Douglas recommended the plan to Peirse.¹⁶⁸

At a meeting of the Expansion and Re-Equipment Policy Committee (ERPC) on August 3rd, Sholto-Douglas repeated Dowding's concerns and conditions. After "considerable discussion", the meeting settled upon a range of options to be placed before the VCAS for policy decision. Option 1 was the existing scheme - surplus Czechoslovak and Polish pilots were to be held in a general "pool" for posting to British squadrons as required. Option 2 was to form new squadrons as suggested by Dowding (a) *in addition to* or (b) *to substitute* existing British units. Option 3 was, predictably, a compromise. The prevailing scheme would hold good "until the invasion

166 Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Edmund Charles Peirse KCB DSO AFC (1892-1970) was educated at Monkton Combe, HMS Conway and King's College, London; served European War 1914-1918; Deputy Director of Operations and Intelligence, 1930-1933; AOC British Forces in Palestine and Transjordan, 1933-1936; DCAS 1937-1940; VCAS 1940; AOC Bomber Command, 1940-1942; AOC-in-Chief India, 1942-1943; Allied Air C-in-C, S.E. Asia Command, 1943-1944, retired 1945.

167 AIR/2/5196: DCAS to VCAS: 28.7.40.

168 AIR/2/5196: DCAS to VCAS: 29.7.40.

scare was over" when all Czechoslovak and Polish personnel could be withdrawn for the formation of full national squadrons.¹⁶⁹

Sholto-Douglas minuted the relevant departments recommending 2(a). If this was unacceptable or impracticable, then he would consent to Option 3. Given the dire circumstances in the air at the time, he was understandably "very much opposed" to 2(b) because this was not the time "to roll up British fighter squadrons unless or until we are forced to do so."¹⁷⁰ In reply, the Air Member for Supply and Organisation (Air Chief Marshal Sir Christopher Courtney) concurred reluctantly with the DCAS's recommendation, and he added his disagreement with the present policy of giving full priority to Fighter Command, warning him that training and bomber expansion "cannot be further and continuously impaired by devoting all our resources to first line commitments."¹⁷¹ Upon this theme, he thought it "most undesirable" that these further squadrons should be formed at all since they would be "of no real fighting value for at least two or three months." His only hope was that "these foreign personnel [would] throw up an equivalent of British personnel for the true development of the force", and he finished with another swipe at fighter expansion.¹⁷² From this we can clearly see that Dowding was to have his way; that the Royal Air Force was prepared to form and equip extra squadrons which had little or no practical use in the present emergency, and that the existence of such units *might* at least have the advantage of releasing British pilots for operational service. Courtney thus concurred in the hope that further, "true", development of the force could arise from the scheme.

On August 15th, Peirse wrote to the Secretary of State with his recommendations. "Having given much thought to the problem", he agreed with the principle that additional squadrons should be formed "if only because the advantages outweigh the disadvantages." In a general summary of the argument, he quoted Dowding as being "strongly averse to the dilution of British fighter squadrons by foreign personnel", adding that "the foreigners themselves are strongly in favour of forming foreign squadrons." A little prompt, which originated with Dowding, was that the Air Force needed more squadrons "to thicken up the line in the west", a perfectly true statement in itself but also a geographical convenience if the new units were to remain non-operational for any length of time. To fully align himself with the opinions

169 AIR/2/5196: ERPC meeting 3.8.40. [Original emphasis.]

170 AIR/2/5196: Minute from DCAS to AMSO 3.8.40.

171 Air Chief Marshal Sir Christopher Lloyd Courtney GBE CBE KCB CB DSO (1890-1976) was educated at Bradfield College; Naval Cadet, 1905; joined RAF in 1918; RAF Staff College, 1925-1928; Director of Training, 1933-1934; Director of Staff Duties, 1934-1935; Director of Operations and Intelligence and DCAS, 1935-1936; AOC British Forces Iraq, 1937-1938; RAF Reserve Command, 1939-1940; AMSO, 1939-1945; retired 1945.

172 AIR/2/5196: AMSO to DCAS: 6.8.40.

so far expressed, he believed that the problems of fitting foreigners into existing British squadrons - "particularly the language difficulty" - "are not fully appreciated."¹⁷³ Sinclair's reply to all departments of August 18th agreed to the scheme "because of the present war situation."¹⁷⁴

At an ERPC meeting of August 17th, it was agreed that one new Czechoslovak and three Polish squadrons should be formed on a single-flight basis with eight aircraft to each flight and "perhaps twelve pilots", thus they were hardly to be squadrons at all. Neither would pilots pass through OTUs, receiving their training on station. Conversion to full strength "would depend on the material situation as the war developed."¹⁷⁵ Later discussions on August 20th rejected the proposal of a dedicated Czechoslovak and Polish OTU primarily "from the inadvisability of putting Poles and Czechs on the same station." Munich indeed cast a long shadow. With almost flippant morbidity, the same Minute suggested withdrawing Polish and Czechoslovak pilots from British squadrons should casualties in the new units be higher than anticipated. "If casualties are less, then the surplus pilots can be either employed with RAF squadrons if the C-in-C agrees to further dilution, or to ferrying etc., until they are required to fill dead men's shoes."¹⁷⁶

And so it was that 312 Czechoslovak fighter squadron was formed at Duxford on August 29th. Within a month it had been moved west to Speke for defensive operations over Merseyside. Despite being equipped with old aircraft which required constant maintenance (including the first-ever production Hurricane L1547 which caught fire and crashed in the Mersey, killing its pilot, on October 10th), 312 still brought down a JU88 on October 4th, but from then until the summer of 1941 the squadron saw virtually no action at all.¹⁷⁷

173 AIR/2/5196: VCAS to the Secretary of State: 15.8.40.

174 AIR/2/5196: Sinclair to all relevant departments: 18.8.40.

175 AIR/2/5196: ERPC Conclusions: 17.8.40.

176 AIR/2/5196: Deputy Director of Organisation to all relevant departments. 20.8.40.

177 The establishment of the early Czechoslovak and Polish squadrons, as determined by the decisions taken in early July 1940, follow in chronological order:

300 (Polish) 'Land of Mazovia' Bomber Squadron - July 1st, 1940 at Bramcote.

310 (Czech) Fighter Squadron - July 10th, 1940 at Duxford.

302 (Polish) *City of Poznan* Fighter Squadron - July 13th, 1940 at Leconfield.

301 (Polish) *Land of Pomerania* Bomber Squadron - July 26th, 1940 at Bramcote.

311 (Czech) Bomber Squadron - July 27th, 1940 at Honington.

303 (Polish) *Kosciuszko* Fighter Squadron - August 2nd, 1940 at Northolt.

304 (Polish) *Land of Silesia* Bomber Squadron - August 22nd, 1940 at Bramcote.

305 (Polish) *Land of Wielkopolska* Bomber Squadron - September 1st, 1940 at Bramcote.

These units represent the original complement of Czechoslovak and Polish squadrons and the extra units as suggested by Medhurst. As a result of the ERPC meeting of August 17th, the following units were authorised:

307 (Polish) *City of Lwow* Night-Fighter Squadron - August 24th (commenced) at Blackpool.

Again we see here the Air Ministry 'making do', resolving problems it had neither foreseen nor wanted by fulfilling the Prime Minister's wishes, if not to the letter, then to a degree satisfactory to itself. Surplus material had to be used up somehow, and we cannot blame Dowding for not taking even the slightest risk with his limited resources. Yet there is still the sense of distrust here. If he had been concerned about language problems, why had he then given his assent to French and Belgian pilots being posted to existing British squadrons, yet denied this to the Slavs? It is speculation, to be sure, but perhaps he too had caught the infection that so many others seemed to have suffered from, that somehow the Slavs were politically suspect, or at best might cause friction within his already stressed fighter squadrons. More research needs to be done here, but we can be certain that the formation of additional units was in no way done for reasons of military need, but for largely political expediency.

There remained only the formation of the Inspectorate to complete the organisation of the Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain. Initial discussions regarding the proposed establishment took place between Medhurst and Brigadier-General Slezák in July, but apart from agreeing that the Inspectorate would act as a channel of transmission between the MNO and the Air Ministry, little else was resolved.¹⁷⁸ Slezák was involved at this early stage because he was technically the Inspector of the Czechoslovak Air Force at the time, yet a movement to displace him was gathering momentum among the rank-and-file. Be that as it may, by September 1940 - now with Karel Janoušek in charge - the shape of the Inspectorate was confirmed by Ingr to the Air Ministry.¹⁷⁹ Working with a staff of seven, the Inspector would be responsible to the Minister of National Defence and would act as the link between him and the DAAC. The rôle would involve the negotiation of all treaties and agreements (which would then be passed back to the Government for amendment and ratification); the supervision of the material needs, the financial costs and the tactical use of the Air Force; the maintenance of all personnel files; the monitoring of morale, and the regulation of training.¹⁸⁰ Reporting directly to the Air Ministry and the MNO in equal measure, his rôle was widened in early 1941 to include the organisation and development of proposals concerning recruitment, the representation of the Air Force at all British and

306 (Polish) *City of Torun* Fighter Squadron - August 28th (commenced) at Blackpool.

312 (Czech) Fighter Squadron - August 29th, 1940 at Duxford.

308 (Polish) *City of Krakow* Fighter Squadron - September 9th at Blackpool.

178 ČsL VB 216/CIII-2a/1/112: Minutes, Slezák and Medhurst, 27.7.40.

179 MNO/9/2922/1940: Ingr to Air Ministry, 26.9.40.

180 MNO/9/2922/1940: 'The Competences of the Czechoslovak Air Force Inspectorate': draft issued in September 1940.

Czechoslovak military meetings, and the recommendation of officers and other ranks for promotion.¹⁸¹

But to a considerable extent the job was a poisoned chalice. The Inspector was a man of presence but no power, of influence but little say. The Air Ministry expected him to manage his air contingent to satisfy the requirements of the RAF, while the MNO wanted it to reflect the aspirations of the Czechoslovak Government and its ministers, and frequently these aims conflicted, sometimes sharply. As will become readily apparent in Part Two of this study, Janoušek (for he remained in the post until after the return to the homeland in 1945) was permanently torn between these two forces, and tended, if he made a choice at all, to fall on the side of the Air Ministry. This in turn brought criticism from his compatriots and engendered petty intrigues to discredit him, but what was never in doubt - then or now - was that he was the one man capable of holding it all together; that without him the Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain would almost certainly have faced disintegration as a pseudo-independent entity, and its members scattered across the RAF according to need and ability. Though this theme will be developed in later chapters, it is something to be borne in mind as we examine other aspects of the story.

Discontent and rebellion.

We have seen how disturbances in the Czechoslovak Army at Cholmondeley Park had led to the separation and isolation of hundreds of men in the summer of 1940. This, however, was not the only crisis to affect the Czechoslovak military after their relocation to Britain, and what is less known, and even less publicised, is that the Air Force too had its share of mutiny and turbulence in those early months.

In the first week of August, Beneš had laid before him two series of complaints from both Honington and Duxford. These were issues which, by the end of the month, would attract other, more serious protests and have the support of nearly one in three of the entire air contingent. These initial grievances were a direct reflection of the high officers-to-men ratio examined earlier. Officers who had been demoted to NCO complained of loss of status; current NCOs who had served in France wanted promotion to commissioned rank; other ranks stated there were too many NCOs and that this impeded their progress. Furthermore, the English system of ranking was more

181 VKPR 28/12/17: 'Summary of the rights and duties of the Inspectorate': Janoušek to the MNO, 28.2.41. The administrative dimension was principally concerned with postings, training, leave, pay, and returning regular reports of losses. Yet another function was the recommendation of medals and other awards. One area *denied* to the Inspectorate was military intelligence, both internal and external, which remained the domain of the MNO. [MNO 13/15888/1941: Moravec to the MNO, 1.8.41.]

concise than that of the Czechoslovak, so consequently there were less promotion slots available, less money being earned and therefore dissatisfaction all round. There were some rumblings of discontent with the existing officer corps, but in the main the letters encompassed what was a general feeling throughout the force - men either wanted to retain their previous rank or achieve a better one. In short, almost everyone wanted to be an officer, commissioned or otherwise.¹⁸²

In response, Nižborsky did not so much solve the problems as dismiss them, choosing to lay much of the blame on the British system.¹⁸³ To the NCOs, he merely pointed out that few opportunities for advancement would become available in Britain and in order to achieve it they must improve upon their trade and specialist qualifications. To the demoted officers, he simply stated that "this is the English system, which our side cannot change", and he referred the other ranks to the difficulties met by the NCOs. Essentially, he did nothing at all, but then what *could* he have done? Short of promoting everybody who wanted it, and this would have been ludicrous, he had little choice but to turn from the problem and hope it resolved itself. On the subject of dissatisfaction with officers, he argued that no concrete evidence existed of malpractice or defeatism so no further action would be taken.¹⁸⁴

The problems began to fester. Within two weeks, Nižborsky produced a report which warned of a potential total collapse of discipline if immediate action was not taken. Centred on the Cosford Depot, but including elements from Duxford and Honington, a total of 450 pilots and ground crew united in presenting a list of demands to the Czechoslovak High Command. Some were petty, some were serious, and all were related directly to the situation in France and the conditions in England. The five demands were: (1) The removal of Brigadier-General Slezák as Commander-in-Chief and Inspector of the Air Force; (2) the replacement of other senior officers with active fliers and not "office types"; (3) the reassessment of individual abilities and skills to meet the new conditions of war; (4) a total overhaul of the officer corps with new officers appointed based on qualifications and knowledge; (5) an investigation into the use of telephones for personal calls during the retreat from France which, it was

182 VKPR 52/1/1/19: Letters of complaint from Honington and Duxford, 6.8.40. The desire for status even extended to former police officers who also wanted their civilian ranks recognised.

183 General Antonín Nižborsky, whose real surname was Hasal, was head of the VKPR and later appointed Commander of the Liberated Territories at the end of the war. A useful account of his activities appears in White: *op.cit.*; pp 265-280.] It was common practice for members of the Czechoslovak Government and military to adopt false surnames to protect their families at home. Antonín Bohumil Hasal (1893-1960) fought in Russia for the Czechoslovak Legion against the Central Powers (for which he had been called up as a Second Lieutenant.); promoted Lieutenant-Colonel in 1920; awarded over 30 decorations by various countries including the British OBE and CBE; served as Minister of Transport post-war; left for exile in the USA after the 1948 coup.

184 VKPR 52/1/1/19: Nižborsky for the VKPR to Honington and Duxford, undated.

claimed, delayed or obstructed the transmission of orders and thus affected the evacuation.¹⁸⁵

Nižborsky illustrated these complaints with examples. He noted a "significant lack of confidence" among the men because of the "unacceptable behaviour of the officers", claiming that they did little but drink, gamble and make fools of themselves in front of the other ranks: "The English military police brought back several officers at 3 a.m. and they were so drunk they had to be carried from the vehicles." He then condemned the refusal of the rebels to obey orders, but added that they were aware that a formal mutiny would harm their cause in England and were determined to solve the problem peacefully and with as little fuss as possible. The accusations against Slezák were that he had promoted certain favoured men, threatened the rebels with courts-martial, and blatantly attempted to hinder the evacuation from France. Other officers, not named by Nižborsky, were accused of weakness, low moral fibre, defeatism and collaboration with the enemy, promising doubters that the Germans would permit their return to the Protectorate without punishment if they left immediately. Some politicians were also subjected to harsh criticism, principally those individuals whom we earlier saw castigated in the debate over recognition.

This time it was Beneš himself who responded, but after some considerable delay. Shortly before the signing of the Anglo-Czechoslovak Agreement in October, he penned a reply which aligned himself with the present leadership of the Air Force which, in his opinion, "was not badly led." Slezák had already been removed as a concession to the rebels and Janoušek installed as Inspector, but one sacrificial head was a small price to pay for stability in Beneš's eyes. What he was not prepared to tolerate was censure of his political judgement:

With regard to the removal of politicians which during the French action did not show adequate abilities or understanding, if the writers of the Memorandum are sincere when they say that they give the President confidence in everything, they must have confidence in all political questions, including membership of the Government.¹⁸⁶

Having scraped through on recognition with the pretense of unity, clearly seen by the British Government but ignored for reasons of convenience, and having survived a substantial revolt in the Army fuelled by political and perhaps racial tensions, a political rebellion in the Air Force would have been the end for Beneš as the credible leader of his émigré government. Addressing the complaints made against the officers, he repeated Nižborsky's earlier defence by requesting concrete information, claiming that

185 VKPR 23/1/2: Nižborsky to Beneš, 26.8.40.

186 VKPR 23/1/2: Beneš to Honington and Duxford, 21.10.40. The draft was prepared by him, but the final document was signed by Nižborsky.

misconduct in France was "clearly unsupported", that many officers had actually assisted with some evacuation costs from their own pockets, that at no time were officers compromised during the evacuation by divided loyalties, either to the French or the Germans, and that he would personally consider any reasonable and sustainable grievance if presented.

Four days after this despatch, the Agreement was signed with the British and the Czechoslovak military units were official allies - or, to be more precise, a military force allied to the cause of His Majesty's Government.¹⁸⁷ Much celebration greeted this news and a good many hot heads cooled down a little. But the President's authority had been bruised; Slezák had been removed as Inspector but retained his position as Head of the Third Section of the MNO, responsible for all matters technical, including training and education. Janoušek had replaced him as Inspector and would suit the post well, but the fact remains that Beneš, to forestall a mutiny, had had to sacrifice a Brigadier-General and nine other officers to restore order.¹⁸⁸ Few had doubts about the real reasons for the trouble. A summary of the events appears in the VKPR files, unsigned and undated but probably by Nižborsky whose responsibility it was, which pins the blame squarely on agitators within the Cosford group. Their aims were not military but political, but it was clear that some Air Force staff had sufficiently angered the ranks while in France to secure their mass support for what was ultimately a political agenda.¹⁸⁹

The events of July and August 1940 had thus been uncomfortable but not critical, and when the inquiries began one particular obstacle was identified, not in what caused the problems, but how to deal with them. Ironically, it was Slezák who flagged a major weakness in the Agreement before it was signed. Essentially, the Czechoslovak air personnel were subject to RAF codes and any courts-martial were to be composed of

187 This term, and similar variations, appears frequently in the Foreign Office correspondence files for the period. Roberts summarised the position well when he pointed out to his colleagues that "the Czechoslovak Government is only a provisional Government self-created on foreign soil without any mandate from the Czechoslovak people." Comparing them with the other émigré governments, he noted that "they are all constitutionally established...with technically at least a complete mandate to represent their countries." He accepted that, in practice, the Czechoslovaks were treated as full allies, but in a strictly legal sense they were not, hence the phrase. [FO 371/26394: Roberts, minute to file, 15.2.41.]

188 MNO 8/2167/1940: Minute to file by Nižborsky, 10.10.40. The names of the officers, who were sent to the Army at Leamington Spa, appear in this file but are not relevant to the present study. A small number of other ranks were also transferred.

189 VKPR 23/1/2. The report is attached to the Nižborsky and Beneš documents referred to above. An additional comment, which was to presage later difficulties, noted that bomber pilots at Honington felt they were not being given enough credit for their work, that fighter pilots had immediate success and received much of the acclaim. As a result, the latter achieved a higher social status, more medals, and were in less actual danger because they saw action over friendly territory.

equal numbers of Czechoslovak and British officers. This was reasonable enough to all sides, but in practice it meant that most minor offences would be summarily dealt with. This, wrote Slezák, was where the fault lay:

The disciplinary powers of Czechoslovak commanders are effectively nil, because according to our instructions we cannot punish offenders, and according to the English instructions the English commanders don't want to try or punish offenders because they haven't orders or arrangements to do so and because they are members of a foreign Army.¹⁹⁰

This point was taken up by Janoušek in November. In a general report to the MNO on the recent disturbances, he noted that "there has appeared a whole series of cases of indiscipline by individual air personnel" and added that the British practice was simply to throw them out of the Air Force into the hands of the Czechoslovak Army or the Pioneers. From this he concluded that "weaker elements" in the Air Force were encouraged to disobey orders knowing that punishment would be slight or non-existent:

Release from the RAF by itself is not a punishment if they simply go to the Army, irrespective of the fact that such a solution creates problems for the Army itself. I'm of the opinion that everyone who refuses to carry out his duty puts himself outside of the law and cannot be protected by [either] Government. Thus I suggest the simplest solution is to send all unreliable people after being released from the RAF to a concentration camp as difficult or enemy aliens.¹⁹¹

A few days later, Slezák developed the concept in a report of his own. He argued that the Air Force was particularly sensitive to negative elements within it, and loss of life could be caused by slapdash work on behalf of unreliable ground crew. He concurred with a point made by Janoušek that action should be swift and with the minimum of fuss, but that offenders should be punished in every sense of the word:

They should be on lower pay and the regime should be strict. We should send such people to a *náhradní těleso* and use them for menial tasks, and the incorrigible ones should be sent to a concentration camp. Once out of the Air Force, there must be no return.¹⁹²

190 VKPR 24/1/1/2: Slezák to the MNO and VKPR, 15.9.40.

191 MNO 11/3587/1940: Janoušek to the MNO, 16.11.40. Janoušek's use of the term "concentration camp" was deliberate and expressed his feelings about the recalcitrants. The Czech phrase is *koncentrační tábor*, and this cannot be confused with *internační tábor* which is "internment camp." We have seen earlier how Beneš himself used the term, but Slezák modified the idea by suggesting a purpose-built *náhradní těleso*, which in this context translates to "reserve section." We must also add, of course, that "concentration camp" did not have the stigma of today attached to it in 1940, though the phrase still carried some impact.

192 *ibid.* Slezák to the MNO, 27.11.40. Janoušek's point about speed and discretion was qualified by a fear that indiscipline may become a political and public question. He suggested in his report of the 16th that each case should be dealt with separately: "If only single, individual cases are investigated, we should not be afraid or worried that these problems will eventually be aired in Parliament or the Press."

But there was a major problem in this because the Agreement (and, as we have seen, British political opinion) did not permit or condone the application of Czechoslovak military codes or scales of punishment while on British territory. Early in 1941, Ingr met this difficulty in a paper prepared for a meeting with Beneš. After summarising much of the previous arguments, he concluded that their hands were tied by the Agreement and that the only possible solution would be to change the clauses relating to discipline, thus allowing the Czechoslovaks to apply their own military laws, and if the Air Ministry did not agree, they should permit punishment before the men were ejected from the RAFVR, thereby sending the appropriate signals to any would-be offenders.¹⁹³

The meeting of January 16th was convened primarily to discuss the issues, but may have been motivated by difficulties in 311 (Bomber) Squadron. The then Director of the DAFL, Air Vice-Marshal Alfred Collier, had written to Kalla in response to a letter from the latter which highlighted a growing problem in the squadron. A number of men were refusing to fly on operations over occupied territory because (a) they feared capture, and (b) in the event of capture, they were concerned that their families would be punished. Kalla asked if the Air Ministry would consider permitting the men to be stripped of all rank, dressed in khaki and not RAF blue, and kept on the relevant station to perform labouring duties. Collier replied that it was not British practice "to conduct demotion in such a theatrical manner." He added that the press might get wind of such a practice and label it as "Gestapo tactics; that is, tactics against which Great Britain is fighting." Rejecting the scheme without reservation, he rubbed salt in the wound by pointing out that all service within the RAFVR is technically voluntary, that voluntary service differed from conscripted service and brought with it a relaxation of normal military discipline. In his opinion, discharge to other services was perfectly suitable.¹⁹⁴

193 VKPR 25/1/1/3: Paper by Ingr to the VKPR and MNO, 16.1.41.

194 MNO 13/67/1941: Collier to Kalla, 9.1.41. One case in point which received more than enough attention from both the Czechoslovak and British points of view, was that of an NCO pilot who, in December 1940, twice refused to go on operational flights over Belgium and Germany. Given the opportunity to think the matter over, he was again ordered on a mission and again refused. He had applied twice for transfer to a fighter squadron (a not-infrequent request from 311 in the early years) and had twice been refused. Given that a front-line fighter pilot's life expectancy was slightly less than two weeks at this stage of the war, this seems to indicate that the man was no coward. He was, however, demoted in the manner described by Kalla. Some local papers heard of this, and Collier's anger is clear from his tone when he told Kalla that the Air Ministry had only come to hear of it through the press coverage, hence his reference to "Gestapo tactics." One tactic used by the Gestapo was to send mail from Protectorate families to men who they believed were serving in Britain. If they received a reply, they were then informed that they would be tried and executed as traitors in the event of a German victory. Another technique, so the MNO believed, was to attempt to recruit such men as

The meeting of the 16th was attended by all the relevant commanders. Ingr noted that an *impasse* now existed which would be difficult to resolve: on the one hand, the British thought that removal from the RAF was punishment enough, and on the other hand, the Czechoslovaks wanted full powers of jurisdiction. General Rudolf Viest pointed out that a simple discharge without a full hearing gave the impression to the men that commanders could remove "uncomfortable" elements under the pretense of disciplinary offences. Beneš added that the Royal Air Force was now seen as the élite military arm, so in effect discharge was little more than gross humiliation. He also feared that the problems might become public "and could even lead to the dissolution of the Air Force itself." Slezák retailed his 'reserve section' idea, but Ingr dismissed this by pointing out that "the morally weak" would simply misbehave in the ranks to see out the rest of the war with a pick and shovel instead of a rifle in their hands. All were agreed that a change must be made to the Agreement at the earliest opportunity.¹⁹⁵ A request to the Air Ministry for substantive talks was despatched in March.¹⁹⁶

The DAFL sat on the request for four months and replied in late July. After the appropriate apologies for the delay, Collier wrote:

As you are aware, our concern has been to ensure that a man is not punished more than once for the same offence, by reasons of his being subject to more than one code of law, and I hope that the proposals which I set out below, and which meet our point of view, will at the same time fulfil your requirements.¹⁹⁷

In essence, the Air Ministry had no objection to the convening of Czechoslovak Reprimanding Courts after or before discharge from the RAFVR provided that the penalties awarded were limited to a reprimand or a formal dismissal from service in the air contingent, so in point of fact the exercise would be little more than a show trial with the sentence already fixed by the British authorities. Closing, he hoped that this solution would be agreeable, "and it does not appear that there is any necessity for any amendment to be made to the Agreement." Unfortunately, Janoušek's reply does not appear in these or the British files, but subsequent references to the existence of Reprimanding Courts seems to indicate that the scheme was adopted.

spies by threatening retribution on their families. [MNO 12/15614/1941: Minute to file by Moravec, undated.]

Air Vice-Marshal Sir Alfred Conrad Collier joined the RFC in 1915; Air Attaché to Moscow 1934-1937; Deputy Director of Plans 1938; DAFL 1940; SAO British Air Mission to Moscow 1941; SAO Allied Headquarters India 1942-1943; Deputy AOC Transport Command 1943-1945; Director-General of Technical Services 1946-1947.

195 MNO 13/163/1941: Meeting of 16.1.41.

196 VKPR 26/1/1/4: Janoušek to Air Ministry, 14.2.41.

197 VKPR 25/5/1/3: Collier to Janoušek, 22.7.41.

Many of the disciplinary difficulties experienced by the Czechoslovaks, whether they were political or military, were kept 'in-house', largely for reasons of prestige and security. The British were aware of the problems, however, and a short series of correspondence passed between the Air Ministry and the Foreign Office in late 1940 which swiftly clarified the position of the host nation. In November, Collier wrote to Strang and informed him that "a small number of Czech officers and NCOs [have], by their own bad example and disobedience to orders, undermined the morale of the units in which they serve."¹⁹⁸ He explained that these men had been posted out of the squadrons affected to the Depot at Cosford, but that this was no solution because they continued to damage loyalty and morale among the recruits. Having conferred with Janoušek - "who told me that he personally saw no objection to the subsequent internment of the people so removed" - Collier hereby applied to the Foreign Office for guidance.

Strang replied in early December. Roberts had told him that the Pioneer Corps would be a more suitable destination, a fair assessment since internment under any circumstances would remove such people from military service altogether. Strang accepted that these men were not necessary politically motivated, that they were "simply people whose character and sense of discipline are not up to the standards of the Royal Air Force."¹⁹⁹ An attached minute by John Ward noted that the Army rebels were definitely opposed to Beneš and his administration, but that these men were "really bad lots who would be unsuitable in any military formation." A final note by Roberts, who had spoken with Collier and Masaryk, indicated that the latter "would be very glad to have this question settled in any manner agreeable to the RAF."

We see here that Masaryk, and to some extent Janoušek, had given the green light to the Air Ministry to devise any practicable scheme to deal with unsuitable elements, yet still the MNO meetings went ahead in January 1941 in an attempt to alter the Agreement. As far as the British were concerned, troublesome Czechoslovaks were a problem for the Provisional Czechoslovak Government, but only after they had been expelled. All the former wanted was to purge RAF units of men whose behaviour threatened operational efficiency, but the latter felt aggrieved that they were not being given the opportunity to mete out the justice: an *impasse* indeed.²⁰⁰

198 FO 371/24369: Collier to Strang, 19.11.40.

199 *ibid.* Strang to Collier, 7.12.40.

200 It also seems more than possible that the Foreign Office and the Air Ministry were misinformed as to the 'crimes' committed. The MNO and VKPR files list complaints about promotion prospects, lack of morale, and a few cases of disobedience throughout September and October 1940, but the sense is that none of the men so charged were the "really bad lots" described by Ward in his minute. If anything, the files show a turbulent period in an Air Force which, like its Army counterpart, was still 'shaking down', men demanding answers to questions which had been first raised in France. It can

It is important not to overestimate the effects of these troubles in the Czechoslovak Air Force during the autumn of 1940 and the early days of 1941. Command difficulties in 311 (Bomber) Squadron should not lead the historian to conclusions of cowardice or base weakness. Very few men in that squadron had ever seen combat in a bomber, one of the most terrifying jobs in the air war, and losses had been hard to bear and difficult to replace. Further, the knowledge that capture by the enemy could lead to the deaths or imprisonment of their families in the Protectorate forced some to either seek service in a fighter squadron or simply refuse to fly. In response, the Beneš Government became heavy-handed, humiliating men before their peers and seeking the right to apply their own military codes towards these individuals.²⁰¹ Understandably, the British refused.

And yet when 450 officers and men banded together and demanded the removal of certain officers from their midst, Beneš meekly complied. No doubt what he might well have done was to throw the lot into the Pioneers or sought internment for them all, but to do so would have torn the heart out of his Air Force and his prestige would have collapsed. He and his general staff (with at least the exception of Janoušek) felt able to browbeat the man who did not want to die for them, but in the face of organised revolt the Beneš regime was shown to be virtually powerless. As for the British, all they wanted was peace in the camp so long as they remained the principal authority and the ultimate arbiters of justice. Perhaps it was as well for the Czechoslovak officers and airmen that they did.

only be speculation, but it is possible that Janoušek - perhaps acting under orders - represented the problems as the work of a few ruffians, thus saving himself the embarrassment of explaining all of the individual niggles which were involved, and which would have reflected badly on the Czechoslovak High Command. The British, acting on his information and knowing the numbers to be relatively small, felt they were simply dealing with unsuitable elements and not men who felt cheated, frightened or humiliated by demotion. [Good examples of the types of complaints appear in MNO 13/126/1940: Reports from Honington and Cosford, 8.9.40.]

John Guthrie Ward was educated at Wellington and Pembroke College, Cambridge; appointed 3rd Secretary at the Foreign Office 1931; Baghdad 1932; 2nd Secretary 1936; Cairo 1938; Acting 1st Secretary 1941.

201 A loose minute in the files of the Allied Administration Committee reveals part of the codes. The penalty of death was applied to cases of mutiny under martial law, desertion to the enemy, cowardice in the face of the enemy, the surrender of a fortified position to the enemy, and the transfer of military materials to the enemy. By way of contrast, the Polish list was more severe. The death sentence could be awarded for murder, crimes against the state, treason, espionage, crimes against the national economy, sabotage, shamming, self-wounding, desertion in the face of the enemy, refusal to obey an order in the face of the enemy, the failure of a commander to hold on to an objective or to capitulate without good cause and the surrender of military materials. [FO 371/24373: Loose minute, June 1940.]

PART TWO

1941-43

The three years covered by this section of the study represent the period when the Allies moved from the threat of disaster to the promise of victory. With the Soviets and Americans in, Churchill's 'Grand Alliance' was a reality by Christmas 1941, though many setbacks and disappointments lay ahead. The war in the air moved from desperate defence to defiant attack. The Czechoslovak Air Force had their rôle to play in this, but it was not, as we shall see, a rôle which was entirely equitable with some other sections of the foreign contingent. Neither was the political position of their government assured, and by the end of 1943 both the military and political aspects merged to provoke some bitter words from the Air Ministry. Finally, it should not be forgotten that something like 60,000 people had only recently arrived in an alien land, and the process of cultural integration was as equally important to many of them as the military duties they were allocated, so it seems apt that, as they began to learn a new life, so might we begin this central part of the study.

Hearths and minds.

From the moment of arrival in the summer of 1940, the language problem *vis-à-vis* the Allied personnel was never far from the minds of anyone, not least the Air Ministry who had been charged with the task of employing the men as efficiently and rapidly as possible. This burden of instant education fell immediately to the British Council. Formed in 1934, the Council's initial aims were to promote the life, language and culture of Britain abroad.¹ When war came in 1939, the Ministry of Information absorbed much of the Council's promotional work in the affected countries and left it with a greatly reduced range of activities, essentially education and the maintenance of Britain's cultural profile. Even these, so the Treasury thought, were "a luxury in wartime."²

The sudden influx of refugees from occupied Europe enabled the Council to argue its case with more confidence. By insisting that the cultural welfare of these people fell within the remit of the Council, the Executive Committee successfully

1 Donaldson, F: *The British Council: The First Fifty Years* (Jonathan Cape, 1984), pp 29-30. In his inaugural speech, the Prince of Wales described the Council as "a proper organisation to spread knowledge and appreciation of its language, literature, art, science and education."

2 Eastment, D J: *The Policies and Position of the British Council From the Outbreak of War to 1950* (PhD, University of Leeds, 1982), p27.

lobbied for a range of suitable proposals.³ Yet this should not obscure the core function of the Council by creating the image that it was a benevolent, altruistic body posing as the conductor for all things wholesome, decent and British. By its own admission, its primary aim was "political, or at any rate, imperialistic", encouraging foreign nationals to "appreciate our friendship."⁴ Content with its mission, the Council pursued these aims and its agenda with considerable success.

Things changed when the military men arrived after the Fall of France. Reacting swiftly to the new situation, the Treasury convened a meeting on August 28th, 1940 at which it was generally agreed that the Council would assume all responsibility for the cultural and educational needs of the foreigners now in the country. This meant that the direct teaching of English (as opposed to the indirect exposure to it) would now become part of the Council's portfolio of activities. To fund the programme, the Treasury allotted a further grant of £17,000. It was also agreed that the Council would teach the language to the foreign servicemen and internees, "but only when asked by Service Departments and the Home Office to do so, when these departments would bear the cost."⁵ This implied that the Council could not act without a direct request from the Service Departments or without clearing its proposed actions with them beforehand. This was to cause problems, for the chain of supply and demand could be broken or kinked by difficulties in communication or resistance by the Air Ministry or the War Office.

Evidence of this survives in the British Council files. Under the terms of the new financing arrangement, the Council invoiced the Air Ministry for £316 for services provided up to and including September 9th, 1940.⁶ But decisions on the amount of

3 BW/68/3: 39th Meeting of the Executive Committee, 21.9.39. The scope of activities was to be selective, concentrating on only the most educated persons, and only those who were stranded or alone in the country. The main elements of the new scheme were the reunion of foreign nationals; further integration between refugees and British citizens; the procurement of free tickets for the theatre, cinema and concerts; and the organisation of 'receptions', lectures, recitals and cultural events particular to the foreign nationals such as traditional dancing and art exhibitions. (Donaldson; *op.cit.*, pp 112-113.) It can be seen from this programme that the Council was by no means geared to catering for the recreational needs of the average soldier or airman who arrived bedraggled and tired during the summer of 1940.

4 BW/2/47: First meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Teaching of English to Foreigners, 21.6.40. A further note complained that too many foreigners tended to learn English "for their own private purposes" and that "comparatively few care for culture and even fewer want to be anglicised."

5 Donaldson, *op.cit.* p114.

6 BW/2/231: 9.9.40. The actual figure was £316, one shilling and fourpence, but for ease of reading all amounts have been shorn of the odd shillings and pence.

At the request of the Air Ministry, fourteen teachers of English (all male) had been initially deployed to the Allied air units on August 7th, five to Cosford (the first Czechoslovak air depot), and seven to the corresponding Polish depot at Blackpool. These men were paid £30 per month and used books of a total value of £65. This sum was later queried by the Air Ministry, and included a request for itemised accounts in future. [BW/2/231: Air Commodore W. M. Page to British Council. 11.11.40.]

teaching required by individual units were taken either by the unit commanders or the Education Officer at Fighter Command, Wing-Commander de la Bère. By November 1940, this officer complained to the Council that "many units in his Command had had no language teaching, nor had they any grammar books", in response to which he was informed that no authority had been forthcoming to appoint additional teachers, hence the Council politely referred him back to the Air Ministry.⁷

By Christmas 1940, the number of teachers employed on behalf of the Air Ministry had increased from fourteen to only sixteen for a combined contingent of over 10,000 men, and while the Air Ministry paid for the books, newspapers, fiction and technical works, the basic stuff of teaching - grammars in Polish and Czech - had been translated, produced and supplied at the Council's expense. By the New Year of 1941, the bill had climbed to £2,110, representing services provided between the beginning of September to the end of December 1940. A cheque for the earlier amount of £316 finally arrived in February 1941.⁸ In November 1941, an internal note was issued concerning the invoice for the £2,110 "which had been lost by the Air Ministry."⁹

In April 1941, the Air Ministry sent a summary of the present situation to the British Council. It included a revised list of the technical and general terms which it wanted taught to the Allied aircrews as part of the general aim "to teach every Allied officer and man to use the English language operationally and technically." Thus far, the Ministry had employed five methods in the furtherance of this aim: (1) the widespread use of interpreters and the dispersal of such men into RAF units "where possible"; (2) the translated manuals supplied by the Council and linguaphone records of operational phrases; (3) the use of British personnel commanding either in the air or on the ground; (4) "use of specially selected Allied personnel to lead in the air"; (5) the use of Allied personnel in Operations Rooms for radio communications. The problem, concluded the Ministry, was that this still left a force "that is not fully efficient and has little flexibility", and suffered from (1) a lack of knowledge of operational language; (2)

7 BW/2/231: Correspondence of 5.11.40. De la Bère also expressed his sincere thanks for the work already done by the Council, "but his anxiety to have more language teaching is caused by the fact that a Czech squadron holds the record of 105 brought down last month, and he feels there must be many other Czech and Polish pilots who would be equally useful, but who must know some English before they can be let loose in the skies."

8 BW/2/231: Invoice to Air Ministry, 9.1.41. The Council was deluged with pleas from Allied stations for books, films, magazines - anything which could either improve the men's command of the language or at least entertain them in some measure. In many cases, the Council met the costs from its own funds. It should also be noted that there are many letters of thanks from RAF stations all over Britain for the efforts made by the Council to meet all their educational needs.

9 BW/2/231: Internal memorandum, 10.11.41. The Air Ministry were "extremely apologetic" that the account had not yet been paid, but "according to their records they have already paid £316 of the sum." This was a separate amount, as we have seen, so clearly the accounting mechanism at the Air Ministry was not functioning at maximum efficiency.

an inability to absorb or read instructions; (3) the non-possibility of employment in composite crews, especially in bomber work.¹⁰

It is tempting to blame the Air Ministry itself for these difficulties, but we must also bear in mind the pressures under which it operated during the second half of 1940. Even so, though we cannot level an accusation of outright negligence in regard to the language training of the Allied crews, there is certainly a hint of indifference in their behaviour. Nor was this attitude confined to the Royal Air Force. By November 1940, the Council heard reports that men of the Czechoslovak Army "had been anxiously awaiting the supply of English teachers since August."¹¹ An internal memorandum also referred to a plea from the Czechoslovak Military that "the lack of mental food for the Czech Army is causing them despair." There was even talk of writing directly to Churchill.¹² Upon enquiry, the Council was told directly by the War Office that "any cultural or educational work amongst the Allied armies" was not required "on anything more than a trivial scale."¹³ It was not until April 1941 that a suitable working arrangement had been established, and even then there were delays in its implementation.¹⁴

It is clear from these scant letters and memoranda that the work of the Council did not feature high in the list of priorities of either the Air Ministry or the War Office, despite the valuable and sometimes valiant efforts of the Council in all other spheres.¹⁵ By January 1942, a survey conducted by the Czechoslovak Inspectorate indicated that the average level of English held by all ranks was a little under 58%. This figure had been calculated from the end-of-year written and oral tests conducted with the officers and other ranks of 310 and 312 squadrons, and it roughly corresponds to the modern-day equivalent of Intermediate-level, good enough to make oneself understood but far from any real fluency.¹⁶ Almost certainly, the tendency for the men to associate with their own countrymen, thereby obviating the need for speaking English, would have affected their ability or motivation to learn, but it seems that British policy must bear

10 BW/2/231: Memorandum from the Air Ministry to the British Council, 23.4.41.

11 BW/2/51: British Council Advisory Committee on Foreigners in Great Britain; Minutes of 7th meeting, 7.11.40.

12 BW/2/229: Memorandum to the Secretary-General, A J S White, 12.11.40.

13 BW/2/229: Correspondence of 28.1.41. White further admitted that this attitude was causing no little resentment amongst the Allied governments.

14 Donaldson, *op.cit.*, pp 116-7.

15 Donaldson, *op.cit.*, pp 112-123. Also, BW/2/51 (Advisory Council on Foreigners in Great Britain), and BW/2/45 (Resident Foreigners Hospitality Committee). Both of these files contain exhaustive information on the cultural activities of the Council from the outbreak of war to December 1942. A particularly successful event was an Anglo-Czechoslovak reception on February 15th, 1940, attended by Beneš and his wife together with Jan Masaryk.

16 ČsL VB 131/CI-3/1/76: Examination Results, January 1942. The full range of results moved from 5% to 95%.

some of the responsibility for these relatively low levels of achievement after one and a half years of exile. On the other hand, Janoušek felt that the British system of teaching the language and RAF practice simultaneously actually restricted advancement. In his words, it was "an exacting task which involved long hours of extra study in English classes and tended to lower morale." He approached the Air Ministry with a scheme to cover basic language training at the Depot from the day of recruitment, but the DAFL rejected this with the argument that language-learning was more effective in situations where English was the principal tongue.¹⁷

It could even be tentatively advanced that the paucity of bi-linguists in the Czechoslovak air contingent actually served Air Ministry purposes in that operational control was firmly held by British commanders who had very few English-speaking Czechs or Slovaks to worry about. Of greater importance to this study, the Air Ministry admission that the Allied forces were still not operating at full efficiency and lacked flexibility merely adds weight to the contention that these air contingents were employed more for their propaganda value and less for their actual contribution to the war effort.

But these problems were very real for the men involved, and anyone who has been to a foreign state with little or no knowledge of the language can relate to the sense of isolation this produces. In material terms, however, they lived identically to their British counterparts. They wore the same uniform (in itself a desirable thing to have, especially after the Battle of Britain); they ate the same food, slept in the same bunks, flew the same planes and shot at the same enemy. The Czechoslovaks also received the same pay as their British allies, and in the case of the air contingent this was a direct benefit from membership of the RAFVR.¹⁸ On July 30th 1940, a meeting was held at the War Office which addressed the question of pay for the land forces but which also set the precedent for the Air Force too. Present at the meeting on behalf of the Czechoslovak Provisional Government were Dr Eduard Outrata, the Finance Minister, and Dr Jaroslav Kraus, then responsible for the Department of Information.

17 ČsL VB 120/CI-2D/1/75: Minutes of a short meeting concerning language training, 13.8.41. Janoušek recorded that the Air Ministry was prepared to sanction a short spell of pre-training at the Depot as part of "acclimatisation."

18 Arguments over pay, pensions and maintenance allowances litter the pages of the Foreign Office and Cabinet files from June 1940 to the New Year of 1941. Most of the pressure was applied by the French whose men, on average, received less in real terms than their British opposite numbers. In late June 1940, the Treasury hosted a meeting which formulated the prime directive for all concerned. Foreign contingents which insisted on independent status would accept responsibility for pay-scales and all other remunerations, but men enlisted in British forces - which included the RAFVR - would be paid at standard British rates. [FO 371/24366 (271): 27.6.40.]

In the first instance, it was agreed that all service pay would be met from the credits advanced by the British to the Provisional Czechoslovak Government, and that the money would be regularly transferred as a lump sum for distribution by Czechoslovak pay officers. It was also agreed that all servicemen would receive pay at the "basic" British rate appropriate to rank; that is, with no additional increments according to trade qualifications or length of service. An exception to this concerned officers serving in the Ministry of National Defence in London. They would receive an increment of four shillings per day on top of the basic rate to assist with the costs of living in the capital. All other officers would receive a single grant of £15 towards the cost of a new uniform. Other ranks would receive standard British uniform, weaponry and general privileges. Ration and leave entitlements would be the same as those enjoyed by all British service personnel, and accommodation would be by billet where possible, but lodging allowances would be paid in other cases, again at the flat rate. On the question of income tax and other deductions made by the State, a short conversation threw light on the sensitive political environment of the time. Kraus wished to know which government would receive income tax paid by the men, and although the minutes do not record the subsequent discussion, we may reasonably suppose that any levy which benefited the Czechoslovak Government would have given rise to considerable friction given the different allegiances and views held by exile group as a whole. It was therefore tabled by Outrata that his Government would prefer the men to receive "lower rates of pay with freedom from taxation."¹⁹

And so although each man had to cope with his own personal difficulties of exile life, at least he could genuinely believe that his new hosts did not treat him differently in terms of pay, conditions and entitlements. We have seen earlier how the evacuees had been temporarily accommodated at Cholmondeley Camp, and also how some of the difficulties which had arisen there might in part have been triggered by poor conditions. Prompted by this, the British military authorities made the first serious move towards improving the welfare of the men by despatching Sir Thomas Cook MP, representing the War Office Welfare Department, to the Camp in early September 1940.²⁰ His aim was to survey conditions and learn what improvements might be made, especially in

19 MNO 14/245/1940: Minutes of the Finance Meeting at the War Office, 30.7.40. The proposal concerning taxation was not settled on this occasion, but in fact became the procedure. It suited the Czechoslovaks, in that their men were not discriminated against in terms of pay; and it suited the British, who were relieved of the need to implement the State system of taxation. [Interview with Squadron Leader Marcel Ludikar, May 1997].

20 Lt.Colonel Sir Thomas Russell Albert Mason Cook (1902-1970) was educated at Eton and Worcester College, Oxford; Conservative MP for Norfolk (Northern) 1931-1945; Liaison Officer to the Allied Forces, 1941-1946; awarded the White Lion, King Charles IV and Military Merit medals by the Czechoslovak Government.

educational and recreational facilities. After consulting with General Bedřich Miroslav, the Officer-Commanding, he made the following recommendations.

First, more mental stimulation was required in the form of books, newspapers and magazines, preferably in English and French if Czech was unavailable, and especially those with plentiful illustrations. Second, he accepted Miroslav's request for more sporting equipment, and he promised to organise materials for volleyball, soccer and other field sports. Alert to the problems caused by the single radio, raised by the British Council a month before, he accepted the need for more receivers, and he agreed when Miroslav and other unit commanders suggested facilities for a mobile cinema to be set up in a large mess tent which could also function as a reading-room. There was a canteen in the Camp operated by the NAAFI, but he learned that Lady Cholmondeley had also assisted her overseas "guests" by making space available in the Castle itself for a small canteen and recreation room, both staffed by the Women's Volunteer Service of which she was a senior member. When Sir Thomas met her for afternoon tea, she offered two smaller rooms and the use of a piano. Finally, with autumn drawing in, he promised to recommend a clothing drive, concentrating on woollens and socks, and in this the WVS and the YMCA were prepared to lend their full assistance.²¹ Cook continued his work into early 1941, visiting 310 Squadron at Duxford on New Year's Eve 1940, advocating similar amenities as those soon to be enjoyed by the Army. He reported that the men received three English lessons a week ("given voluntarily by a retired Cambridge professor"), enjoyed twice-weekly cinema shows in the camp and ENSA shows periodically, and on the subject of comforts generally noted that the men's requirements were being amply addressed by "voluntary bodies" in the Cambridge area.²²

In essence, the allocation of comforts was bound up with the greater concept of morale. Ever since Roman times, and probably beyond, army commanders have been keenly aware that high morale in any fighting force is crucial to that force's efficiency. No less aware of this were the British, but it took them a couple of years to really formulate their perceptions of Allied morale, and how to maintain it, into a policy document of great depth and considerable length. Unfortunately, space does not permit a full examination of its many fascinating and varied clauses, but what follows should convey the overall sense of the document and, more importantly, the British view of

21 MNO 14/296/1940: 7.9.40. Report by Miroslav to the MNO. He declared the visit to be a total success, adding that "Captain Sir Cook looked at these proposals very favourably."

22 VKPR 26/1/1/4: Report on the visit of Sir Thomas Cook to 310 Squadron, 1.1.41. He had also organised an inter-Allied football tournament for February and March 1941. The report noted that Group-Captain Beaumont's wife, herself a Czech, was supervising the activities.

their unexpected allies as it developed over two years of collaboration and close observation.

The preamble to the document acknowledged that time had passed since the "urgent atmosphere" of 1940 and the subsequent tensions generated by the 1941 raids; that now, after two and half years, the various Allied air forces were fully engaged in the combined war effort.²³ This was followed by a broad declaration that "history revealed no precedent to guide the Government or the Service in their planning for the reception, acceptance and operative effect of the Allied air forces." This could be interpreted as an almost apologetic *caveat*, but the object of its inclusion was to introduce the five basic principles which time and experience had now permitted to emerge as the guiding philosophy of the Air Ministry in its relations with the Allied air forces. These were:

- (i) The Principle of Nationality - the preservation of national, and as far as possible, Air Force identity; the retention of national traditions and customs, rituals, religion and culture etc.
- (ii) The Principle of Legality - the recognition of the right to be subject to their own national or service laws; the equal obligation to be subject to British and service laws [*sic*]; the balance of justice under such dual legislation.
- (iii) The Principle of Equality - the recognition of absolute equality [to include pay and conditions, ranks, trades, training, vocations and service.]
- (iv) The Principles of Concentration - as opposed to indiscriminate dispersal of Allied Air Forces through the Royal Air Force; the avoidance of disintegration due to over-dispersal; the advantage of coherent national integral units.
- (v) The Principle of Construction - the ultimate creation of independent self-contained national air forces for future national use in Europe; the formation of all-allied units towards that end; the final reconstruction of national air forces on their withdrawal from Britain.²⁴

It must be emphasised here that these were the absolute rules as far as the Air Ministry and Air Council were concerned when it came to the administration, deployment and use of all the Allied air forces then on British soil. More to the point, we shall see later in the present study how a number of these 'principles' were altered, twisted or simply ignored in the case of the Czechoslovak Air Force, but in the eyes of the British, these

23 ČsL VB 121/CI-2d/1/175: 'The Maintenance of Good Relations and Allied Air Force Morale', p1. In a covering letter to the Czechoslovak Inspectorate dated 6.5.42, the DAFL insisted that the policies described in the document "have been found by experience to foster good relations, to assist the smooth administration of Allied air forces and to promote their well-being, happiness and morale." It was also emphasised that the memorandum was for guidance only, "and does not impede existing Station practices." It was certainly considered important by the Air Council because the appended instructions required it to follow the Allied squadrons from station to station. Oddly, no copy of this document surfaced during the research for this study in British archives, neither in the files of the DAAC/DAFL or the Air Council.

24 *ibid.*, pp 1-2. Some lesser elements have been omitted from this list to conserve space.

five tenets were "the soil upon which allied morale can grow; whether it flourishes or wilts is determined by what it has to weather and the treatment it receives."

The Air Ministry then recapitulated the existing practices in regard to the command structure within the Allied air forces, arguing that "morale at the top is as important as morale 'among the troops'." This, claimed the document, was to be maintained in the following ways:

- (a) A full appreciation of the contribution to the war effort by parliament, press, publicity and propaganda.
- (b) The conclusion of agreements pledging mutual co-operation towards common aims and ideals.
- (c) A sympathetic and co-operative review of all proposals put forward by Allied Air Force Inspectorates or Headquarters.
- (d) A ready concession of all just claims affecting the efficient administration of all allied air forces.
- (e) The solutions of "problems" by open conference and discussion in an atmosphere free from bias or prejudice.²⁵

As far as the Czechoslovak Air Force was concerned, items (c) and (e) in particular were to be swept aside in the near future over the question of independence, but in the main, these five points said little that was new. Items (a) and (b) were already a reality or committed the Air Ministry to nothing tangible, whereas item (d) was little more than a platitude in that the next four pages were devoted to describing the administrative procedures as determined by the Ministry, setting them in stone for the rest of the war.²⁶

With regard to the welfare and morale of the other ranks, the general policy was 'keep them busy'. The Ministry identified certain key factors as dangerous to morale. These were: enforced inaction due to a variety of causes (i.e. adverse weather, cancelled missions, lack of enemy activity etc.); geographical dispersal (the separation of squadrons away from concentrated formations or a particular locality); the stress of redeployment to another station or Group; bad war news; and problems associated with

25 *ibid.*, p3.

26 For example, Section (C), Paragraph 3 was concerned with the rôle and duties of the Senior Allied Officer (SAO). Even if equal in rank, the SAO was always subordinate to the will of the Station Commander who, in turn, was always a British officer as determined by the inter-governmental agreements (in the Czechoslovak case, Article 2, Paragraph 2). He was also adjacent to - and not part of - the chain of command between the squadron commander and the station commander: "The station commander will naturally consult him about the squadrons; he may want, from someone outside the squadron, confirmation or correction of opinions formed. In such cases, the SAO must give sound balanced interpretation of his views. Only with great tact will he avoid being suspect. He must never appear to stand in between the squadron commander and the station commander but outside both." [*ibid.*, p6. Original emphasis.] Exceptions were made if the SAO had operational flying duties, but in effect he was little more than a conduit for morale and minor problem-solving.

leave (where to go, what to do, and who to do it with). All of these elements, claimed the Ministry, had a greater impact on Allied crews than native squadrons.

Inaction was to be mitigated by providing "entertainment, shows, dances, games, competitions, lectures and even serious educational or cultural training for those so disposed." Geographical dispersal was not strictly a matter which lay within Allied hands, for it was a command decision made at Group or Command level. Even so, the Ministry argued that "the more we are together, the happier we will be", and permitted small, localised adjustments to be made in favour of Allied squadrons if the principle of concentration was served. Much the same thinking applied to redeployment, the theory here being that a squadron move forced the men to come to terms with a new environment, possibly even a new dialect of English to wrestle with, and certainly a new station commander who might or might not be disposed towards working with Allied crews. On the subject of bad war news, again some form of entertainment was recommended to overcome "an unusually heavy mood of depression", but emphasis was to fall on the engagement of "prominent allied people" to give lectures on the war situation or arrange morale-raising tours of arms factories or shipyards. With leave, the document noted that men tended to "stay local" or spend their time in areas where their home nationals were concentrated. No solution was offered for the problems arising here, but the Ministry drew attention to the various hospitality organisations which would advise and assist any man who approached them. The important factor was to draw the men away from the station or camp if possible, for it was accepted that leave - if well spent - was an invaluable boost to morale.²⁷

It was to these national associations which the great majority turned for help when faced with time to kill. We have seen earlier that the Czechoslovak Refugee Trust Fund (CRTF) was prepared to help the British with recruitment for the Czechoslovak Legion in France in the early months of 1940, but as the evacuees began to arrive *en masse*, so the Fund increased its activities by orders of magnitude to embrace the new demands.

The CRTF had its origins in the British Committee for Refugees set up in September 1938 to deal with the displaced of the Sudetenland, be they

²⁷ *ibid.* pp 7-10. The document closed with a short paragraph on 'Tolerance', for the Ministry understood that the maintenance of good morale was ultimately dependent "upon a tolerant and sympathetic understanding" of the plight of the Allies who were so far from home. Nevertheless, the Ministry required no outstanding concessions to be made. In its own words: "This is no plea for 'wet-nursing', it is no plaint for weakness, but rather for increased strength. If anyone who is working with allied personnel feels so die-hard English that he can see nothing good or useful in a 'foreigner' then he were better not employed with them." On the one hand, this clearly demonstrates that a change of heart had taken place in the two years between the arrival of the men in 1940 and their contribution to the war effort since then. Failing that, it was a piece of glib propaganda designed to bolster the morale of the Allied commanders who read it. Most likely, the truth contains elements of both, and tolerance undoubtedly was a matter for each individual.

Sudetendeutsche, Czechs, Slovaks or Austrians. After the destruction of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, the CRTF was created as a separate entity, superseding the original Committee, to administer funds provided by the British on behalf of the new influx of refugees. In total, the numbers were estimated to have been 3500 Czechs and Slovaks, 2000 Sudetendeutsche, 850 Germans and 475 Austrians by the outbreak of war.²⁸

The CRTF received its money from the remnants of an earlier financing scheme which had gone awry. After Munich, the British gave the new Czechoslovak Government £4,000,000 to be spent directly on internal refugees plus an advance of £6,000,000 for reconstruction. The money did not actually leave England, for it was held by the London branch of the Czechoslovak National Bank. After March 15th, 1939, approximately £3,500,000 was left in the account designated for reconstruction, and £3,250,000 in the refugee account. It was this sum which was placed at the disposal of the CRTF, though to make sure that the cash was used honourably, the British packed the directorship with their own people save one.²⁹

The CRTF was different to all the other refugee organisations in that it functioned as a controlling body for a number of specific groups, each representing a variety of political and national interests. The two most prominent were the *Landmannschaft* (The Association of Fellow-Countrymen) which was a cultural and social organisation for Czechs and Slovaks, and the *Arbeitskreis* (Working Committee) which brought together the various political and racial dimensions. The CRTF had a cultural commission which was advised by both of these to produce a comprehensive, liberal programme of educational classes, entertainment, legal and personal counselling, and social events designed to bring Czechoslovak national life to the attention of the general public. According to Lafitte, writing at the time, the CRTF "has done much to maintain friendly relations between the Czechs and the British people."³⁰

28 Lafitte, F: *The Internment of Aliens* (Libris 1988) p53. This volume was first published by Penguin in 1940.

29 The Director of the CRTF was Sir Henry Bunbury. The Trustees were Sir Malcolm Delevingne, Ewart Culpin and Erich Turk. The unspent reconstruction money caused flutters at the Treasury. It had been decided to distribute the money to "British holders in respect of coupons due on the Czech External Debt", and a "British holder" also included Czechoslovaks who had settled in the UK before the war began. However, because the claims took so long to process, and the holders appeared to be few in number, it seemed that one Czech family was due £753,000 and another £537,000. A secret Treasury document conceded that "it would be too great a public scandal to go on with the scheme in present circumstances" and examined alternative methods of disposing the money. [FO 371/24292 (205): Treasury to Foreign Office, 11.9.40.] *n.b.* The money discussed here should not be confused with the gold assets mentioned in Part One.

30 Lafitte, *op.cit.*, p54.

The primary difficulty was within the terms of remit for the CRTF itself. Even though by 1941 the general *milieu* had significantly altered in regard to the refugee situation, still the CRTF was bound by its original function, "the emigration and settlement of refugees affected by the Munich Agreement" with particular attention paid to Sudeten Germans and Communists.³¹ We have seen how this was, at times, liberally interpreted by parties whose idea of "emigration" was enlistment in the Czechoslovak forces and subsequent despatch to the French front, but the norm was the rigid application of the original rules. This was demonstrated in late 1940 by a request from the War Office for guidance concerning available funds held by the CRTF and any peripheral agencies. Under the terms of the general pay settlement noted above, all Czechoslovak servicemen received basic British rates; that is, without increments to cover the maintenance of dependants. In a number of cases where wives and families had also joined the men in Britain, it had become apparent that real hardship was forcing the women and children to turn to charity, but the War Office was alert to the possibility that an official re-structuring of the pay agreement would "create a precedent for all manner of other claims."³² In the event, there being no extra funds of any kind, the Treasury suggested granting the Provisional Czechoslovak Government permission to use some of its credits to meet the problem. What this difficulty indicates is that the British felt, quite justifiably, that the Czechs should accept responsibility for the welfare of their nationals within all reasonable limits, and this attitude is reinforced by the events relating to the creation of the Czechoslovak Institute in London.

Despite the eloquent wording of Bruce Lockhart, from which it could be inferred that *he* was the driving force behind the Institute, assisted by the British Council, the idea came in fact from the Czechoslovaks themselves.³³ In August 1940, the Council received a letter from Jaroslav Kraus recommending "an all-embracing Czechoslovak association."³⁴ There was already an existing base for social events known as the Czech Centre in Clifton Gardens, London, "opened with a flourish of trumpets" by Beneš in the late summer of 1939, but despite the fact that it was "a small club, apparently overcrowded", it was also a hotbed of intrigue and faction, hence Kraus's call for an "all-embracing" reincarnation, political unity now being the spirit of the

31 FO 371/24369; C 12305/1419/62; Memo of 11.11.40. A full collection of official documents relating to the origins and work of the CRTF may be found in HO 294/5.

32 FO 371/24369; Minute of 19.10.40. The "other claims", though not detailed in this exchange, probably related to pensions, widow's allowances and disability awards, all three of which were discussed at length in the August meetings of the AFOSC [See CAB 85/19].

33 "Another activity which occupied much of my time was the formation of the Czechoslovak Institute in London...[a] project sponsored and financed by the British Council." [Bruce Lockhart, R H: *Comes The Reckoning* (Putnam 1947) pp 111-112.]

34 BW 27/3: Kraus to A.J.S. White, 10.8.40.

times.³⁵ Not that this was the argument which impressed the British Council, for from their perspective a precedent had already been set in the establishment of the *Ognisko Polskie*, or Polish Hearth. Accepting that earlier enthusiasm for the Hearth had "aroused certain aspirations which will be very difficult, if not impossible, to gratify", the Council accepted the proposal with the proviso that the Foreign Office signalled agreement. Hopes that the CRTF might contribute to the scheme foundered on the conditions mentioned above but, more to the point, that the Czechoslovaks themselves might resent such interference.³⁶

Bruce Lockhart's involvement did not begin until a month or so after the Council had begun canvassing for opinions. In early September, Roberts wrote and advised them not to place the Polish and Czech centres too close to each other. Having consulted Bruce Lockhart, he felt that this would "only encourage the possibility of drawing invidious comparisons and, if there should be any friction, it will be increased by physical contiguity."³⁷ This is an interesting statement in itself, for it highlights the different views held by the British Council and the Foreign Office. Roberts was responding to a suggestion from the Council that a programme of "knitting" the social affairs of the two countries together could be instigated "in the spirit of co-operation", beginning with a mutual reception held at the Polish Hearth.³⁸ The rationale behind the Council scheme was rooted in the knowledge that "in the past, there has always been a considerable amount of jealousy and friction between Poland and Czechoslovakia", thus this coming together would, it was felt, prepare the ground for reconciliation. Sweeping this noble plan aside, Frank Roberts pointedly informed them that the Czechs and Poles were not political equals in this country, and any reception held at the Polish Hearth should be delayed before the Czechoslovaks were in the position to return the compliment. "This is a tender plant," he added, "which should not be forced on too much."³⁹ Responding, the Secretary-General of the British Council, A.J.S. White,

35 BW 27/3: Minute by Nancy Parkinson, 13.8.40.

36 *ibid.* Nancy Parkinson, whose opinions carried no little weight in the British Council, qualified these thoughts by adding that, in her personal view, the facts indicated that "so many Czechs dislike and mistrust the Trust Fund." In his *Diaries*, Bruce Lockhart mentioned that the *Evening Standard* (his former employers) had attacked the Provisional Government as unrepresentative and championed the position of the Czech and Slovak Communists who were against the war. Dismissing this, he added: "Truth is that the Sudeten, Jewish and Czech Communists have collared the machinery of the Czech Refugee Fund." [Young, K (ed): *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, 1939-1965* (Macmillan 1980). Entry for August 16th 1940, p73.] This was probably pitching it a bit strong, but one can understand the natural resentment of many émigré Czechs and Slovaks at the activities of the Fund which always seemed to place the needs of the Sudetendeutsche at the head of the priority list.

37 BW 27/3: 5.9.40. Roberts to British Council.

38 BW 27/3: Circulated internal Minute, 26.8.40.

39 BW 27/3: 5.9.40. Roberts to British Council. In emphasising that the Czechoslovak Government had only Provisional status, he warned the Council that the Czechs were therefore "a little

agreed, further suggesting a Steering Committee to see the plan through. This, too, was rejected by Roberts because no such organ was needed in the case of the Polish Hearth, but on this occasion his objections were ignored.⁴⁰ The new Committee, with Bruce-Lockhart in attendance, met at the end of October 1940.⁴¹

From this point, things moved fairly rapidly given the nature of the times. Premises were found, two miles from the Polish Hearth, at 18 Grosvenor Place. With an annual rent of £300, plus another £350 in rates and taxes, this was not cheap. Furniture for the eleven rooms was purchased locally, modifications and decorations carried out by Czechoslovak volunteers, and the whole place was ready for its ceremonial opening on January 21st 1941 by Anthony Eden, an event missed by Bruce-Lockhart due to illness.⁴²

From the start, the Czechoslovak Institute was heavily supported by the British Council. The projection for the financial year 1941/2 envisaged a £2500 subsidy, taking into consideration an expected income of £300 from subscriptions and donations, and a further £100 from overnight room rental and private hire. Food and drink would be sold on a limited-profit basis.⁴³ By 1942, that estimate had increased to £4820 as the probable subsidy required to keep the Institute viable in 1944. Of particular interest are the amounts expected in contributions from the relevant governments. The Belgians, Dutch and Norwegians paid half of the running costs of their own national houses, while the Greeks and the Yugoslavs donated £250 and £300 respectively. The Poles and the Czechoslovaks, however, were noted as offering "odd amounts only", with the latter being specifically flagged as being unreliable.⁴⁴ By 1945 that attitude had

touchy lest they be treated by the Poles as poor relations."

40 BW 27/3: Correspondence between the British Council and the Foreign Office, 16.9.40 and 27.9.40. Kraus, the 'originator' of the idea, was the Czechoslovak representative.

41 BW 27/3: Minutes of 31.10.40 At this first meeting, it was decided that Bruce Lockhart would be the Chairman of the Executive Committee, and that the name of the new association would be the Czechoslovak Institute.

42 Bruce Lockhart; *Comes The Reckoning*, p112.

43 BW 27/3: Undated fiscal projection issued before April 1941. The annual subscriptions were set at 2s 6d for Czechoslovak nationals and 5s for British student members. The actual balance for 1941 was £5,093, of which £380 was income from profits and subscriptions. In June 1941, the Lord Mayor's Czechoslovak Refugee Relief Fund (totally separate from the CRTF) offered £3,500 to the Institute on condition that it be freely open to "all Czechoslovak residents and refugees from Nazi oppression in this country." This proviso was practically unnecessary, but this accounts for the boost in the projected figure. [BW 27/3: 5.6.41].

44 BW 108/1: Estimate of expenditure, 17.11.42. It should be noted that, though this file contains the general records of the National Houses in London, only a few papers concerning the Czechoslovak Institute have survived. At the time of this estimate, the bank account for the Institute showed that it had only £251 in liquid funds.

changed, and the Czechoslovak Government notified the Council that it wished to continue the Institute's existence at its own cost.⁴⁵

The primary function of the Institute was to be a non-political club which would reflect and preserve Czechoslovak culture while offering somewhere to go, and perhaps to sleep, to servicemen on leave in London. It was also expected to act as a co-ordinating body, a focal point, for the variety of Czechoslovak groups and societies scattered around the country. At the time, it was estimated that 15,000 Czechoslovak nationals were in Britain (to include 5000 or so servicemen). There were branches of the Friends of Czechoslovakia Society in Liverpool and Leeds, with Masaryk Societies in Oxford, Cambridge, Leeds and others, including Scotland. New groups, such as the Czechoslovak Women's Society based at the Institute, were welcomed.⁴⁶

Records of a luncheon shared between Nancy Parkinson and unnamed members of the Czechoslovak Military Information Division show how the latter's conception of the Institute was in tune with that of the British Council. Miss Parkinson suggested a range of services which would provide information about local amusements, cinemas, libraries and other accommodation if required. The suggestion was received "with great enthusiasm, as both the military and the Air Force authorities, feel that their men have nowhere to turn to when visiting London." For their part, the Czechoslovak military would issue an Order of the Day to all ranks and distribute a card showing the location of the Institute in London.⁴⁷ Even so, programmes of events which have survived show that the entertainment was very much geared towards the higher thinker. Classical music recitals, literary readings, poetry discussions, historical lectures and similar arrangements formed the staple cultural diet of visitors to the Institute.⁴⁸ But there were few dances, and though on balance the Institute dealt with military and

45 BW 108/1: British Council memorandum to the Foreign Office, 8.8.45. The Czechoslovak Institute in London survived until the Communist coup of 1948 when the British Government closed it down.

46 HO 294/72: British Council briefing to the Home Office, undated but probably issued in late 1940 or very early 1941 judging by the terminology which suggests that the Institute was not yet in being. The Council also drew attention to the estimated 30,000 Czechoslovak nationals in Canada who, it was hoped, would use the Institute as the centre-point of their communications with Britain. The Scottish Czechoslovak House received an annual grant of £400, with the Edinburgh Poles receiving £700 and the Free French £800 (all figures represent the 1943 projection). In total, *all* national houses received a grant of £27,438 for 1942/3 with the Polish Hearth receiving the largest share of £3,750. The all-national Allied Centre in Liverpool was funded with £3,630. [BW 108/1: Financial estimate of 17.2.43].

47 BW 27/3: 6.5.41: Letter to Miss Priscilla Boys-Smith (Secretary of the Czechoslovak Institute) from Parkinson.

48 HO 294/72: Copies of the monthly programmes are held in this file.

civilian clients in equal numbers, activities and amenities tended to be biased towards the latter.⁴⁹

This would suggest that the Institute did not cater for the service personnel on an equitable basis, something partially confirmed by most of the interviewees for this study who expressed an opinion.⁵⁰ Furthermore, in 1943, the British Council commissioned work on a short film entitled *Safe Custody* which was to be based on the activities of the National Hearths. Part of the resumé stated:

We see a young Czechoslovak student reading a newspaper, then he discards it for a medical book. He has found a haven to pursue his studies in the Czechoslovak Institute, a club with British foundation where Czechoslovakians in Britain can enjoy some of the traditional teachings of their own country. We see the Librarian at work in the Library with its rare copies of immortal Czechoslovakian books. Then we look over the shoulder of a Czechoslovakian officer who is studying a notice-board where we see announcements of concerts, lectures, meetings.⁵¹

If this oozing sentimentality truly represented the British Council's perception of the Czechoslovak Institute, and it seems a plausible conclusion to assume that it did, then it is no surprise that most service personnel tended to move through it rather than support it in any meaningful sense. In effect, the Institute was little more than a tool of the British Council in its mission to promote British culture, only with the wartime national houses it had a relatively captive audience and chose to maintain its profile by acting as financier, protecting its investment by packing the controlling directorate with its own people.⁵² Taken entire, the Council did its best to educate and accommodate all the émigrés - political, civilian or military - from all of the countries which had succumbed to occupation, and it did so with the consent of the Government and with funds provided by the Treasury. Yet it is hard to shake the impression that the average man in the Czechoslovak Army or Air Force was largely left to fend for himself in terms of his entertainment. If he came to London looking for gaiety or careless distractions from the pressures of war, he was unlikely to have his needs satisfied at the Czechoslovak Institute.

49 BW 27/3: Letter of 8.10.41 from the British Council to the Food Office at Caxton Hall.

50 Squadron Leader Marcel Ludikar, for example, referred to the place as somewhere one could buy a cheap bed for the night while in London. He was not actually aware that "the place" was called the Czechoslovak Institute. [Interview, May 1997].

51 BW 108/1: Unsigned and undated resumé, but probably issued in early 1943 judging from its position in the file. The proposed narrative for the other main National Hearths was couched in similar terms with similar images.

52 All of the source files used in this section contain numerous references to the Council officials who directed the affairs of the Institute. Equally, similar names can be found in similar positions for the other national houses in London.

Recruitment (1): The problems

In the main, there were only two issues which plagued the Czechoslovak Air Force throughout the period of exile in Britain during the war, and these were recruitment and the question of independent status. Both caused political and military difficulties between the Czechoslovaks and their British hosts, and also between the Czechoslovaks themselves, and neither was ever resolved to the complete satisfaction of any party.

In mid-January 1941, Beneš wrote to Sinclair on the subject of air reinforcements, apparently replying to questions raised by the latter in an earlier note. He declared that the secondment of men from the land forces to form a third Czechoslovak fighter squadron would be "extremely difficult", suggesting that Czechoslovak air personnel then with regular RAF squadrons be released to serve under their own flag. The only other option would be to form the additional unit with conscripts on the proviso that there would be limited reserves.⁵³ Beneš was armed with a report from Ingr written on the 5th which dismissed any proposals to siphon troops from the Army, claiming that recruitment here was also very limited and that "we will need all types of war experience, not only from the Air Force, but also in all types of weapons in ground units back home."⁵⁴ This was a weak spot for Beneš. As will become apparent later in this study, he was constantly aware that "back home" he would immediately have need of a viable and efficient military organisation to maintain order and resist any revolutionary action against his Government, so he followed Ingr's lead and sent his letter to the Secretary of State. Sinclair replied two weeks later, again urging the release of troops from the Army into the Air Force:

Aircrafthands are an immediate requirement. In the formation of Allied squadrons we find it most desirable that all the maintenance personnel are of Allied nationality. We are considering the formation of an additional Czechoslovak fighter squadron, but there is a deficiency of some 50 to 70 unskilled personnel to fill aircrafthand posts on the establishment. If the Army can supply these, the formation of the squadron will be greatly facilitated...and would thus be a very direct contribution to the war effort.⁵⁵

Beneš was now cornered, and the problem was actually much worse than Sinclair realised. A comprehensive report prepared by Janoušek for Ingr had been circulated

53 MNO 14/366/1941. Letter from Beneš to Sinclair, 14.1.41. Sinclair's earlier correspondence is missing from this file.

54 VKPR 25/1/1/3: Report by Ingr, 5.1.41. He also included a procedural complaint against the Air Ministry, claiming that it ignored the MNO and tended to deal directly with Beneš. "In the interests of smooth relations", he wrote, "I would suggest that the Air Ministry were tactfully informed of this fact."

55 VKPR 26/1/1/4: Sinclair to Beneš, 28.1.41.

within the MNO during the week before Sinclair's letter. In it, Janoušek described the situation as "critical", but chose to blame the British for much of the problem in that "the Air Ministry decided to transfer the English personnel because they need them to build new units, and any request from us to detain them will be denied." By this, he conveniently overlooked the stark fact that he would not have had an Air Force to inspect at all were it not for the British personnel which topped up the initial establishments. Even so, he fully accepted the need for a third fighter squadron to be formed as soon as possible:

The argument for building a new fighter squadron is that, up to now, the Czechoslovak Air Force in France and here in England is our most powerful and political force in this war. The success of our ground Army could not be fully evaluated because of the chaotic days in the last struggle for France [thus] the Air Force can be used for political and propaganda purposes whereas the Army cannot.

He also recognised the need for an additional squadron for psychological reasons. As will be seen below, Janoušek was faced with a large *surplus* of flying crew, but current theories for their employment were, in his judgement, out of the question :

The MNO is of the opinion that it is possible to solve the shortfall [in groundcrew] by using displaced officers, standby pilots and specialists, but this would cause a great lowering of morale because not one of them at a time of great need for every trained pilot would understand this. Given the training costs and the present drive for British recruitment, no pilot would understand why he is not flying...and this would not create a favourable impression within the Air Ministry of the Czechoslovak Air Force.⁵⁶

Discussions regarding the formation of a third fighter squadron had actually begun in late 1940, it being clear to all parties that the large surplus in flying personnel would have to be employed in some fighting capacity. It was agreed that 126 mechanics and 100 troops for unskilled labour would be needed, and it was in this latter group that the shortfall was most keenly felt. The Air Ministry had offered some assistance with mechanics, but saw no reason to supply auxiliary troops when the Czechoslovak Army was inactive at Leamington Spa.⁵⁷ But at this point in January 1941, Janoušek identified a minimum requirement of 108 unskilled men to be immediately released from the Army, requesting an urgent decision by Beneš if necessary.⁵⁸

56 MNO 13/232/1941: Report by Janoušek to Ingr, 20.1.41.

57 VKPR 26/20/11: Slezák to Ingr, 3.12.40. In this report, requested by Ingr, Slezák also noted that 312 (Fighter) Squadron was 18 men under-strength in auxiliaries, and noted that British pressure required the Czechoslovak Air Force to be fully established in all capacities by October 31st, 1942. It was a requirement destined never to be met.

58 MNO 13/232/1941: Janoušek to Ingr, 20.1.41. He was supported in his argument by Slezák who attached a minute calling for the shortfall to be made up at the expense of the Army. Both he and Janoušek were aware that the British knew how "desperate" the situation was, and that it "would greatly damage our prestige if they saw, particularly at a time when the British Air Force has such a

Sinclair's letter followed a few days later. Within a week of its receipt, Beneš had convened a top-level conference to discuss the matter, yet it is perhaps significant that no representative of the Air Force contingent was recorded as present.⁵⁹ Stanislav Bosý, the Deputy Chief-of-Staff, revealed that the Air Force was 170 men short of the full complement, yet there were still 528 people of military age available for possible service, of whom 40% (250) may prove suitable. Of these, 170 must go to the Air Force "since it is not possible to consider weakening the land units." Any recruits displaying "lack of morale" could be sent to the Pioneers. Ingr countered that the Canadian government had not encouraged either Czechoslovaks or Poles to enlist in the UK forces, but added that "it is a matter of life and death" that more men be enlisted from whatever source.⁶⁰ Beneš, still pushing for a third fighter squadron "for political reasons", stressed that the Army was in itself a symbol of political status, and that his main objective was for a fully-recognised Czechoslovak Government. Without a credible military contingent, that aim was unlikely to be achieved easily.⁶¹ Ingr felt that any expansion or reduction of the Air Force would have no significant effect either way, but Beneš refuted this, insisting upon a third fighter squadron with or without reserves, and for this an additional 204 men would be required on top of the current shortfall. Slezák, bluntly, said that if this was to be the policy, "we have no choice but to transfer them from the Army." Ingr immediately reacted negatively, stating that neither the Air Ministry or the War Office would even consider such a scheme.⁶² Some strong disagreement between the two followed until Beneš closed the meeting with a request for more specific details on requirements and possible sources of personnel.

great need, that we don't show enough understanding for our own."

59 MNO 14/317/1941: Minutes of 6.2.41. Although the file cover sheet detailed copies to be sent to the Czechoslovak Inspectorate, it is unclear from margin notes if they were duly despatched. Neither does there appear to be any sound reason for the absence of air representation. Slezák, however, was present.

60 *ibid.* Bosý also took pains to point out that, of the 528, "there are amongst them Germans and Jews." Accepting Ingr's comment concerning the problems with Canadian recruitment, he again told the meeting that "into the Czechoslovak Air Force will come a number of Germans and Jews." Beneš was not averse to this on purely political or racial grounds, but he advocated "careful selection" if such a recruitment policy was forced upon them. Slezák even suggested the mobilisation of women to meet the shortfall, but no comments were recorded.

61 *ibid.* Beneš also argued that "the participation of the pilots at the given moment [which presumably was a reference to the Battle of Britain] was politically more helpful" than a fully-functioning land unit in gaining complete recognition.

62 In the event, both Ingr and Beneš were ultimately satisfied, for to absorb some of the surplus flying personnel, 313 (Fighter) Squadron was formed at Catterick on May 10th 1941, but with an entire ground crew complement drawn from British reserves. It was swiftly operational (one month) because most of the aircrew had flown with one or both of the other two squadrons. [VKPR 25/4/1/3: Meeting, 3.9.41.] See also p104.

Beneš received his report swiftly, and with it came the shortages for February 1941 based on MNO assessments. These were that 311 (Bomber) Squadron was operating at only 66% strength in flying personnel and at 80% strength in ground crew. Both 310 and 312 fighter squadrons were up to strength in flying personnel, but were suffering from lack of ground crew, 310 operating at 85% and 312 at a mere 50% of the total establishment.⁶³ The MNO totals for the whole force clearly illustrate that perennial problem which had faced them ever since the evacuation from France - too many officers and not enough other ranks. The air contingent showed a surplus of flying personnel (all of whom were either commissioned officers or NCO pilots) of 227, whereas the current shortfall of ground crew was now 167.⁶⁴ Should a third fighter squadron be created, that latter number would rise to 369, and this could only be made up with British assistance, rigid conscription, or by further depleting the establishment of the land unit.⁶⁵

Beneš recalled the same group for another conference, and again no representative of the air contingent was present. The resultant conclusions were that (1) all possible conscripts and/or volunteers should be mobilised for Air Force use only; (2) that the shortages would not be met by postings from the land unit; (3) that the Air Ministry should be told the truth of the situation but, in Beneš's words, the report "should be stylised so it doesn't look too black."⁶⁶

In reply to Sinclair's letter of the 28th therefore, Ingr, after some delay, presented a plan based on the February meeting. In all, some 426 possible recruits had been identified and were due for imminent medical examinations, after which it was estimated that between 150 and 200 men would be classified as fit for service. This literally represented the end of the line for Czechoslovak recruitment in the winter of 1940/41. A third fighter squadron, utilising the huge surplus in flying personnel, could be formed, but it would function without any ground reserves whatsoever. The projected four-squadron contingent would thus be 640 men short if the RAF reserve establishment was applied, or 240 men short if no reserves were included at all, and yet there would still be nearly 200 surplus fliers.⁶⁷ Sinclair replied within the week:

63 *ibid.* MNO report of 18.2.41. The MNO accepted the Czechoslovak Air Inspectorate's total of 1,222 men of all ranks in the air contingent at that time. This number was split into two categories, flying personnel (628) and ground crew (594).

64 At first glance it seems contradictory that 311 (Bomber) Squadron should be operating at 66% strength in flying personnel when there was such a vast surplus, but there are separate reasons for this which will be examined later in the present study.

65 *ibid.* The MNO was using Inspectorate figures here, calculations which the correspondence shows was not always trusted by the former. Recording that the differences were "not drastic", the same report insisted that a full census was urgently required to clarify the matter.

66 MNO 14/366:1941. Minutes of MNO meeting, 18.2.41.

67 MNO 14/366:1941. Letter from Ingr to Sinclair, 3.3.41. The letter was drafted on February

I am sorry that it has not been possible for you to release men from the Czechoslovak Army for service in your Air Force, and I agree that the figures you have supplied show that the number of men becoming available for Air Force service is unlikely to be large...The Air Staff must, I am sure you will agree, reconsider the question of forming a third fighter squadron, more especially as the men now becoming available will need considerable training before they can be regarded as fit for service.⁶⁸

We should pause at this stage to reflect upon these meetings and consider the impact which the manpower shortages had upon the Czechoslovak Air Force. The whirl of reports, statistics and correspondence of January and February 1941 indicate that the excitement of the previous summer and autumn had passed into history and that now some harsh realities had to be addressed. In the first instance, "shortfall" does not refer to a literal absence of men in any given unit. British personnel had been posted to supplement the establishments where Czechoslovak nationals were unavailable, for without a full complement of groundcrew a squadron would have been declared non-operational. As Sinclair stated, it was the policy of the Air Ministry to ensure that Allied squadrons were 'whole' in terms of nationality, thus pressure was constantly applied to achieve that aim. Furthermore, each of the four squadrons was operating without any credible ground reserves, and this meant that rotation was not possible. Each man thus worked to his physical limit, and the effect on morale and efficiency was not unnoticed by the MNO. Yet even without adding reserves into the equation, the air contingent still relied on the presence of 240 (mainly British) support staff which the Air Ministry wanted back. Not surprisingly, the idea of forming 313 (Fighter) Squadron was dropped as soon as the truth became apparent.

Also, the meetings of February 1941 revealed differences of attitude within the MNO which were serious. Janoušek and Slezák recognised the great importance of the Air Force for political, military and propagandist reasons, and in their view *any* source of recruitment was a valid one. However, Ingr - an Army man if ever there was one - took the view that the existing force was overstretched anyway and that the land unit would lose all credibility if its complement was whittled away. Bosý's position is harder to gauge. In the February meetings he played the rôle of neutral, merely supplying information for the others to debate, but, as we shall see later, when the subject under discussion turned to independence for the Air Force, these divisions reappeared along similar lines.

To meet the current, and future, manpower requirements, the MNO had little room for manoeuvre. There were only three feasible sources: overseas (specifically

26th and went through a process of close editing. Ingr also restated the decision not to transfer men from the land unit to meet the shortages.

68 MNO 14/601/1941: Sinclair to Janoušek, 11.3.41.

Canada and the USA); the Middle East contingent of the Army, and whatever was left in the United Kingdom. The real hope was Canada. Early recruitment based simply on press releases was thoroughly disappointing with only two Czechs, four Slovaks, one German and one German Jew stepping forward in 1940. The Czechoslovak Consular-General in New York, Colonel Oldřich Španiel, rejected the latter two and minuted London that "more intensive propaganda activity" was needed, perhaps even a fully military Mission. He also added, rather woefully, that the majority of people in Canada were Slovaks rather than Czechs, "and on the whole we are talking a worker's element here."⁶⁹

Things were not going to get any easier, not least because the attitude of the Canadian Government was, at best, cool, and the general attitude of the British Government can only be described as indifferent. This is not to suggest that obstacles were deliberately placed before the interested parties, but rather that they were more or less left to fend for themselves. Both the Poles and the Czechoslovaks were keen to raise volunteers in North America, and early in 1941 had submitted formal requests through the British Government to organise recruiting activity, yet the Canadian Defense Ministry promised only "sympathetic consideration." In a paper considered by the AFOSC on March 4th, Strang also poured cold water on the desire to mobilise Americans, stating that the US Government should first give written approval because it held "strong views about the recruitment of US citizens for service with the forces of their country of origin."⁷⁰ Another problem was the cost of the projected exercise in that the Poles freely admitted that they had no available finances, that the Canadians refused to contribute anything, that the British Government felt "unable" to sacrifice dollar reserves, and that the War Office had expressed "the strongest possible objections" to paying for the scheme.⁷¹ In Committee, however, the Air Ministry advanced the view that the Poles "were outstandingly good pilots", and that they would welcome additional recruits to counter any possible shortage which might occur in 1941, thereby leaving open the possibility that they might obtain extra manpower at virtually no cost and effort to themselves.⁷²

69 MNO 11/4222/1940: Oldřich to the MNO, 24.10.40.

70 AFO (41) 15: Report on Overseas Recruitment, 1.3.41. [Allied Forces (Official) Papers were all prefixed AFO.]

71 *ibid.* The Polish proposal to the Air Ministry envisaged the latter paying for immediate expenses with repayment to follow at an appropriate time. All training would take place at RAF schools in Canada. The Air Ministry made no comment and requested "guidance" from the AFOSC.

72 CAB 85/20: AFOSC Minutes, 4.3.41. It is also worth recording the appendix to the Air Ministry view in which it was stated that "good as the [Polish] airmen were, any additional pilots should be drafted into the RAF" rather than form new Polish squadrons. The reason given was that "the purely Polish squadron was necessarily less elastic and took longer to move than an English squadron." This was patent nonsense, since even a cursory inspection of movement records shows no

In point of fact, the Czechoslovaks had made preliminary enquiries regarding the Canadian dimension in the summer and autumn of 1940. The Czechoslovak Consul-General in Montreal, Dr F. Pavlašek, had written to the Department of External Affairs in Ottawa on June 12th requesting the position of the Canadian Government as regards active recruitment. Five months later, he received his reply.⁷³ Eight conditions were listed, seven of which represented serious difficulties for the MNO in London. The primary insistence that no Canadian or British nationals would be permitted to join the Czechoslovak forces in England clearly excluded any citizens who had opted for Canadian nationality after immigration, and we can appreciate the damage caused by this condition through a comment by Nižborsky when he estimated "about two hundred" might become available from the North American campaign from an estimated colony of 30,000.⁷⁴ The Canadians also rejected any liability for any costs involved, be they for recruiting, training, organisation, equipping, transportation, rations or accommodation, return passage to Canada, or any pensions, medical care or demobilisation allowances. By the same token, they absolved themselves of all responsibility for the proposed action, yet reminded the Czechoslovaks that any men so enlisted "must be subject to and conform with Canadian law and regulations, civil and military, relating to...armed forces in Canada." To make absolutely sure that the MNO knew where it stood on this matter, Skelton sent an addendum a few hours later on the same day which stated:

In its arrangements with other Allied Governments which are planning to organise military forces in Canada, the Canadian Government has made it clear that...it is not prepared to take any part in compelling or, indeed, to permit the use of compulsion in connection with such recruiting activities. I shall be grateful if you will make this fact clear to those in charge of the recruitment of Czechoslovak nationals in Canada.⁷⁵

In essence, then, the Czechoslovaks had to rely upon sentimental appeals to people who had forsaken the nationality of their birth to fight for a country they no longer belonged to. Having found such people, they then had to bear upon themselves the not

significant differences in the times taken for squadrons of either nationality to move. Much more likely was the fact that the Air Ministry appreciated that any potential recruits would speak good or even perfect English and could thus drop neatly into a home unit.

73 VKPR 28/2/13: O.D.Skelton to Dr F.Pavlašek, 26.11.40.

74 MNO 14/366/1941: Minutes of meeting, 18.2.41. During the discussions surrounding the October Agreement, Ripka had told Strang that the Czech colony in Canada was approximately 40,000 of which perhaps 2000 might be suitable military material. [CAB 85/19: AFO (40) 47, 16.9.40.]

75 VKPR 28/2/13: Skelton to Pavlašek, 26.11.40. Both notes were included in AFO (41) 23, prepared in March 1941, which the AFOSC accepted, issuing authorisation for recruitment to proceed under the conditions stated. It had therefore taken 9 months for the Czechoslovaks to make any headway at all regarding what had once been a potentially valuable source of desperately needed manpower.

inconsiderable cost of transporting and training them to possibly sacrifice their lives in what was, after all, a common war effort. The final condition, "that the foregoing matters be brought to the attention of prospective recruits", was probably the least of their concerns.

The Air Ministry, itself absolved from responsibility by the AFOSC decision, then moved relatively quickly to establish an agreement with the MNO concerning Canadian recruitment. Introduced as being "a supplement" to the existing Anglo-Czechoslovak Agreement of 1940, it covered recruiting activities in Canada and the USA. And yet even here we may see the Air Ministry, while ostensibly presenting the Czechoslovaks with a solution to their problems, nevertheless acting in its own interests as well. At first capping the maximum number of enlistments at 100 every three months - "to make good the estimated normal wastage" - they added the tempting offer that surplus volunteers may be enlisted at a further rate of 15 every three months "for service with British single-seater fighter squadrons", again knowing full well that these men would speak excellent, or at least adequate, English.⁷⁶ Regarding expenditure, the Agreement euphemistically stated that all costs would be met from "the credits granted by His Majesty's Government", which meant that the Czechoslovaks would pay eventually. To minimise the cost, Ingr requested that training could be carried out in the USA or in RAF Air Training Schools in Canada.⁷⁷ In reply, the DAFL indicated that training in the USA was still in its infancy, but that the prospect of training in Canada would receive "sympathetic consideration."⁷⁸ This latter point was developed in a telegram of August 16th from the Dominions Office in London to the Canadian High Commissioner. On the subject of training, it was acknowledged that no facilities were open to the Czechoslovaks as yet, "and we understand that it is unlikely that the Canadian authorities would be willing to help the Czechs to establish such a capacity". Thus the inevitable conclusion was that volunteers would need to be transported to Britain for training.⁷⁹ The telegram also admitted that "the Czechs are unlikely to secure any considerable number of recruits in Canada", and from what we have seen above, this was hardly surprising.

76 MNO 17/2023/1941: 'Agreement regarding Recruitment for the Czechoslovak Air Force in Canada and the USA', 30.5.41. Article 6 of the Agreement also stipulated that any enlisted men from the main cohort "not required to replaced actual wastage in Czechoslovak units will be available for posting to British units", and, once there, they were unlikely to return. The same conditions applied to maintenance personnel. [Also VKPR 25/2/1/3.]

77 MNO 17/1639/1941: Ingr to Dore, 30.5.41.

78 MNO 17/1641/1941: Dore to Janoušek, 12.6.41. The position regarding the USA was reasonable given that it was not yet an active belligerent in the war. The first British flying-pupils began training there only on June 7th, 1941.

79 MNO 19/2265/1941: Telegram of 16.8.41.

It seems clear from this that Canada as a viable recruiting ground was effectively barren from the Czechoslovak point of view. Neither can it be said that the blame rested with them; it was more of a combination of the Canadian and British attitudes which stifled such chances there were for the émigrés to boost their dwindling numbers. In the main, the reasons were political and not military, and have much to do with Beneš' political machinations. On April 19th, 1941, Churchill inspected the Czechoslovak Army at Leamington Spa, after which Beneš handed him a Note essentially calling for full recognition of his Provisional Government. In this document, he clearly laid the blame at the door of the Foreign Office for the lack of full recognition, as a consequence of which the Czechoslovaks were considered as "Allies of the second category":

The reasons invoked by the Foreign Office for the continuation of this policy were "legal" difficulties. In fact, it is the remnant of the Munich policy. Our people here and at home feel it is unjust and a continuation of the Munich humiliation.⁸⁰

Yet again Beneš had demonstrated his profound lack of touch when it came to the delicacies of British diplomacy, for the effect was not far short of catastrophic. Seeking to defend themselves, the men of the Central Department looked for allies of their own. In a long minute to William Malkin on April 22nd, Roberts noted that the Dominions had been reluctant to recognise the Provisional Government, citing General Smuts as saying: "I frankly dislike Beneš' persistence...he has occasioned too much trouble."⁸¹ Regarding the USA, Roberts added that it had not yet extended recognition of the Provisional Government and had not accredited a representative to it.⁸² In a minute of

80 FO371/26394, Beneš to Churchill, 19.4.41. Also BA-B/79: Correspondence. In the Prague Archive, letters survive between Bruce Lockhart and Beneš on the subject of the April Note. Beneš appears quite smug that the Note caused such a stir in the Foreign Office. "The effect was terrific," he wrote, adding that the behaviour and thoughts of the Foreign Office "were still rooted in Munich." This, he added, "merely rubbed salt into the wound" of the Czechoslovak distress. [BA-B/79: 23-26.4.41, correspondence with Bruce Lockhart.] As for Eden, it seems he did not share the *angst* of his subordinates. According to Bruce Lockhart, the Foreign Secretary thought the episode would "do the Foreign Office no harm!" [Bruce Lockhart R.H: *Diaries (Vol 2)*: Entry for 10.5.41.] The English idiom used here is the nearest approximation to the original Czech - *řízla do živého*, literally "to cut into the live body."

81 FO 371/26394: Roberts to Malkin, 22.4.41. Smuts also said that if full recognition went ahead "we might sit with insoluble problems at the Peace Conference." Sir Herbert William Malkin GCMG CB KC (1883-1945) was educated at Charterhouse and Trinity College, Cambridge; entered the Foreign Service 1911; legal advisor to the Foreign Office from 1929.

82 *ibid.* The American position was that they had never ceased to recognise the Czechoslovak Legation and Consulates in the USA, hence any further extension was irrelevant. This, however, was merely subtle diplomacy. What irritated Beneš most was that Anthony Drexel Biddle had been appointed US Minister to the Allied Governments except the Provisional Government. "Are we a kind of black sheep or what?" he was said to have exclaimed. [Taborsky, *Between East and West*, p50.] Biddle was not accredited to the Provisional Government until July 30th, 1941, largely through the efforts of John Winant who had replaced Joseph Kennedy as US Ambassador to Britain.

June 14th, Roger Makins cited Lord Cranborne as having communicated the new proposals to the Dominions, "all of whom had exploded and shown the strongest opposition to giving Dr Beneš any further recognition."⁸³ The eventual compromise was a formula by which the word 'Provisional' would be dropped from the title, and diplomatic representatives of ministerial rank could be exchanged but without letters of credence, thus "neither step would involve full recognition." Beneš would be told that this would in no case be a commitment to future frontiers, nor would it imply acceptance of juridical continuity or grant full legislative authority.⁸⁴ The Australian and South African governments "somewhat reluctantly" agreed, New Zealand accepted, and Canada, after some delay, followed suit.⁸⁵

The Canadians thus had no incentive and no obligation to extend anything more than indifferent assistance to the Beneš administration when it tried to recruit volunteers from the North American continent. They had recognised the Provisional Government on October 28th, 1940, more as an act of solidarity with London than a bold political stroke. Yet it was friendship cheaply bought, and this held good for all the Dominions. When the time came to actually do something constructive, especially in regard to financial assistance, they folded their arms. Similarly, the general policy of the British was that Allied nationals should be "encouraged" to join their own forces for political and not military reasons, yet this would stop short of compulsion.⁸⁶ The net result was

83 *ibid.* Minute to file by Makins, 14.6.41. Viscount Cranborne was Secretary of State for the Dominions between October 1940 and February 1942, returning to the Office again, after a short tenure by Clement Attlee, in September 1943. There is much to support Cranborne's statement. On May 30th, Smuts declared that Beneš had resigned freely and provisional status was satisfactory as it stood; on May 31st, Australia had claimed that further recognition might "be misconstrued as a promise of restoration"; on June 13th, Canada revealed concerns over the effect further recognition might have in the Protectorate, particularly the status of the Hácha Government in Prague.

84 In his work in this area, Jan Kuklík points out that the Czechoslovak Constitution contained no contingency arrangements for the situation in which Beneš was placed by the events of 1938 and 1939. As such, his efforts to gain full recognition were hampered by two opposing forces: the reluctance of some sections within the British Foreign Office, and the dissenters within his own exiled political community who challenged his right to office. The only defence Beneš had was to accept that there were legal weaknesses in his arguments but all would be resolved once the war was over and free elections could be held in the liberated territory. [*Česky Časopis Historický*, 95/1997 Číslo 2: Kuklík, *op.cit.*, pp 431-438.]

85 FO 371/26394: Unsigned minute to file, possibly Makins, 14.7.41. What complicated the issue was that the Soviets on July 9th, without any hesitation whatsoever, extended full recognition, accepted the juridical continuity of the pre-Munich Government, and "regarded the physical restoration of the Czechoslovak Republic as one of their war aims." The inevitable conclusion in Whitehall was "that it is important that we and the United States should do likewise, so that no unfavourable comparison should be drawn." Yet again, Beneš had not received recognition for his merits, despite the wholehearted support of Eden and Churchill, but because the Russians had forced the hand of the Western allies.

86 FO 371/26398: Minute by Roberts to Sir Eric Machtig (Permanent Under-Secretary at the Dominions Office), 5.8.41. This file, opened in 1992, also contains the Canadian terms of November 1940. Two further files are closed until 2017.

that no one was prepared to make any particular effort and could inevitably fall back on the promise of "sympathetic consideration" when presented with new initiatives.⁸⁷

The Czechoslovaks reacted to the paucity of new blood in a desperate way by accepting back into their ranks some of the men thrown into the Pioneer Corps the previous summer. At the end of March 1941, Bosý wrote to Kalla and informed him that a number had requested, through British channels, to be transferred to the Czechoslovak Army. The War Office had contacted the MNO for their attitude towards the idea.⁸⁸ Within weeks, about 50 had been released and were used to fill in the ranks of auxiliary ground personnel in Czechoslovak air units.⁸⁹ When the Soviet Union was attacked in June 1941, the exodus became a flood. A "considerable part" of the contingent transferred to the Pioneers in 1940 was now seeking a return to the Army, claiming they had been talked into revolt by agitators within Cholmondeley Camp, that they now sought "forgiveness for their actions", and that unless they played their part in the war effort "their return home would not be a good or joyful one."⁹⁰

From the point of view of Janoušek, however, his Air Force gained nothing from this exercise since all of the second wave of transferees went directly to the Brigade. In early September 1941, he convened a meeting to discuss further recruitment and it was decided from the outset that the Air Force would be at a political disadvantage if it were shown to be receiving men who had earlier been thoroughly discredited.⁹¹ It was accepted that only two realistic possibilities existed - either divert all the new recruits into the Air Force or disband at least two of the squadrons in order to make the remaining two wholly Czechoslovak.⁹² Josef Schejbal pointed to 311 Bomber Squadron which had such a deficiency in ground crew that it operated with barely a third of the establishment enjoyed by British bomber squadrons, with the result that "to ensure operations, the Czechoslovak ground crew work day and night in the worst

87 This inertia was not limited to the Canadians. The same minute by Roberts notes that 17 men in Australia had stepped forward, 7 wishing to join the Czechoslovak forces in Britain and 10 the Australian home forces. The matter had been referred to the Czechoslovak Government with a comment that the Australians wanted to retain the whole group. It is likely that all of them were of Sudeten origin.

88 VKPR/25/3/1/3: Bosý to Kalla, 31.3.41. "For training reasons, it is preferable that they all be accepted at once, so ask the War Office to tell the Pioneer Corps to tell the men that [they] will be given confirmation of their acceptance if they will be discharged from the British forces."

89 *ibid.* Bosý to Kalla, 27.5.41.

90 *ibid.* Confidential report by Nižborsky to the MNO, 7.7.41. Nižborsky's tone in the document could be described as politely derisive.

91 VKPR 25/4/1/3: Meeting, 3.9.41. This discussion was for commanders within the Inspectorate only. Ingr was not present, nor any of the political leadership.

92 The recruiting drive throughout the summer had produced only 100 or so suitable individuals who at the time of this meeting were undergoing preliminary training at the Czechoslovak Army Depot in Wilmslow or the Air Force Depot at Cosford. The men had been enlisted to serve with the Czechoslovak Armed Forces, and therefore could not be claimed wholly by the Air Force.

possible conditions."⁹³ Touching upon the influx from the Pioneer Corps, he added that the Army was now passing on men who were "completely incapable" of adjusting to Air Force requirements, and because 311 was a fully operational unit, there was no time to spend on basic military training. It was better to receive no men at all from the Brigade rather than substandard individuals.⁹⁴

The debate then focused on what numbers were required and where they might be found. The general figure accepted was a further 100 men by the end of the year. Ostravský suggested that the whole Middle East contingent be returned to England "and thus solve all the gaps, Army and Air Force", whereas Karel Tomán proposed to make up the shortfall by abolishing one *prapor* [battalion] within the Army.⁹⁵ This was immediately rejected since neither Ingr nor Beneš would even consider the idea. Tomán retorted that if something wasn't done soon "we'll have a Brigade but we won't have an Air Force." The eventual conclusion was to accept the likelihood that an even distribution of the new men would be decided upon by both Ingr and Beneš, and that the search would continue. As a footnote, the minutes recorded that "it does not look feasible to get new recruits from Canada in the near future."

We see here an Air Force in crisis. One squadron was operating entirely due to British assistance (313), another was being worked to a standstill (311), and yet powerful voices were flatly refusing to erode the combat strength of the Brigade any further. But even the required number of another 150 men for 1941 pales into insignificance when we consider the report produced one month later which concluded that to fully establish the Air Force with Czechoslovak personnel, and supply enough reserves to permit normal rotation of shifts, and discharge men who were either exhausted or nearing demobilisation age, around 500 more willing souls would be

93 Major Josef Schejbal had been the second squadron commander of 311 Bomber Squadron. He was transferred to the Inspectorate in 1941 to act as Chief of Staff to Janoušek. He joined the Communist Party after the war and was promoted to Brigadier General. Assigned to purchase surplus American radar equipment in the USA, he jumped ship and asked for political asylum, but because of his Communist connections he was reduced to working in a gasoline station until his death. [White L.M: *On All Fronts (Vol 2)*: Němec H: 'Remembering Some Members of the 311th (Czechoslovak) Squadron Within RAF Bomber Command', p87.]

94 *ibid.* We have seen that 313 (Fighter) Squadron had been established with British ground crew, and it was suggested in response to Schejbal that it now be wound up and the pilots used to fill vacancies in the other units. He rightly pointed out that nothing would be gained by this, that by forcing men who had experience in France and the Battle of Britain to wait idly for a flying post would be devastating to morale.

95 Lieutenant-Colonel Karel Tomán (Mareš) had been the first acting squadron leader of 311 Bomber Squadron in 1940. When he was faced with the early difficulties noted in Part One of this study, he frequently chose not to report everything to London and tried to solve problems by himself. This earned him the nickname 'Iron', "for trying to iron out or smoothe out all unpleasantness." [White L.M: *On All Fronts (Vol 2)*: Němec H: *op.cit.*, p88.]

needed in total. The argument presented had nothing to do with the present war whatsoever:

The Air Force in Great Britain will be the only one which we can count on from the start when we return home. Flying personnel who will be recruited at home will only be capable of activity after 6 months training, so they will be of little use at the beginning. The need for a fully-trained Air Force might be necessary; i.e. in the Sudetenland and a possible conflict with the Hungarians, so even at the price of lowering the presence and numerical state of the Brigade, it is necessary not only to keep the Air Force...but to expand it.⁹⁶

This neatly illustrates that two forces were at work in 1941, each represented by powerful lobbies within the military and the government, and each working towards different objectives. On the one side, men such as Ingr and Beneš were prone to look post-war, both being keen to develop and train the air and land units in Britain to stand as viable military arms at the war's end ready for any conflicts which might arise in the liberated Republic. On the other side, most of the Czechoslovak Air Inspectorate recognised that they were at war *now*, and that the fighting strength and political credibility of the Air Force was being adversely affected by these post-war considerations. As we shall see, it was a debate which was never satisfactorily resolved.

It is worth reflecting at this point exactly why the Czechoslovaks had such a permanent problem convincing eligible volunteers to take the oath. To some extent it was a problem very much of their own making. We have seen how Canada and the other Dominions showed little interest in facilitating recruitment. Equally, it is understandable that men who had made their homes in another country should feel reluctant to defend, and possibly die for, the land of their birth, especially if they had emigrated for political or racial reasons. Yet the Czechoslovaks in London were guilty of perpetuating exactly these same divisions, and examples litter the files of the MNO.

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1940, dozens of men wrote sincere letters claiming that just because they were of German extraction, yet considered themselves Czech, they had been denied the opportunity of service.⁹⁷ Similarly, throughout 1941 and 1942, a great many more wrote volunteering for duty, listing their ethnic origin as Austrian or German, and were generally refused, the most common reason given being that they did not speak Czech.⁹⁸ This of course was merely a sop. If men who arrived in 1940 could be taught English, it stands to reason that courses could easily have been

96 VKPR 25/6/1/3: MNO Study Group Report, 17.10.41.

97 Many of these letters were collected into one file, MNO 14/928/1941.

98 VKPR files 28/1/1/7 and 28/2/1/7 consist almost entirely of such applications. By far the majority of applicants were Sudetendeutsche, Austrians or Jews. Many letters were written in German, and one, showing the writer to be terminally bereft of tact, was addressed to "Oberst Kalla".

arranged to teach German-speakers Czech, and in any case, the official language of the air contingent was English. Evidence to illustrate that this was simply an excuse survives in a report by Janoušek to the VKPR in March 1943:

Overall, the Czechoslovak members of the Czechoslovak Air Force are extremely tolerant in terms of ethnic and religious matters, but are totally uncompromising in the German question.⁹⁹

It is interesting to note that Janoušek specified the nationality here, and in the transfer of former recalcitrants from the Pioneer Corps referred to above, Bosý explicitly stated that only persons of "Czechoslovak citizenship" would be included in the draft.¹⁰⁰ We have also seen that Jews were never in a truly secure position either, and remained a minority right through the war.¹⁰¹ There is an unpleasant whiff of a desire for purity in all of this; not necessarily antisemitic but most certainly nationalistic in character.¹⁰² That Beneš had post-war plans for the German minority in Czechoslovakia is well-known, and it is perhaps understandable that men serving in the forces were not prepared to fight alongside other men who came from that very group of people who were perceived as being responsible for the disaster in the first place. But, as reasonable as the arguments may have been, these political and ethnic divisions constituted yet another obstacle to recruitment which the Czechoslovak forces could ill-afford.

Most of the recruitment problems came to a head in 1942. In the first place, American entry into the war effectively ended any possibilities of substantial recruitment from that country. In early 1942, following a meeting of Allied representatives in New York to discuss the implications of US involvement, Španiel informed Ingr that the majority of volunteers who had perhaps first thought of serving with the Czechoslovaks would now move directly into the US forces.¹⁰³ Secondly, Ingr drew a line under

99 VKPR 29/3/1/8: Report by Janoušek on the Czechoslovak Air Force, 15.3.43.

100 VKPR 25/3/1/3: Bosý to Kalla, 27.5.41.

101 It is scarcely possible to establish the exact ratios for religious beliefs within either arm of the forces in Britain during the war. The Air Force service records in the Olomouc City Archive indicate that around 61% of the men were Roman Catholic, and a further 31% listed themselves of being of no religious conviction. This latter figure, however, may conceal some of the Jewish contribution because Jews often wrote 'None' in the space allocated for religion on the enlistment forms. [VKPR 23/1/2/1: Recruitment Report, 2.11.40.]

102 There were occasional exceptions when a man of German or Austrian origin would be accepted into service with the Czechoslovak forces, and though no absolute criteria appear in the relevant files, it would seem that if he could demonstrate that he had lived, studied or worked for most of his life in undisputed Czechoslovak territory, and his skills or experience met the needs of force to which he had applied, then he would be enlisted. However, for every one such application, probably twenty were rejected.

103 MNO 36/547/1942: Španiel to Ingr, 29.1.42. The meeting took place at the Norwegian Embassy on 21.1.42, and though it was acknowledged that Roosevelt had declared that his

further transfers from the Army into the Air Force, arguing that it was now some 600 men short "and the fighting capability of the Brigade cannot be lowered any more."¹⁰⁴ Janoušek reacted angrily:

If the Brigade is in a situation where its fighting capability is still possible, and is lacking 600 people, then the Air Force, which has been from the very beginning in operational activity, has lacked more than 50% from the start. I have *not* demanded the make up of the shortfall, thus I was not given the 262 to make up numbers but to cover losses - 249. I have to emphasise that the political importance and status of the Czechoslovak Air Force counts as much as the Army, but we must recruit to cover all losses, and then - and only then - recruit to cover the shortfall in the Air Force as well as the Brigade.¹⁰⁵

He continued in the same vein to explain that all recruitment from all sources since 1940 had done nothing to increase the Air Force but merely "held it in place". He argued that the central problem was being ignored due to this endless wrangling over numbers, this problem being that the term 'ground crew' was used to describe any non-flying personnel when in fact the real shortage was in specialist trades:

It is impossible to think of recruiting flying personnel from our own ground crew...because we lose experienced technicians which are not easy to replace. Also, recruiting experienced personnel from the British is out of the question because of the departure of a large number of operational squadrons to the Near and Far East. If new recruits are not obtained and ready for service by February 1943, then the gradual abolition of squadrons will begin, starting with 311 Bomber Squadron.¹⁰⁶

Janoušek was thus prepared to fight Ingr head-on for more men, and to give himself a chance of victory he took the problem directly to Beneš only to meet with the inevitable compromise. Beneš requested a comprehensive report to be on his desk "at the earliest opportunity", but hinted that he might authorise 80 of the 120 men required to be immediately transferred from the Brigade.¹⁰⁷ Janoušek moved with great speed, and within two days his report was ready.

Government would not impede allied nationals joining their own forces, Španiel drew the inevitable conclusion that both the Czechoslovaks and the Poles would now need to look elsewhere for volunteers. Even so, the numbers were scarcely significant, for the recruiting campaign in the USA had produced just 10 individuals, all of whom were sent to Montreal for initial assessment. [MNO 36/604/1942: Španiel to Ingr, 7.1.42.]

104 VKPR 27/3/1/5: Ingr to the MNO, 20.4.42. The Air Force had requested another 120 men to be transferred in the Spring of 1942, and in this report he made the point that the Brigade had already sent 262 men to the Air Force in 1941. He accepted that some recruits may still be forthcoming from Canada, but only men who specifically requested service with the Air Force would be sent to them in future, the rest would go to the Brigade.

105 VKPR 27/3/1/5: Janoušek to Ingr (via the MNO), 7.5.42.

106 *ibid.* Janoušek also curtly pointed out that Ingr's figures were wrong, for the latter had argued on the basis that the Air Force was operating with more men than it actually had, "whereas the real state of things is that there are 1302 people and not 1500 as the MNO claims."

107 VKPR 27/3/1/5: Minutes of meeting between Janoušek and Beneš, 12.5.42. Beneš also told Janoušek that the British were becoming alert to the crisis, thus "he would be glad if the question was

He again chastised the MNO for taking too simplistic an attitude towards recruitment problems within the Air Force. Mere numbers, he argued, were not enough. If he needed to replace a lost or demobilised serviceman, the chances were that he would be from flying crew and not ground personnel, and flying crew took a long time to train, anything up to eight months. As a result, the projection for the end of 1942 was grim, mainly because the transfer and recruits had come to him too late, and the numbers currently in training would barely be sufficient to maintain losses, let alone the shortfall. To illustrate his entire argument, he drew attention to the sad state of 311 Bomber Squadron, transferred the previous month to Coastal Command. In theory, this unit should have been operational with 20 fully-trained crews, yet it had never gone above 14 crews during its entire service life:

...and yet they must still perform the same service as any other complete British squadron. The flying crews and ground personnel are being used all the time, and these conditions have an unfortunate effect on fighting morale and the psychological state, particularly in recent times of high activity with the RAF when our losses went deep. If it had carried on in its present fighting task, the entire squadron would have disappeared. A similar situation will arise in the fighter squadrons at the end of the summer because the number being trained is totally inadequate.¹⁰⁸

He accepted that earlier plans had relied on recruitment from Canada and the United States, "but the present situation shows that this cannot be done." He also acknowledged that the Air Ministry had reduced the establishment figures for reserves to 200% flying crew and 50% ground personnel, yet still there appeared to be no hope of reducing the shortfall, or even maintaining losses, without substantial recruitment during the rest of 1943.¹⁰⁹

The same file contains an undated letter of support from Nižborsky with a proposal for a gradual influx of men into the Air Force rather than a block transference from the Army. If the MNO could find, from all sources, 20 men every second month suitable for training as flying-crew, this would meet immediate requirements and almost certainly cover the projected losses for the rest of 1942. The shortfall itself would remain, and thus the squadrons would still be heavily dependent on the British for ground personnel, but at least "the gradual extinction of the Czechoslovak Air Force" could be avoided.¹¹⁰

solved positively."

108 VKPR 27/3/1/5: Report of Janoušek to the VKPR, 15.5.42.

109 *ibid.* To prove his point, Janoušek produced a telling statistic. Of the last batch of 48 volunteers to pass through the Depot at Wilmslow, 34 were recruited as fit for service, but only 7 were accepted as suitable for flying duties. Therefore of any given list of names perhaps only 15% would see active duty in the air.

110 VKPR 27/3/1/5: Nižborsky to the VKPR, undated but probably written within a few days of Janoušek's report. Nižborsky's scheme was based on the need to supply 120 men capable of flying

As a foil to Janoušek's report, Ingr produced his own a month later which made his position absolutely clear. As far as he was concerned, the Air Force could function as a fighting entity until the spring of 1943 if Nižborsky's scheme of 20 recruits every second month was adopted, though he accepted that if losses were higher than expected then things could become difficult. In acknowledging that recruitment in Canada and the USA was proving unsatisfactory, and after negotiations with Beneš, he was prepared to prime the pump by permitting the first twenty to be drawn from the Army, but he also said that "this will be the last transfer from the Army to the Czechoslovak Air Force, and it is not possible that even the smallest number will ever again be transferred."¹¹¹ Yet another door had now been slammed shut.¹¹²

It was at this point that the Air Ministry became involved, and there can be little doubt that Janoušek himself had brought the matter to the attention of senior officials within that department. He was a trusted man within British circles, and he would have been aware that to move Ingr from his position of intransigence he would need powerful allies, thus we see a letter of great importance pass between Sinclair at the Air Ministry and Eden at the Foreign Office in early July. The former wrote to the Foreign Secretary:

I feel that I should let you know without delay of a serious state of affairs which has arisen and is bound to grow worse, unless corrected now, in regard to the Czech Air Force.¹¹³

He continued by outlining the present condition of the contingent, that it consisted of four squadrons with approximately 1300 men, and that the units had, until that moment,

duties before January 1943, yet he was aware of Ingr's refusal to supply them from the Army. By hoping to spread the load over the next seven months, he was banking somewhat on further recruits from Canada, but he and the others were to be disappointed by a report from the Canadian Recruiting Office a few days later. Between July 1941 and July 1942, a total of 490 men volunteered from Canada and the USA. 252 were selected for further evaluation, 142 were enlisted, and 116 finally passed muster for transport to Britain. Of these, only 18 were assessed as suitable for Air Force training. [MNO 38/1802/1942: Report on Recruitment in Canada, 16.5.42.] A further summary produced in August put the matter bluntly: "Taking into account the relatively low level of education of our countrymen here, there is a comparatively small number who fulfil the conditions of entry into the Air Force." The figures quoted illustrated this. This gave a projected monthly figure for 1942/3 as 2 to 4 men suitable for flying duties and perhaps only 1 or 2 mechanics. [VKPR 27/4/1/5: Report on Recruitment in Canada, 10.8.42.] The same document also stated that the reputation of the Czechoslovaks among the Canadians is "not good", and that there was a serious lack of discipline among many of the recruits with "gambling, drinking and malicious gossip" commonplace.

111 MNO 43/2744/1942: Draft report by Ingr for MNO circulation, 15.6.42.

112 A year later, Karel Kuttelwascher was sent to publicise the Czechoslovak war effort in Canada and the United States. Using his celebrity status as a formidable night-fighter, he undertook an extensive tour across the Continent, but after six months of interviews, radio talks and personal appearances, he returned to Britain, his impact on recruitment "only minor and temporary." [Darlington, *Nighthawk*, p179.]

113 FO 371/30850: Sinclair to Eden, 5.7.42.

been maintained at their established strength from the existing reserves and recruitment.¹¹⁴ He then added that these reserves were "rapidly drying up, and unless more are forthcoming the squadrons will have to be rolled up and will gradually disappear." He told Eden that both Philip Nichols and the Air Staff had been in contact with the Czechoslovak Government in attempts to persuade them to release men from the Independent Brigade to meet the estimated wastage:

...but for reasons best known to himself, Dr Beneš is not prepared to allow this: all he has done so far is to instruct General Ingr in the Middle East to see if he can make any savings in men in the reorganisation of the Czech Forces there. This, however, will only provide about 100 men, which is totally inadequate to maintain the Czech Air Force at its present strength.

I need hardly say how perturbed I am by the thought that such a gallant little force should be broken up, particularly in view of the valuable service it gave to the Royal Air Force at a time when we ourselves were short of trained pilots. Moreover, the political and military repercussions which would result from its disappearance would, I think, be unfortunate.¹¹⁵

Sinclair urged Eden to intervene personally, "so that he [Beneš] can have no excuse for saying that he has been kept in the dark about the true state of affairs. In doing so, you might like to stress the fact that the Czech Air Force is the only regular force which is at present taking toll of our common enemy." This last sentence was a reference to the inactivity of the Czechoslovak Brigade at Leamington Spa (which was hardly their fault since they had not been deployed) and the relative lull in the Middle East theatre of operations. Neither did he include the Poles in this term (and, for that matter, any of the other Allied contingents) since they too were in constant action. Sinclair's "fact", therefore, was hardly worth stressing.

Two days later, His Majesty's Ambassador to the Czechoslovak Government, Philip Nichols, wrote to Roger Makins at the Foreign Office on the same topic. He mentioned that the Brigade itself was starved of recruits, though it numbered nearly 5000, whereas Beneš had adopted a compromise position of placing the blame on both

114 Sinclair's use of "1300 men" also indicates that his information originated with Janoušek since only he and his immediate supporters knew the actual numbers within the Air Force.

115 *ibid.* The Middle East battalion was organised as an anti-aircraft unit. Those of pedantic frame of mind might also note that Sinclair did not refer to Beneš as 'President', even though his Government had by this time achieved full recognition.

Sir Philip Bouverie Bowyer Nichols KCMG MC (1894-1962) was educated at Winchester and Balliol College, Oxford; served in Europe with the Suffolk Regiment 1914-1918; entered Foreign Service 1920; First Secretary to Rome 1933-1937; Foreign Office 1937-1941; Minister to Provisional Czechoslovak Government in London 1941; Ambassador the Government of Czechoslovakia 1942-1947; Ambassador to the Netherlands 1948-1951. Nichols' relationship with Beneš was not a warm one, at least from the latter's side. Beneš still sought Lockhart's advice even after Nichols had been appointed until Bruce Lockhart asked him not to complicate matters. In 1944, Bruce Lockhart wrote in his diary: "He [Masaryk] made it quite clear...that Beneš and he liked Phil...but 'Poor boy. He's doing his best, but it's not a very good best.'" [Bruce Lockhart R.H: *Diaries (Vol 2)*: Entry for 11.4.44.]

the Air Ministry and the War Office for the difficulty in resolving the matter. He claimed (so Nichols argued) that the Air Ministry were insisting that the contingent be kept up to full strength, while the War Office "were very anxious" that he should not reduce the Middle East contingent. In a typical Beneš move, he suggested that the *whole* force be brought back to Britain as one entire battalion, but since the War Office had resisted even a partial weakening of numbers, it was hardly surprising that Middle East Command were opposed to full withdrawal.¹¹⁶

The net result was that Beneš, if he so chose, could deny complicating the affair while his Air Force withered away before his eyes. Not long after these notes, Eden wrote to Masaryk covering the same essential points and asking the latter to intervene "to prevent the roll-up of squadrons." Masaryk replied positively, promising Eden that "he may rest assured...matters will be duly adjusted."¹¹⁷ But Masaryk had simply passed on the correspondence to the MNO, and he received a short reply from General Viest who supported Ingr. He argued that the Brigade had given the Air Force 537 men since 1940, and positively no more could be taken away. A plan under consideration was to re-organise the land unit into a tank brigade which required fewer numbers, but this was ultimately dependent on the agreement of the War Office, hence the only reasonable solution was to transfer some or all of the Middle East contingent to meet the required numbers.¹¹⁸

In the short term, nothing was done. The Air Ministry made its own enquiries and determined that a small force of around 200 could be taken from the Middle East "sufficient to maintain the Czech Air Force at its existing strength for some four months", but events which directly concerned the Brigade combined to work in the Air Ministry's favour.¹¹⁹ In December 1942, Nichols wrote to Roberts at the Foreign Office that the Czechoslovak Government would "have need of an armed force when they return", and that the Brigade would be central to that requirement. Even so, Nichols told Roberts that, "at just under 4000 men, its chances of being reinforced are in the highest degree problematical", and:

...unlike other Allied contingents, the Brigade has no intakes of refugees and escapees. Czech hopes of considerable reinforcements from North America have been disappointed, and the only recruits in view at the moment are from among the comparatively few Czech citizens fit for military service now in North Africa.¹²⁰

116 FO 371/30850: Nichols to Makins, 7.7.42. Nichols' figure of 5000 included the Middle East contingent of approximately 1000 men.

117 FO 371/30850: Eden to Masaryk 17.7.42; Masaryk to Eden 30.7.42.

118 MNO 43/4116/1942: Viest to Masaryk, 6.8.42.

119 FO 371/30850: Air Ministry to Foreign Office, 19.9.42.

120 FO 371/30855: Nichols to Roberts, 8.12.42.

He continued, however, to argue that this apparent stagnation should not prevent the 'bleeding' of the force in battle, since they could "never hold up their heads in Prague unless they have been in actual combat with the Germans." He accepted that some of the men had been involved in the retreat from France, but that they would receive no welcome in their own country until and unless they fought the Germans "in later stages of the war."

The dilemma is plain. The Brigade must go into action but it must not be decimated. If...it was to be put in the forefront of the battle, it might well lose half its effectives, with the result that Beneš and his Government would be reduced to the use of something under 2000 men. It seems to follow that the future employment...must be regarded largely from the political as opposed to the military angle; that the method of its employment is in fact a political rather than a military question. [The Brigade] should play its part, but should not be called upon to make heavy sacrifices.¹²¹

Nichols further had claimed that he had mentioned all of this to Masaryk who "entirely agreed", and that he not taken into account the 3000 men or so in Russia because "their future is so uncertain."

Nichols contacted Masaryk again and heard, presumably via the MNO, that Ingr favoured sending the whole UK force out to the Middle East for active service, or alternatively the Middle East force should be returned to Britain.¹²² They passed the problem on to the War Office who contacted the Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East proposing that the return of the Czechoslovak contingent was "desirable for political reasons."¹²³ The reply, early in the New Year, considered the retention of the unit to be "essential" for anti-aircraft operations until April 1st, but a later confirmation agreed that the unit would be transferred back to Britain immediately after this date.¹²⁴

One further event in 1942 which, in theory at least, should have aided all of the foreign governments in their recruitment drives, was the Allied Powers (War Service) Act. Introduced in the Commons by Ernest Bevin, supported by Herbert Morrison and Anthony Eden, the Act was designed to:

...make provision as to the liability to war service of the nationals of Allied Powers; to define for the purposes of the Allied Forces Act (1940) membership of certain Allied or associated forces; and to remove doubts as to the power of imprisoning or detaining persons sentenced by service courts exercising jurisdiction by virtue of that Act.¹²⁵

121 *ibid.* The minuted comments to this proposal as it circulated the Foreign Office all agreed that it should be a War Office problem which, though the Foreign Office needed to be aware of it, did not specifically concern them, thus rejecting Nichols' thesis that it was a political matter at heart.

122 FO 371/30855: Nichols to Roberts, 18.12.42 and 21.12.42.

123 FO 371/30855: War Office to C-in-C Middle East, 26.12.42. The C-in-C was General Sir Harold Alexander. The whole Middle East contingent was back in Britain by August 3rd 1943.

124 FO 371/30855: C-in-C middle East to War Office, 5.1.43 and 15.1.43.

125 House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, Vol.380, col.1529.

We may see from two of these clauses that this new instrument was partly constructed to tidy up loose ends left by the 1940 legislation, and the first clause was, in fact, not specifically directed towards the benefit of the allied powers at all.

As early as the summer of 1940, the principle for compulsory service in either a civilian or military capacity for all uninterned male aliens had been established by Bevin in the War Cabinet.¹²⁶ Ostensibly, the idea was to strengthen the mechanism which already existed for the registration of aliens for the International Labour Force under the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1940 which had created labour conscription. This new measure in 1942 was simply an extension to those powers whereby all allied nationals not in reserved occupations could, by law, be compelled to serve in uniform.

But what made this Act different to other instruments of compulsion was that it did *not* require any individual to join his own national forces; rather, if he had not done so within two months of receiving his call-up papers from his 'own' government, he would become liable to service in British forces "as if he had been a British subject."¹²⁷ Thus, as a tool by which the Allied governments could boost their numbers, it was effectively a useless piece of legislation because, as we saw in 1940, the British Government was never going to allow its minor allies to force into military service those persons who had racial and political reasons for abstaining. Such individuals were free to apply to British forces for service, and as a concession to the governments concerned, the British would refer those persons back to their 'own' governments for permission to do so. In the vast majority of cases this permission was granted, and we may glimpse this principle in action through the Czechoslovak recruitment summary of 1942.¹²⁸

Total applications for service in forces other than Czechoslovak = 133
Rejected applications = 10

Destination of remainder:

British Army (Britain)	= 11
British Army (Middle East)	= 10
British Army (Far East)	= 4
British Army (South Africa)	= 2
British Army (East Africa)	= 2
British RAMC	= 10
British Home Guard	= 23
Royal Air Force	= 38
British Fleet Air Arm	= 1
The Royal Navy	= 2

126 CAB 65/8: Minutes of 24.7.40. Bevin insisted that any legislation should compel such service "under the same general conditions as were applicable to British subjects."

127 Allied Powers (War Service) Act 1942, Clause 1, Subsection 2.

128 VKPR 1052/1943, Recruitment Summary for 1942. This summary deals only with applications from persons obliged to seek permission from the Czechoslovak Government to join other national forces.

US Army	= 2
The Australian Army	= 5
The Brazilian Army	= 1
The Yugoslav Army	= 1

The new Act could do nothing to prevent this from occurring in any subsequent years simply because any man who was refused permission to join a force of his choice need only sit tight for two months and then he would fall under either of the British National Service Acts and find himself in the British Army.

The Act was a long time coming. Geoffrey Mander had been pestering Attlee in the House since September 1940 for an assurance that the Government would introduce legislation conferring compulsory powers upon the Allied governments, but the answer then, and on subsequent occasions up to the Bill's introduction, was that the complexity of the matter caused considerable delays.¹²⁹ Much of the problem, it was true, concerned the necessity for separate negotiations with each Allied government, but another factor was the peculiar condition of the Czechoslovak case itself. Since early 1941, the official position of the Foreign Office was that it did not recognise Sudetendeutsche or other refugees under the authority of the Czechoslovak Refugee Trust Fund as being under the authority of the Provisional Czechoslovak Government.¹³⁰ This meant that any legislation so passed *must* take this into account, yet it had always been the position of the Beneš administration that such people were, technically, subjects of pre-Munich Czechoslovakia.

By March 1941, it was agreed that legislation could proceed if some people were protected and, if placed under pressure to enlist by the governments concerned, would be able to avoid conscription into those forces and become subject to British laws: "These groups would include certain racial and political minorities, particularly in the Polish and Czechoslovak communities."¹³¹ That each man should serve in some respect no matter what his nationality might be was a fully accepted principle, but there were only two possible options before the British Government: (1) to extend the

129 Mander's first Parliamentary Question was on September 18th, 1940. He asked again on December 3rd, again on March 3rd, 1941, and again on August 5th. [House of Commons Debates, 5th Series: Vol.365, cols 149/150; Vol.367, cols 398/399; Vol.369, cols 911/912; Vol.373, col 1785; Vol.378, col 2011.]

130 FO 371/26438: Minutes, 21.1.41. Another problem was that no satisfactory definition of "a Czechoslovak citizen" had yet been devised, and as part of this meeting, which in itself had been convened to discuss Bevin's statement in the War Cabinet, it was decided that such a person should be "every male...who has at any time possessed Czechoslovak nationality and has not subsequently acquired other nationality."

131 FO 371/26438: Minutes, 17.3.41. Any disputes over the nationality of any individual would be settled by a Tribunal on which the relevant Allied Government would be represented but would not have voting rights. Also referred to the Tribunal would be people who "had lost the sentiment of solidarity with their own country" and those unable to speak the national language.

National Service Acts to include Allied nationals, and this would certainly have been resented by the Allied governments; (2) extend conscription powers to those governments but in the knowledge that equality would not be obtained because military codes, pay scales and conditions varied considerably. The compromise was that all Allied nationals had a 'fail-safe' option by which they could don a British uniform if alternative prospects were not to their liking.¹³²

When the Bill came before Parliament for debate in June 1942, most of the points hitherto raised in private became public. For the Government, the Joint-Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour, Malcolm McCorquodale, drew attention to the fact that all the Allied governments had now accepted the proposals "with one exception...The Czechoslovak Government who, for reasons connected with their own law, have so far not felt able to agree to the Bill being applied to their own nationals."¹³³ This was hardly surprising, as we have seen that the Bill effectively denied them access to persons who, under Czechoslovak law, were deemed to be subjects of the State. More to the point, McCorquodale added that, "if and when the Bill is passed", further discussions would take place with the Czechoslovaks "in regard to the application of its provisions." In other words, the Bill would become law whether the Czechoslovaks agreed with it or not.¹³⁴ Finally, near the end of what was a longer debate than that which attended the earlier Act of 1940, the Attorney-General, Sir Donald Somerveil, admitted that the Bill, in respect of the Allied governments, "does not so much give them power, but says what consequences will happen if certain steps are not taken."¹³⁵ What the Allied governments had been demanding ever since the fall of France had, therefore, been a grave disappointment, and in the case of the Czechoslovak Government especially it failed to solve any of their recruitment problems to even the slightest degree.¹³⁶

132 FO 371/26438: Minutes, 19.4.41. Also highlighted in this meeting were the positions of the Polish and Czechoslovak Jews, those whose political sympathies were out of step with the Beneš or Sikorski governments, and the Sudetendeutsche who "were not yet reconciled to the Beneš régime." The Free French Forces were likely to be untouched by any of this, including the proposed legislation, "because of the special circumstances of the French case."

133 *House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, Vol.380, col 2175*. Malcolm Stewart McCorquodale (1901-1971) was National Conservative MP for Sowerby from 1931 to 1945, and Conservative MP for Epsom from 1947 to 1955. He was also a serving officer in the RAFVR throughout the war.

134 *ibid.* This drew a request from the floor for an explanation as to why the Czechoslovaks had been excluded, an explanation which was not given by McCorquodale, or at least not recorded. However, the matter was taken up by Miss Eleanor Rathbone (Member for the Combined English Universities) when she declared that the Sudeten-German population in this country were "passionately desirous of victory for the Allied cause", yet she also accepted that the political difficulties raised were substantial. [*ibid. col 2191.*]

135 *ibid. col 2197.*

136 In point of fact, the Act was only an Enabling Measure and required an Order in Council to bring it into effect. The Act would remain dormant "until, in agreement with the Allied nationality

With the return of the Middle East contingent to the UK, the immediate problems of the recruiting question were largely at an end, although at no time were enough men transferred to fully establish each squadron with Czechoslovak nationals and sufficient reserves. There were men available to form a small flying group for service in the Soviet Union, and the steady influx of suitable material at the rate proposed by Nižborsky in 1942 was now possible, though Ingr continued to hold his 1942 position of no further transfers beyond that proposal. As we shall see later, by the summer of 1943 most minds at the MNO were turned towards the post-war situation, and the rôle of the Brigade - fully-trained and equipped - was paramount in their thinking.

As a final point, it can be mentioned that the Canadian volunteers, by and large, had also proved to be a disappointment. Janoušek, writing in November 1943, drew the attention of the MNO to the relative failure of the recruiting drive in North America, "not only in terms of quantity, but also quality":

The Canadian volunteers have caused more ills than good, and there's not much point at recruiting high numbers of Americans and Canadians at high expense to the Czechoslovak State when they then ask to be transferred to the RCAF or the USAAF. Many do not speak Czech, they openly admit they have nothing to do with our cause, ground personnel originally recruited for flying training are a source of constant problems, and their work and ability as a whole by far does not reach the level of the original Czechoslovak flying units.¹³⁷

He continued to outline the major problems, pay, conditions and family provision being at the top of the list of grievances. He added, "I have thus informed the military attaché in Canada to be absolutely clear about the situation in the United Kingdom", and advised that a reduction in recruitment would, in the long term, bring financial and military benefits to the forces in Britain.¹³⁸

In summary, recruitment for the Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain was hobbled almost from the start. In addition to the initial problems of too many officers and not enough men, the political arguments within the MNO meant that each man transferred from the Brigade was done so grudgingly, and it was a battle which Janoušek ultimately lost, out-argued and out-ranked by Ingr. Furthermore, neither the British or the North

concerned, an Order is made applying it to persons of that nationality." [*ibid.* col 2176.] In the case of the six Allied governments plus Yugoslavia, such an Order was not made until March 11th, 1943 and did not come into force until April 1st - by coincidence the same day that the Czechoslovak contingent in the Middle East was due for transfer to Britain. [*House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, Vol.388, cols 2360/2361.*]

137 MNO 65/5015/1943: Janoušek to the MNO, 11.11.43.

138 *ibid.* Janoušek was fair in his report when he stated that the North American recruits received the same pay as men in the RAF because the Czechoslovak Air Force was part of the RAFVR, but he also noted that USAAF pay was higher, and both this force and the RCAF paid extra for service overseas. Though thousands of miles from home, the Canadian recruits received no such bonus as members of the RAFVR.

Americans were prepared to provide much more than encouragement, and even this came with several conditions attached. Political and national obstacles also existed, many created by the Czechoslovaks themselves in their desire for a force clean of unwanted elements, and such legislation which might have helped was half-baked, misdirected, and ultimately came far too late to have any effect.

Recruitment (2): The effects.

It is possible to gain insight into the effects of low recruitment, and in particular the great difficulties this posed when attempting to replace losses and wastage, by broadly comparing the deployment of the three Czechoslovak fighter squadrons with that of seven Polish units which have comparable records. The Polish squadrons selected for the exercise are 302, 303, 306, 308, 315, 316 and 317.¹³⁹ In Figure 1, the number of locations, the total number of days spent in service, and the average number of days spent on any given station are displayed in tabular form up to the launch of Operation *Overlord* on June 6th, 1944.¹⁴⁰

Figure 1: Squadron deployment to June 6th, 1944.

Squadron	Locations	Days	Average
310 (Cz)	22	1425	65
312 (Cz)	28	1361	49
313 (Cz)	20	1095	55
302 (P)	31	1423	46
303 (P)	17	1320	78
306 (P)	17	1330	78
308 (P)	23	1354	59
315 (P)	11	1229	112
316 (P)	10	1164	116
317 (P)	19	1209	64
All Czech	70	3881	55
All Polish	128	9029	71

139 Excluded from the Polish contingent are 300, 301, 304 and 305, all of which were bomber squadrons; 307, a specialist night-fighter unit; 309, an Army Co-Operation and latterly a reconnaissance unit; and 318, formed early in 1943 for tactical reconnaissance duties and training.

140 These figures are in whole days, and are drawn from a variety of sources including the Operational Records Books in AIR 27. Movement dates cannot be considered as absolutely accurate because squadrons sometimes moved in echelons, thus the dates must be regarded as probable and not definite. As Wing Commander C.G. Jefford makes clear, the date of the move depended on who recorded it and when, and from which perspective, Group, outgoing unit or incoming unit. [Jefford, C.G: *R.A.F. Squadrons* (Airlife 1988), pp 19-20.]

Before concluding anything from this data, it must be strongly emphasised that these figures are for general illustration only, for they do not take into account the changing conditions of war, equipment replacement, training programmes, or any of the myriad other factors which affected any given squadron's position in the line. However, we can see from this that the Polish squadrons enjoyed, on average, greater stability in deployment, spending something like 25% longer at stations than the Czechoslovaks. Also, the average Polish squadron moved approximately 18 times in its combat career to *Overlord* compared with the Czechoslovak tally of 23, thus the psychological strain of re-deployment was lessened for the Poles, a factor highlighted by the Air Ministry in its paper on the maintenance of high morale in Allied squadrons.

But it is not so much how often the squadrons moved which reflected their combat duties, but where they were situated. If we perform further calculations on the data, this time by area, then a much more interesting picture emerges. In Figure 2, the same squadrons are sorted by Group, again up to *Overlord*.¹⁴¹

Figure 2: Squadron deployment by Group to June 6th, 1944.

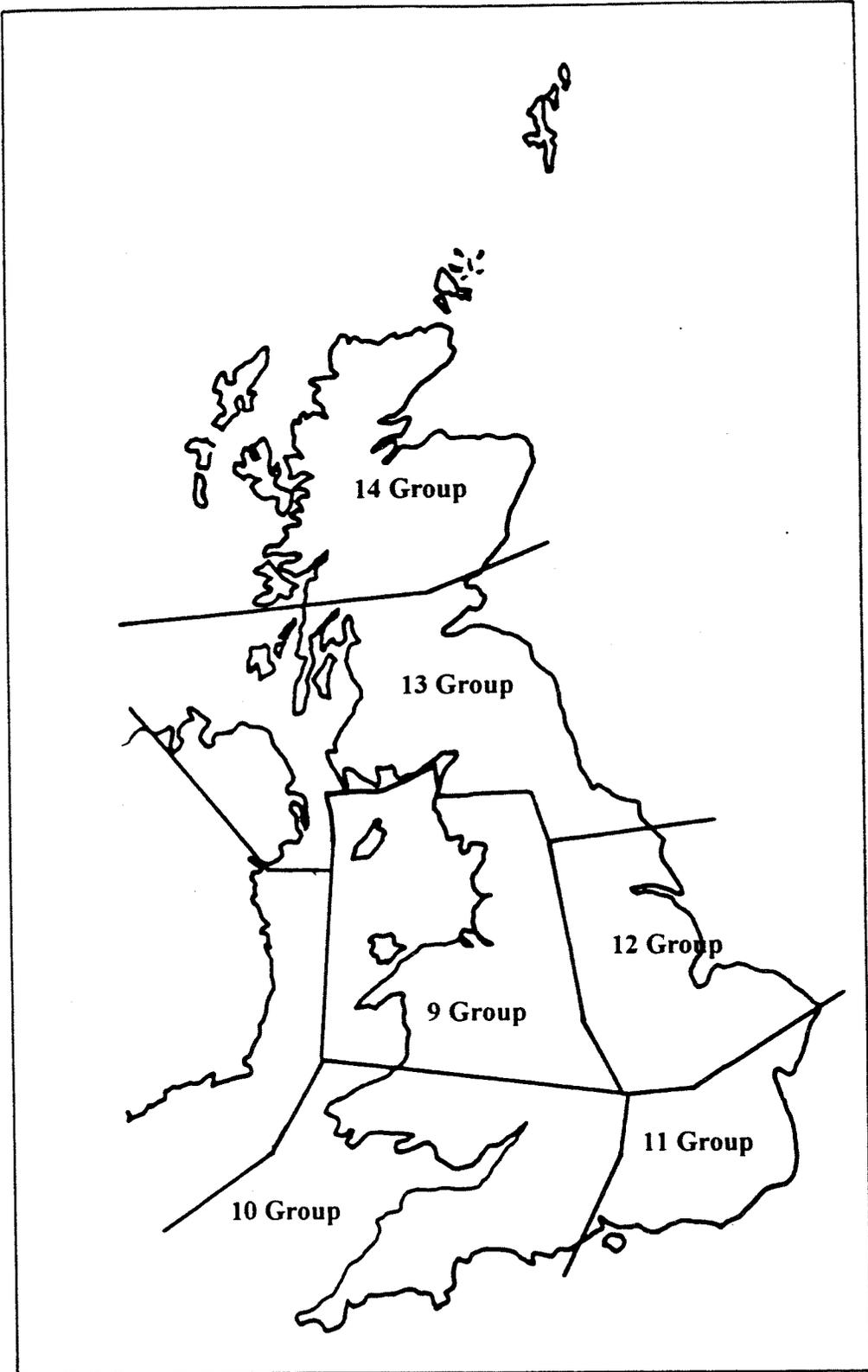
Squadron	9 Group	10 Group	11 Group	12 Group	13 Group
310 (Cz)	13 (1%)	<u>661 (46%)</u>	149 (10%)	357 (25%)	245 (17%) ¹⁴²
312 (Cz)	287 (21%)	<u>651 (48%)</u>	194 (14%)	36 (3%)	193 (14%)
313 (Cz)	4 (1%)	<u>637 (58%)</u>	241 (22%)	37 (3%)	176 (16%)
302 (P)	76 (5%)	308 (22%)	<u>821 (58%)</u>	128 (9%)	90 (6%)
303 (P)	83 (6%)	nil (-)	<u>758 (57%)</u>	226 (17%)	253 (19%)
306 (P)	230 (17%)	142 (11%)	<u>763 (57%)</u>	122 (9%)	73 (5%)
308 (P)	377 (28%)	58 (4%)	<u>759 (56%)</u>	160 (12%)	nil (-)
315 (P)	286 (23%)	nil (-)	<u>421 (34%)</u>	340 (28%)	182 (15%)
316 (P)	71 (6%)	256 (22%)	<u>424 (36%)</u>	266 (23%)	147 (13%)
317 (P)	161 (13%)	339 (28%)	499 (41%)	75 (6%)	135 (11%)
All Czech	8% (5th)	51% (1st)	15% (3rd)	10% (4th)	16% (2nd)
All Polish	14% (3rd)	12% (4th)	48% (1st)	15% (2nd)	10% (5th)

141 The table is organised to show the total number of days spent in any given Group, followed by a percentage which reflects the proportion of the entire time in service spent in any Group; hence 310 (Czech) Squadron spent only 1% of its 1425 days in 9 Group. The numbers in the lower two rows rank those percentages in order.

Group numbers and boundaries changed during the war. In July 1940, only 10, 11, 12 and 13 existed in Fighter Command and each had a slightly different area than when the revised version of 1941 added 9 and 14. Also, as *Overlord* approached and the Second Tactical Air Force was complete, some Groups were renumbered altogether, but what matters here is not the number but the area which any Group covered. Because of this, the Group numberings used here, though inaccurate in the purest sense, serve as indicators of geographical location.

142 All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number, therefore the totals may not add to 100%, as with this particular squadron.

Figure 3: Group boundaries as of Spring 1941.



If the reader will now refer to Figure 3 (p119), then it becomes immediately clear from these statistics that the three Czechoslovak fighter squadrons spent the largest proportion of their time in 10 Group; that is, southern Wales and the far south-west of England. Every Polish squadron, however, spent the greater part of its time in 11 Group, mainly at Northolt, and primarily in the defence of London.

The distances between the primary area for each national contingent and the respective second places are too great for coincidence to play a significant part. Furthermore, they are large enough to cancel the small errors of calculation and data collation which may have occurred. Admittedly, the Polish group spent 63% of its time in 11 Group (2787 days from a total of 4445) at Northolt, and much of that was spent in Wings of two or three squadrons, thereby partially fulfilling another of the Air Ministry's 'principles' noted earlier in this section. Even so, other 11 Group service was still nearly three times that spent by the Czechoslovak contingent in that area, so even without Northolt the Polish units still far outweighed the Czechoslovaks in 11 Group service.

So what explanations can be advanced for this division of labour? We saw earlier how Dowding had spoken of creating Slav squadrons "to thicken the line in the west", but apart from 312, which took up a lengthy residence in Speke (Lancashire) in September 1940, it was to be August 1941 before 313 moved to the south-west (Portreath), followed in December by 312 which re-located to Perranporth.¹⁴³ Of course, much depends on what Dowding termed "the west", but the records show that there was no headlong rush to move Allied squadrons into that area. Factory protection in Lancashire was, naturally enough, a good cause for fighter deployment, but by far the bulk of the action in the early years of the war involved the squadrons of 11 Group in the south-east. In any case, pure reinforcement of a battle line need not be so discriminatory as to involve the aircrews of one national group, so we must reject this as a valid reason. We must also reject any suggestion that the Poles were better pilots and more capable of defending London against fighters and bombers, for there is not the slightest piece of evidence, official or anecdotal, to support such an assertion.¹⁴⁴

143 The Polish squadrons which first saw service in the south-western part of Britain were: 306 (November 1940); 317 (July 1941); 302 and 316 (August 1941); and 308 (April 1942).

144 In fact, Air Marshal Sir William Sholto-Douglas told Bruce Lockhart in 1944 that both the Czechoslovak and Polish fliers were "excellent" and that he could "not differentiate on merit." In summing up their characteristics, however, he felt that the Poles were "gallant, romantic and individualistic", whereas the Czechoslovaks were "rational, solid and obey orders." They were "very good fliers indeed [and the] team work good." [Bruce Lockhart R.H: *Diaries (Vol 2)*: entry for 26.2.44.] Sholto-Douglas was at this time C-in-C Coastal Command.

In all probability the reason lay in the Czechoslovaks' difficulties with recruitment, and this can be illustrated by briefly examining the duties assigned to the Czechoslovak squadrons during their time in the south-west. Take, for example, 310's rôle at Perranporth in Cornwall. Virtually all of the stations in this western part of Britain were home to squadrons which patrolled the south-west approaches to the island. It was monotonous work, but losses were low - almost non-existent at times. However, squadrons from here (and its controlling station, Portreath) also flew offensive fighter sweeps and provided cover for returning bombers if required. Similarly, 312 spent time flying convoy escorts from Fairwood Common and occasionally participated in *Ramrod* operations against the Brittany coast, but again losses were very low.¹⁴⁵ 313, which spent over a year at Church Stanton in Somerset, flew *Ramrods* and *Rhubarbs* which "enlivened their hated convoy patrols", a tedious duty but also one which promised little contact with enemy aircraft.¹⁴⁶ In fact, Jiří Rajlich and Jiří Sehnal's painstaking research has resulted in a complete list of all the operations flown by the three fighter squadrons from June 1st 1942 to April 1945, together with the corresponding losses. On average, the three squadrons in total lost 20 pilots a year from 1942 to 1944, not a high figure, but high enough to show that they were not exactly detailed for light duties either.¹⁴⁷ Besides, we have seen earlier that pilot replacement was not such a problem for the Czechoslovaks; it was never easy, but Janoušek's training programmes, especially by April 1942, had promised a steady supply.

A clue to the answer lies in the deployment of 310 squadron, the oldest and most experienced of the three units. If the reader refers to Figure 2 again, it will be seen that 310 spent the least period of time in 11 Group than any of the other squadrons. It spent nearly a year in the adjacent area, 12 Group, but this resulted from its first posting to Duxford and from then on it followed the same pattern as the others. The interesting thing about 310 is that it was the only squadron ever to have had a full complement of Czechoslovak ground crew, and we know that the recruitment, training and replacement of ground crew was by far the biggest headache for the MNO. Furthermore, most of the south-western stations (and, for that matter, many of those in 9 and 13 Groups) were either spared completely from the attentions of the Luftwaffe or suffered one or two minor raids during the whole war; whereas the stations in 11 Group

145 A *Ramrod* was a bomber raid escorted by fighters to a specific target, usually in daylight.

146 Ashworth C: *Action Stations (Volume 5) Military Airfields of the South-West*. (Patrick Stephens Ltd 1985) p72. A *Rhubarb* was an offensive fighter sweep against enemy communications and storage sites.

147 Rajlich J, Sehnal J: *Stíhači nad kanálem* [Fighters Over The Channel] (Naše Vojsko 1993) pp 271-330. It should be carefully noted that the figures quoted concern losses suffered by the Czechoslovak fighter squadrons only, and do not include men who died while posted to other units.

were either badly and repeatedly hit or lived under the threat of enemy action at least until *Overlord* and to some extent beyond. As for the other two squadrons which, to varying degrees, relied on British ground crew to keep them operational, surely it would be a tenable argument to suggest that it was politically desirable to restrict to a minimum the potential losses among them, not least because neither the British nor Czechoslovak authorities were at any time entirely comfortable with the situation.

If the reader would briefly consult Appendix B, it will be seen at a glance that the strength of the Czechoslovak air contingent levelled out at approximately 1500 from June 1943 onwards, and this represented only a marginal increase from earlier tallies. In contrast, the Poles added nearly 4000 to their numbers between December 1940 and *Overlord*, and thus they were in a significantly better position to withstand losses of all kinds. It is therefore possible that the Czechoslovak squadrons spent the vast proportion of their service in Britain at stations which were only marginally vulnerable to enemy attack to save ground crew losses and not air crew. At once it must be admitted that the evidence is shallow and that a great deal more research needs to be done to fully prove the point. Nor, unfortunately, has any official document yet been discovered which even so much hints that this may have been policy and not accident; or simply part of the complex shuffling of squadrons which continued throughout the war.

There is an alternative explanation, but it is as equally difficult to prove and it is also impeded by other evidence which exists in regard to the Poles. In this other scenario, the Czechoslovak squadrons would have been placed sufficiently distant from the 'hot spots' of south-east England to deny the Beneš Government a serious voice at the peace table, yet not so far as to freeze them out of the action altogether, thus maintaining the image that a creditable contribution to the war effort was being made. From the political point of view, this theory seems tempting. We have already seen how wary the British were of embroiling themselves in Czechoslovak politics and how adamant they were in refusing to endorse any post-war settlement until the time came. Add to this the fact that the Czechoslovaks were never full allies (whereas the Poles were); that the Czechoslovak Army was not deployed until a very late stage in the war (whereas the Polish land forces were active in several theatres throughout the conflict); and that the Czechoslovak Air Force took no part in the liberation of Europe save for a few sweeps over the Normandy beaches (whereas some Polish squadrons were in the van of the advance), and one has the makings of a credible argument. Always a political tool of some description since their arrival, the Czechoslovak squadrons were equipped and deployed according to a pre-determined decision by the British to restrict

their post-war influence to little more than mutual award-giving and commemorative flights.

Again, we are desperately short of hard evidence to establish the fact, but the theory also breaks down in one other important respect. As Martin Kitchen has shown, the British were as ill-disposed towards post-war Polish plans. After the Tehran Conference, during which Stalin had demanded a vast chunk of eastern Poland to be compensated by German territory in the west, Churchill had told the London Poles that this would be the best they could hope for. By insisting that they came to an agreement then in early 1944 rather than waiting until the Red Army had overrun the country completely, Churchill was trying to nip a looming post-war difficulty in the bud.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, in a letter to Eden, the Prime Minister wrote:

...we have never undertaken to defend existing Polish frontiers [and] they must be very silly if they imagine we are going to begin a new war with Russia for the sake of the Polish eastern border.¹⁴⁹

If this represents a clear illustration of Churchill's attitude in January 1944, then it is clear that the Poles could expect no favours from the British either. Nevertheless, some Polish squadrons fought their way across Europe after *Overlord*, so if British policy was to keep the Czechoslovak squadrons well behind the lines for political reasons, why was this not applied in the case of the Poles as well? The theory is substantially weakened by this question alone.¹⁵⁰

Finally, there is also the possibility that the impetus for holding the squadrons back need not necessarily have come from the British authorities. We have already seen that the Czechoslovaks knew their real and impending difficulties with recruitment from a very early stage in their exile. Furthermore, the scale of the post-war development and the future rôle of the Air Force after liberation were also not far from the agenda, so in this sense the Czechoslovaks had a vested interest themselves in minimising losses and maximising the experience and training of their aircrews. In a report to the VKPR in late 1941 (unusually on Air Ministry paper), Janoušek wrote:

One cannot rule out the fact that our Air Force may be engaged in some fighting after our return home, so it is recommended that at least the present fighter squadrons be kept on a war footing [after the liberation]. These squadrons will be the basis for the building-up of a new Czechoslovak Air Force [therefore] it is necessary that we return

148 Kitchen M: *British Policy Towards the Soviet Union During The Second World War*, p177.

149 PREM 3 355/7: Churchill to Eden, 4.1.44.

150 According to Anita Prazmowská, by 1944 the Polish Government in London "had become increasingly irrelevant in British and United States politics in spite of its increased military contribution to the war" and that its future relationship with the Soviets was actually hindered by the Polish desire to fight with the western Allies, particularly the British. [Prazmowská, *op.cit.*, p192.]

home with the greatest number of trained personnel, air and ground, and with the greatest possible number of aircraft.¹⁵¹

Just by itself, this would provide a powerful motive for ensuring that Group deployments were favourable to the Czechoslovaks; that each man learned his craft and stood a fair chance of surviving the war to apply his skills at home. We shall see below that Beneš was well aware of Janoušek's popularity within the Air Ministry as the man to lead the Czechoslovak air contingent, so it is not by any means unlikely that he spoke to the right man at the right time and kept his men constantly, but relatively safely, employed.

On balance, the first and third of these theories seem the most likely contenders as valid explanations as to why the air contingent spent so much of its time in quieter sectors, but in the last analysis recruitment is at the heart of both. We might hope that some useful documentation might one day appear to prove one or other, but it is also quite probable that no such paper exists; that the decisions were made orally under some kind of gentleman's agreement, leaving the historian to discover the pattern and attempt to expose the motives. We know that 311 bomber squadron was transferred to Coastal Command in April 1942, not because its losses were any higher than any comparable unit, but because replacing those losses was extremely difficult. Therefore it made sense to minimise them at source. But fighter squadrons could not be so offset; quite simply there was nowhere for them to go unless they were rolled up and the aircrews dispersed. This would have been politically catastrophic, more for Beneš than the British, so the next logical option would be to place them out of the range of the fighters and bombers flying out of enemy airfields in France and Scandinavia.

The independence question

We have seen in Part One how the British authorities, and the Air Ministry in particular, reacted negatively to the initial proposals made by the Czechoslovaks in 1940 for an independent Air Force, and how subsequently the contingent was placed within the RAFVR for the purposes of administration, deployment and command. In 1940, the Czechoslovaks had hoped to take advantage of the general confusion surrounding the

151 VKPR 25/6/1/3: Janoušek to VKPR, 10.12.41. The preamble to the document also claims that his notes confirmed "the verbal comments of the President", and it is perfectly feasible that such an initiative would have come originally from Beneš. In an attached minute, attention is also drawn to the difficulties met in properly rewarding ground crew for their services, yet the only way they could earn awards equivalent to the air crew was by bravery under fire, yet enemy action against the airfields was so slight that only 5 Czech War Crosses and 11 medals for valour had been awarded to date "and most of those were earned by the ground forces before transfer to Britain."

exodus from France by simply pointing to their agreement with the French and suggesting it as a working model for a reconstituted force on English soil. But once this plan had been so comprehensively rejected, it appeared to the British to be the end of the matter.

That was not the view of the Czechoslovaks, however, for during the autumn of 1940 and the early part of 1941, a short series of minutes and papers circulated within the MNO and the VKPR testing the thesis that the Air Force could yet still be granted independent status by the British, but this time on the Polish model. More to the point, this topic revealed yet another breach within the Czechoslovak High Command, and it led ultimately to a document being issued by the Air Ministry which revealed the full extent of the exasperation which that Department felt in its dealings with the Czechoslovak Air Force in the United Kingdom.

In November 1940, Slezák submitted a report to the VKPR which called for the independence question to be re-negotiated with the British. His arguments were numerous, and several points bear examination because they reveal much about the condition of the Air Force at the time, the political atmosphere within the Beneš Government, and the long-term strategic planning which, even then, was uppermost in the President's mind.

Slezák began with a statement which scarcely needed any qualification given the fabulous successes of the Luftwaffe in the Polish and French campaigns: that a modern state required an independent Air Force as a strategic weapon in itself, as the kingpin of defence.¹⁵² By this he meant that, as with the British and the other great powers, an independent Air Force was literally so; that is, having no connection with the land forces in terms of finance, development and training except as part of an overall defence policy or military campaign. This had not been the case in Czechoslovakia before the war because the air arm had been wholly supported and directed by the MNO as army co-operation units. As a result, the Air Force had progressed only in fits and starts as a series of superseding defence policies required the Army to take ever greater responsibility for the defence of the nation.¹⁵³ To avoid this happening again, he argued, now was the time to reorganise it and present a coherent, feasible plan to the British for reassessment.

To support his claim, he first pointed to the current record of the Czechoslovak Air Force within the RAFVR and to the fact that air power was without doubt the

152 VKPR 24/1/1/2: Slezák to the VKPR, 9.11.40.

153 *ibid.* So soon into the report, Slezák began to point the finger at the culprits. Reminding his readers that many attempts to create an independent arm had been rejected, he argued that "people in leading positions had never really understood the importance of it and even today they are not at all inclined to such an idea."

strategic weapon of the future. It could strike deep into enemy territory, it could defend or attack at a moment's notice, and it could either act in tandem with the Army or clear the way for a successful land campaign. All of these benefits meant that its administrative and tactical leadership must also be fully independent from the Army, "because, at present, the needs of the Air Force are always adjusted to the Army's demands." He insisted that the Air Force would be a "young" service, with youthful personnel, new ideas, fresh strategies and current technology. Youth was the key. Warming to his theme, he noted that the demands of modern powered flight on the human body were enormous; therefore commanders should also be physically fit and younger than their counterparts in the Army. As a result, promotion in the Air Force would be faster than that in the land forces, morale would stay high, and the nation would get the best possible return for its investment.

Janoušek issued a paper of his own two days later, this time to the MNO.¹⁵⁴ He argued that British refusal to grant independence had shackled the Air Force to the MNO, and any future development or expansion would have to depend on the needs of the Brigade. Furthermore, by creating an Inspectorate only, the British had secured for themselves an Allied force with no power to regulate itself. These two aspects could only be solved by (a) separating the Air Force from the MNO, and (b) re-organising the Air Force into a form acceptable to the Air Ministry so that it might consider independence on the Polish model. Hinting that the Air Ministry "would very much welcome this solution", he then looked forward to the day of national liberation and added that the experience gained from a truly independent command structure would be invaluable when the Air Force was rebuilt after the war.

It is difficult to believe that the Air Ministry had shown interest in granting the Czechoslovak Air Force the independence which it had so thoroughly resisted six months before. Moreover, no evidence has yet emerged to substantiate Janoušek's claim, and the relevant Air and Foreign Office files contain nothing on the subject during this period. Of course, this is not to say that he did not speak with someone of influence, but it was unlikely to have been an official exchange, and the most probable candidate for such a conversation would have been Beaumont who, as we have seen, was very sympathetic toward the Czechoslovak cause. Even so, it is difficult to reject the conclusion that Janoušek was merely sweetening his audience here, for he saw himself as a potential Secretary of State for Air within the Czechoslovak Government. Besides, he himself offered no concrete evidence to support his statement, only that he was "convinced" that Air Ministry would endorse such a re-organisation.¹⁵⁵

154 MNO 9/2921/1940: Janoušek to the MNO, 11.12.40.

155 *ibid.* Janoušek's bid for higher office is explicit in this paper. Speaking of the role of higher

We must bear in mind that these papers would have certainly crossed Ingr's desk, and earlier we saw his position regarding the needs of the Army versus those of the Air Force in terms of recruitment. As Minister of National Defence, Ingr was responsible for the *entire* Czechoslovak military, and both Slezák and Janoušek were proposing nothing less than to carve off a substantial slice of his responsibility and give it to younger men in direct opposition to his own authority. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a rejoinder to this scheme quickly originated from within the MNO, and though it was unsigned, we may be reasonably sure that Ingr either authored it or approved it. Directed at both reports, it was argued in the first place that only the great powers had independent air forces, and all those of the smaller states were inextricably connected to the Army. The present Air Force, as it was constituted in Britain, was far too small for independent status and the existing Agreement with the British meant that they had virtually all the levers of command in their hands, Janoušek's Inspectorate being little more than an administrative body.¹⁵⁶ In the second place, both the Army and the Air Force formed two parts of a common defence force. Thus only one person should bear overall responsibility and if separate ministries were created this would inevitably lead to endless argument.

These were powerful arguments, containing references to the present condition and the future development of what was, and would always be, a small force. Slezák had also insisted that independence now would free the Air Force to have its own recruitment policy, henceforth volunteers could be specially selected for ground duties and not lost to the Army for no other reason than the fulfilment of quotas. He added, temptingly, that independence would improve the relationships with the other Allies, "and especially the British, who we will be able to deal with as an equal party."¹⁵⁷ This was also swept aside in the riposte, for the Czechoslovak Air Force, "whether we like it or not", was a part of the RAF, and thus an independent Air Force command within the MNO "would be just an illusion."¹⁵⁸ A final, overwhelming paragraph sealed the debate for the present moment:

commanders in an independent force, he wrote: "The Inspector of the Czechoslovak Air Force, which for the Air Ministry is the main agent, is for internal Czechoslovak needs, and for the future also, the effective head of the Air Force. In order that he can represent its interests, and where there is a need for Government involvement, it is also necessary for the Inspector-General to be Secretary of State for Air."

156 MNO 9/2922/1940. This paper is undated, but its file-stamping indicates that it was issued, at the latest, on December 31st 1940. Judging from the typeface, it is a carbon-copy of an original which does not appear in either the MNO or VKPR files.

157 VKPR 24/1/1/2: Slezák to the VKPR, 9.11.40.

158 MNO 9/2922/1940. [Undated]

The Czechoslovak Air Force has always acted according to the needs of the Army, but why should this be a difficulty? Both parts must act according to their *mutual* interests. The MNO, and thereby the Chief-of-Staff, must coordinate the interests of both sides or else there will be damaging divisions. Recruitment problems will exist regardless of independence or not, and recruitment must be concentrated and centralised, not divided. This is the business of the MNO.¹⁵⁹

As a nod towards the independence lobby, the author accepted that "there are many valid reasons" for an independent Air Force, "but the question will only be solved at home. In Britain, there is simply no point in discussing the matter."

Both Slezák and Janoušek had made the same mistake in their various papers, for they had both focused too hard on the need for an independent command structure within the MNO, threatening Ingr's position. Janoušek had argued that his present responsibilities meant that he was forever trying to implement MNO policy and simultaneously satisfy British requirements, a balancing act that was not always achievable, especially when it came to recruitment. His solution, in having himself appointed Supreme Commander of the Czechoslovak Air Force, would make him accountable directly to Beneš and not Ingr, who logically would then become responsible only for the Army. Such a post would mean that he could "defend the interests and needs of the Air Force, particularly when in conflict with the Army." In short, it was an argument which was highly unlikely to have inspired Ingr to reach for his rubber stamp.¹⁶⁰

Beneš became directly involved in the early months of 1941.¹⁶¹ The reports which had gone to the VKPR would certainly have been read by him, but not necessarily those produced for or by the MNO. In early February 1941, he convened a meeting to discuss independence and recruitment, and the previous arguments for and against independence were presented.¹⁶² It was unanimously agreed that the current Agreement with the British effectively nullified any influence the MNO or the Czechoslovak Government had over the Air Force; as Beneš summarised it, "We can't even effect any kind of change." He also believed that the arrivals from France had not altered the British strategy concerning the war in the air in any way, and he claimed that

159 *ibid.* The emphasis is original.

160 VKPR 25/1/1/3: Janoušek to the VKPR, 11.12.1940. He also added that the office of the Supreme Commander would also embody a political element, thus making him a member of the Government. "This would help to maintain much better links between the political leadership, the Air Ministry, and the Czechoslovak Air Force...and we would thus prepare a new level of leadership for the Air Force after the war."

161 It is probable that his involvement was forced by Slezák who had discussed the matter with Janoušek. Both were agreed that the question of independence could not be solved without the intervention of Beneš and Ingr, and Slezák minuted the VKPR in January to that effect. [VKPR 25/1/1/3: Slezák to the VKPR, 8.1.41.]

162 MNO 14/317/1941: Minutes of 6.2.41. Janoušek was not present at this meeting.

both Eden and Sinclair had told him at the time of the evacuations that independence "was a matter of fact...they were polite and willing, but as I found out later, they were only manoeuvring."

This last point was completely untrue. We have seen in Part One of this study that there was not the slightest scrap of evidence to support such a claim, and we might glimpse a reason for this statement in what followed it. Turning to Janoušek's rôle, he accused the Inspector-General of mishandling all of the negotiations with the British and "leaving us in a bad position." As a result, a political struggle had developed between the Czechoslovak Government and the Air Ministry over the independence question, and he now believed that the British would not grant it "at any price."¹⁶³

Before we consider the President's motives here, we should also glance at a further meeting less than a fortnight later at which, again, Slezák was present but Janoušek was not. It was decided at the outset that independence for the Air Force could never be in the hands of the military or political leadership of the Czechoslovak Government, and that it could be done "only at the instigation of the British."¹⁶⁴ In one sense that should have been the end of the matter - after all, the British position had been made clear from the start - but it is also apparent from the record that the issue was used to score personal and political points. The meeting considered another short paper prepared by Janoušek in which he argued:

If we take into account the fact that the Air Force definitely needs more independence in decision-making than it has at the moment, and where the constant refusal of the Minister [Ingr] to my demands for more personnel has badly damaged the Air Force and created the impression with the Czechoslovak airmen, as well as the British, that the MNO isn't interested in supporting the Air Force in order that it can fulfil its fighting rôle properly, I now support a reorganisation of the Air Force which is acceptable to the Air Ministry.¹⁶⁵

It is unfortunate that the minutes do not record all of the comments at the table, for it is certain that Ingr would have disputed Janoušek's "fact" in regard to decision-making. What *does* emerge with some clarity is that Janoušek held considerable influence with the British and that this was resented. Following an offhand comment by Slezák that the Polish had much greater administrative freedom than the Czechoslovaks, Beneš agreed and said, "We lost the chance from the start and Janoušek is responsible." He went on to say that in his opinion the whole matter was indivisible from the interests of

163 *ibid.* Beneš also added that victory in the Battle of Britain had turned the RAF into the élite force, leaving the Air Ministry with greatly enhanced political, as well as military, influence. He believed that the independent status of the Brigade presented the British with no problems whatsoever "since they are not being used."

164 MNO 14/427/1941: Minutes of 18.2.41.

165 *ibid.* From the record, it appears that Slezák read the report aloud.

the British military "and the interests of Janoušek - personal interests." And yet Beneš also recognised Janoušek's power, for he accepted that the latter should remain the titular head of the Air Force, not least because he was "suitable to the British and even against our interests they will keep him there."¹⁶⁶

Beneš was clearly doing some manoeuvring of his own in these meetings, for in Janoušek's absence he had succeeded in isolating him and placing much of the blame for the position of the Air Force squarely on to his shoulders. By doing so, he would not alienate Ingr or any of the other Army men on whom he relied to build a competent force ready for repatriation at the war's end. In one sense, he had to take sides because the argument had reached a point where he was forced to make a decision one way or the other, and it was simpler to target Janoušek (while simultaneously confirming his position as Inspector-General) than it was to decree a major reorganisation within his military forces. There were always two dimensions to this argument - independent status for the Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain as a fighting arm, and independence *within* the Czechoslovak Armed Forces as administered by the MNO. The first was a dead cause and everyone knew it at heart, but the second held the danger of a serious schism at the highest levels of command, and this Beneš had to avoid at all costs. He succeeded, and for the next eighteen months the question did not resurface.

When it did, however, it did so with some considerable impact. In October 1942, Ingr wrote to Masaryk informing him of a decision to approach the Air Ministry with a revised Agreement based on the 1940 version but so structured as to give the Air Force much greater independence, especially in the field of administration. What triggered this resurgence of an old idea is difficult to ascertain, as is a reason for the timing of the scheme. The papers and indexes in the MNO and VKPR archives lend no clue. It could have been the involvement of the Czechoslovak squadrons in the Dieppe Raid, perhaps prompting a determination to achieve greater prestige and recognition, or it could have been part of Beneš's political programme, by this time turning east towards the Soviet Union. Also, Reinhard Heydrich had been assassinated in June 1942 by British-trained operatives, and the Munich Agreement had been repudiated in the House of Commons by Anthony Eden in August, so perhaps Beneš and his commanders felt more confident of success at this time than they had in 1940.¹⁶⁷ But whatever the cause or causes may have been, a close study of the texts seems to indicate that the MNO had been taking stock and felt that the time was indeed right for a full reappraisal.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.* Beneš also said that "a problem" was that the officers in particular were content to be in the RAFVR, and this echoes sentiments recorded by the British as we saw in Part One.

¹⁶⁷ It should be noted that Heydrich was actually attacked on May 27th, but died from his injuries on June 4th. A full account of the operation - code-named ANTHROPOID - may be read in Callum MacDonald's *The Killing of SS Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich* (Macmillan 1989).

One of the first points raised was that the 1940 Agreement had been contracted with an interim Government which was now legally defunct and had been replaced by a fully sovereign administration.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, the Czechoslovak Air Force had necessarily been absorbed into the RAFVR because of the numerous differences in organisation, training and equipment:

Now that two years have passed, these reasons are no longer valid, therefore it has become necessary to start negotiations with the British Government so that the Czechoslovak Air Force will be on the same level as the Polish or French air forces. This would mean that the Czechoslovak military administration would have greater influence over the Air Force [and] it would no longer be a part of the RAFVR. It would serve alongside the RAF, with its allegiance to the Czechoslovak Republic not, as at present, to the interim Government and the British monarch. All of these limitations to our sovereignty should cease to exist.

Not a word of this was inaccurate or exaggerated, and many could successfully argue that it was also wholly justified. The fact that it came from Ingr indicates that he was still very much at the helm, and nothing in the documents even remotely suggests that such an independent force would have its own minister within the MNO, so Ingr's position as Chief-of-Staff was safe.¹⁶⁹

The draft Agreement which was enclosed differed in many small yet crucial aspects from the rather hurried arrangement of 1940. In the earlier Agreement, Paragraph 1 of Article 1 (Establishment) stipulated that:

The Czechoslovak personnel available shall be organised into Czechoslovak units attached to the Royal Air Force. Such units, although organised in this way for reasons of practical convenience, shall be recognised as units of the Czechoslovak Air Force, which is part of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces.¹⁷⁰

We see here that the British had accepted the principle of an independent force at least by name. To illustrate this fact, roundels in the Czechoslovak national colours were painted on aircraft fuselages, the Czechoslovak flag was flown at all RAF stations at

168 ČsL VB 215/CIII-2e/1/212: Ingr to Masaryk, 25.10.42. Most of the Czechoslovak documents discussed in this section are to be found in this file.

169 *ibid.* For the remainder of the letter, Ingr concerned himself with procedural details, the most important of which were (a) the main Agreement would be little changed from the one of 1940, the only differences reflecting the status of the Czechoslovak Government; (b) the substantial changes in the status of the Air Force embodied "the Czechoslovak demands which are the same as those in the Polish-British Agreement." Clearly, the Beneš Government was pitching for full Allied status with this request.

170 There are many copies of the 1940 Agreement in various files at the Public Record Office in London. Draft papers may be found in AIR/2/5162 with additional commentary in AIR/2/5153. The Foreign Office collection is in FO 371 (Correspondence 1940), and the finished document can be read in FO 417 *et al* (Confidential Print) from which this, and subsequent extracts, are taken.

which units were based, and the small adjustments previously noted were made to service uniforms.¹⁷¹ In the 1942 revised version, this was changed to:

The Czechoslovak Air Force will be reorganised from Czechoslovak units attached to the Royal Air Force, forming now one bomber squadron, three fighter squadrons, one bomber training flight and depot with appropriate reserves of flying personnel and other personnel. Additional squadrons may be formed as facilities become available.¹⁷²

Having thus established the principle of independence in the first sentence, Paragraph 2 proposed a minor alteration to the medical procedures concerning the selection of personnel. The 1940 Agreement laid down that "the usual Royal Air Force medical boards, assisted by Czechoslovak doctors if available" would administer all medical examinations, whereas in 1942 the Czechoslovaks wanted *joint* medical commissions to be established.¹⁷³ This brought an adverse reaction from the DAFL. After first indicating that the Czechoslovaks had never yet taken advantage of the opportunity to have their own doctors on the medical boards, the present suggestion was waved aside because the number of volunteers to be examined would be so small, and the shortage of doctors so great, that it would simply be a waste of manpower.¹⁷⁴

Paragraph 3 of the 1942 version was not dissimilar to the corresponding paragraph in 1940 Agreement, whereby men not employed in Czechoslovak squadrons would be made available for service in British units. However, in the 1942 version, a new final sentence was added: "If so employed, they will operate only from bases in the territory of the United Kingdom." To this, the British comment was:

171 *ibid.* These concessions were embodied in Article 5 of the 1940 Agreement. The Czechoslovak flag could not be flown independently of the RAF ensign, however.

172 AIR/2/5162: Undated file. This extract, and all subsequent ones, is taken from the papers which were examined by the DAFL. The *draft* version, which appears in ČsL VB 215/CIII-2e/1/212, differs in some aspects, changes brought about mainly through comments by Janoušek. In this Article, for example, the last sentence in the draft read: "Further squadrons with such reserves will be built as soon as possible." In his commentary, Janoušek suggested the modified form as seen above, presumably so as to keep open the concept of expansion rather than the promise of it. [ČsL VB 215/CIII-2e/1/212: Remarks to the New Version of the Czechoslovak-British Air Force Agreement, Janoušek 16.11.42.] In the DAFL files, the clauses relating to personnel are heavily underlined. It is also worth noting that the papers considered by the DAFL are a rather haphazard translation. 1429 OTU was a training flight for 311 Bomber Squadron until it moved to Coastal Command. It was then absorbed into No.6 OTU.

173 The reason for this apparent British involvement in what was to be an independent national force lies in the accepted principle that all men enlisted in the new Czechoslovak Air Force would be medically examined "according to normal Royal Air Force standard", thus it was conceded that RAF doctors would need to be on hand to verify those standards.

174 AIR/2/5162: Memorandum on the Proposed Revision of the Czechoslovak Forces Agreement. The reference to the low numbers involved was prompted by the insertion of two clauses in the new version which stated that the Czechoslovak Air Force would be "composed by (a) the drafting of Czechoslovak citizens living in the United Kingdom and (b) the drafting of volunteers who may come from overseas." After first pencilling in "suitable" as an adjective for "volunteers", the RAF critic wrote in the margin, "A dried-up source."

This has been an understood but unwritten policy with Czechoslovak personnel, but it would be unwise to commit ourselves in black-and-white to such an agreement, not because of four Czechoslovak squadrons, but because all the other allies might wish to impose a similar restriction on the employment of their personnel, and this, at a later stage in the war, might be an embarrassment to the Air Staff.¹⁷⁵

Paragraph 4 was a logical extension of the general concept of the proposals, that the present Inspectorate be scrapped and replaced by an independent command which would remain under British command. The DAFL response was almost predictable:

It is most improbable that the Air Ministry would recognise the formation of a separate Czechoslovak Command (bearing in mind that the Poles asked for and were refused a similar request). The Czechoslovak Authorities may be satisfied if their Inspectorate were renamed Headquarters of the Czechoslovak Air Force.

Paragraph 1 of Article 2 (Employment) stipulated that all personnel in the Czechoslovak Air Force should enjoy the same rights and amenities as RAF personnel, which in fact they already did. Again, however, this was the first time that such a clause had been formally proposed, and in rejecting it the DAFL drew attention to the advantages which might be lost if the force withdrew from the RAFVR.¹⁷⁶ This was an ill-conceived clause all round, because Janoušek commented that the airmen would then be entitled to serve under RAF disciplinary codes (which they did already) but the principle of independence would mean that they should fall under the jurisdiction of their *own* national codes. The intrinsic compromise was therefore self-defeating.¹⁷⁷

175 Ever since the collapse of France and the absorption of the Allied air personnel, and particularly after the US entry into the war, the RAF had operated a pooling system whereby trained pilots, irrespective of nationality, would be posted to squadrons which had the greatest need, subject of course to the concurrence of the relevant national authorities. This is not to suggest that allied squadrons did not operate in overseas theatres. 335 (Greek) Fighter Squadron had been operating in the Western Desert since January 1942, and its sister unit (336) followed suit in early 1943. A number of Free French squadrons were formed from flights which had been on active service in North Africa, and 349 (Belgian) Fighter Squadron was formed at Ijeka in Nigeria for service in the Belgian Congo, moving to Britain in the summer of 1943. [Halley J.J: *The Squadrons of the Royal Air Force* (Air Britain 1980) pp 280-300.] The point being made in the comment was that so many RAF squadrons had one or two non-British nationals in them that such a precedent as suggested by the Czechoslovaks could have caused chaos when offensive operations later in the war required more overseas bases.

176 Such advantages included the receipt of regular RAF pay, service under RAF regulations and leave structures, and the right to British diplomatic protection if captured, the men being legally considered as members of the armed forces of the United Kingdom. The DAFL also noted that formal equality might affect the RAF directly in that thus far Allied nationals with particular skills could be retained within specialised establishments, but fully independent status for the Czechoslovak Air Force would make it "most difficult to resist certain special postings." In a further comment, the DAFL critic noted that, as members of the RAFVR, "they have been given a great deal more secret information and have been given facilities for study and research which they would probably not have got if they were an independent air force. I do not feel that having sucked the orange dry they should now be permitted frivolously to throw away the skin."

177 ČsL VB 215/CIII-2e/1/212: Remarks etc., Janoušek 16.11.42.

In Paragraph 5 of Article 3 (Organisation), the 1942 version touched a very sensitive nerve:

Where it is necessary for administrative convenience, certain posts may be duplicated to enable British as well as Czechoslovak personnel to be borne against them. Where there is found to be a need of qualified Czechoslovak ground staff to fill posts in the establishments of the Czechoslovak Air Force, British personnel may be appointed to fill them.

Embedded in this finely-worded clause was an existing practice, namely that British personnel were already shoring up some Czechoslovak units and, as we have seen, this was not a favourite topic with the Air Ministry or the DAFL:

This last sentence is very dangerous, and it would be unfair to expect the Air Ministry to undertake such a commitment. There is little possibility of the Czechs obtaining substantial reinforcements for their Air Force, but rather than roll up any of their squadrons they will choose to draw upon Czechoslovak ground personnel as air crew, and will expect deficiencies thus occasioned to be made up by posting in British ground personnel. The RAF is also suffering from a shortage of ground personnel, and further it is contrary to the Air Staff's policy to man Allied squadrons with British ground personnel.

In Paragraph 2 of Article 5 (Uniform etc.), the 1942 version wished to expand the rights of the officers and airmen to wear Czechoslovak military insignia, badges and buttons. In response, the DAFL interpreted this request to mean that the Beneš Government did not want to return to Prague with its Air Force in a foreign uniform, though the British commentator added: "They will wish to retain, however, the RAF flying and rank badges", and this echoes the frequently expressed opinion that the Czechoslovaks in the RAFVR were immensely proud of their RAF status and rank.¹⁷⁸

But it was the Appendix which related to jurisdiction which sparked the longest and most critical response from the DAFL. While retaining the current system whereby civil offences would be tried by British civil courts, the 1942 proposals obviously wished to extend full Czechoslovak military law to their future independent Air Force whilst simultaneously retaining the right to have men employed in RAF squadrons to be subject to British military laws.¹⁷⁹ The reaction to this was blunt and to the point:

178 An additional comment reads: "The choice of uniform will present great problems, for in any foreign air force uniform plays a much more important part than it does with us, and further, foreigners can never understand our attitude towards the RAF uniform. Old and sore questions will be raised which were better left as sleeping dogs." If we recall the row over the wearing of national flying badges [See Part One] the writer is being slightly disingenuous here when he minimises the importance of RAF uniform in relation to foreign forces.

179 See Articles 1 and 5 of the section dealing with jurisdiction. In addition to courts-martial fully composed of Czechoslovak personnel for disciplinary proceedings in independent squadrons, it was requested that any officer or airman commissioned or enlisted in the RAFVR or RAF would be tried by courts-martial consisting of an equal number of Czechoslovak and British officers. This was the

It is proposed that those Czechs who remain in the RAFVR will remain subject to the Air Force Act, but that those who form the new Czechoslovak Air Force will be subject only to Czech Military Law...All our other Allies are at the moment subject to the Air Force Act and in those cases in which it is proposed to allow them to operate their own code of law it is only intended to apply this to complete squadrons in which there are no British personnel. The Czechs are a wasting asset and are already unable to supply all the personnel for their squadrons. The position will get worse as they have exhausted the possible sources of recruitment and can only get new men by drawing them from the Czech Army. The Czech Army are opposed to this course and it is unlikely that they will produce many recruits. The Czechs will therefore have squadrons which are partly Czech and partly British, and I do not think it satisfactory in their case to have the Czech portion dealt with under Czech law.

Clearly, the DAFL were aware of the difficulties between the air and land components of the Czechoslovak forces concerning manpower, and it is also apparent that they were aware that virtually all outside recruitment was at an end. At the time, only 310 (Fighter) squadron was wholly composed of Czechoslovak personnel, so in fairness to the DAFL, the split-jurisdiction request was, in fact, unworkable.

The 1942 proposals were therefore comprehensively rejected by the DAFL. This is hardly surprising since it can be seen that many suggestions were half-baked and in many cases impracticable. Janoušek also saw the new ideas as being problematic, and in his commentary he tended to focus upon the impact the proposed Agreement would have on the men themselves. Alert to the truth that so many officers and other ranks actually preferred being in the RAFVR for a variety of reasons, and aware also that independence would mean the application of Czechoslovak military laws and pay scales (which were lower than those in the RAF), he wrote:

I strongly believe that it is necessary to take care that individual airmen will not be financially or materially damaged. This would have serious consequences on their morale and their performance in battle. This would lead to the fact that the independence of the Czechoslovak Air Force would only be a source of dissatisfaction and embitterment. During the negotiations for this Agreement, this circumstance was totally overlooked.¹⁸⁰

A close reading of the final sentence would seem to suggest that Janoušek had been excluded from the preparations of the draft document, since it seems logical that he would not have omitted a point of such importance if he had been involved. Weight is added to this assumption by a subsequent remark which was also an attack on Ingr: "It [the document] was prepared by an officer who does not know and cannot know the realities in which the Czechoslovak Air Force lives and fights."¹⁸¹

existing principle as laid down by the 1940 Agreement.

180 ČsL VB 215/CIII-2e/1/212: Remarks etc., Janoušek 16.11.42.

181 *ibid.* He continued by using this reason, and the fact that the new version was so closely based

Janoušek was clearly not a happy man, yet he could not negate the principle of the exercise since he had pushed so hard for a review two years before. Even so, he was fully abreast of the realities which had applied during the first chaotic reorganisation in 1940, for he noted that the British had been forced by the impending German invasion to get as many skilled pilots into the air as quickly as possible, thus "the Czechoslovak air force units were incorporated into the RAFVR and complemented by British ground personnel instead of Czechoslovaks." This was more-or-less accurate, for we have seen how Dowding was prepared to roll up British squadrons rather than supplement them with Slav pilots, but he was right in the case of ground personnel. A fully operational fighter squadron equipped with British aircraft needed skilled maintenance echelons immediately, something which the Czechoslovaks could not provide through no fault of their own. The point he was trying to make, however, was that virtually nothing had changed since then, and a proposal for independence would be easily defeated by the British with one counter-request:

It is quite possible that, when we are insisting on having our own independent Air Force, the English [*sic*] will insist on us having all our own ground personnel as well, and will therefore permit us to have only so many units for which we have enough of our own ground personnel; i.e. one full bomber squadron.¹⁸²

Throughout the rest of the commentary, Janoušek slowly pulled the project to pieces, speaking as an officer who was completely in command of his subject matter. For example, he wrote that it was futile to point to the French, Belgians and Dutch as enjoying more independence than the Czechoslovaks, and thereby setting this up as an example of discrimination, because each of those countries still, technically at least, were in possession of unoccupied national territory in the form of colonies; "therefore they ensured for themselves a totally different basis for negotiations about recreating military units in the United Kingdom." He also refuted the argument that the Poles had any real independence since they too were under the control of the Allied High Command, and only their sheer weight of numbers - which permitted them to have their own training units, special air detachments, education programmes etc. - gave only the

on the Anglo-Polish Agreement, to demand that many of the paragraphs were either scrapped or totally re-worked. "It would be better to draft a totally new proposal [and] base it on the actual state of affairs. Because of this, all the paragraphs which deal with us in a way as if we had just arrived in England, and as if we were beginning to build the Czechoslovak Air Force only now, can be omitted. Furthermore, it is necessary to avoid all those paragraphs which are unrealisable or unfeasible. It would also be useful to leave out those paragraphs which are only theoretical."

182 *ibid.* Janoušek graphically illustrated this by using the Polish Air Force as an example. A rough average of Czechoslovak personnel per unit, he wrote, was a little over 200 men (based on 4 operational squadrons, one training unit and one Depot manned by a total of 1300 men), "whereas the Poles have 11 operational units, one training unit and one Depot and 12,000 men with another 3000 coming back from the Middle East as reserves, and this roughly amounts to 1000 men per unit."

impression of independence. As regards the 'independent' status of the Army, he ruined the gloss on that by simply mentioning that in 1940 the Army was in no danger of being deployed on active service, so from the British perspective it was an easy concession to make.

Though Janoušek obviously had little time for the proposals, and though he went on to criticise virtually every clause in the draft, perhaps the most significant point he made was that the whole idea was based on an unchanged situation. Seeing this with absolute clarity, and seeing through it to the heart of the matter, he added an observation which is difficult to refute: "There remains, therefore, as the sole reason for starting these fresh negotiations with the British Government, the new standing of the Czechoslovak Government and the recognition of our national sovereignty." With this, the Inspector-General knew that the officers and men under his command were now political pawns, and if he himself was not consulted about the new proposals, much less regard would be held for the thoughts and feelings of the rank and file.

But if Janoušek was incensed by the revision, this is but nothing to the overall reaction of the DAFL. In an unnecessary document - unnecessary because it addressed no particular points, and was in fact little more than a stream of consciousness tacked on to the largely neutral critique examined above - someone at the DAFL took the time and effort to record his feelings about the Czechoslovak Air Force with almost bullying frankness:

The whole conception behind the Czechoslovak's desire to have more autonomy presupposes that the Czechoslovak Air Force is developing and expanding, and it seems that the Czechoslovak Air Force aspires to a position of importance which is not relevant to its size.

We have always recognised the Czechoslovak Air Force as a political necessity; at the same time we cannot but regard it as a military luxury.

The Czechoslovak Air Force is but a handful of personnel some 1500 strong, hardly sufficient to man one small RAF station. Moreover, it is a wasting asset, for there seems to be not the slightest hope of obtaining recruits. Not only is expansion out of the question, but it is doubtful whether we shall be able to maintain it at its existing strength. The Czechoslovak Air Force has always been dependent upon the RAF, and this dependence is increasing and is likely to increase simply through lack of personnel.

This request of the Czechs may be primarily a political one, because according to our information, many of the changes which would be consequent upon the introduction of the revised Agreement would be bitterly resented by some sections of the Czechoslovak Air Force. Although national feeling runs high in Czechoslovak subjects, it is curious that the Czechs think more highly of RAF decorations than their own. It is also noted that quite a number of Czech personnel do not wear the arm badge "Czechoslovakia" because they like to be mistaken for RAF personnel.

The Czechoslovak Air Force has been treated sympathetically and generously by the Air Ministry; its status as an RAFVR Air Force has given the Czechs many advantages and facilities which have had to be denied to other Allied Air Forces. The Czechoslovak Air Force would obviously be the principal loser if it withdraws from the RAF, although of course, from our point of view the administrative problems and

complications following the withdrawal would be out of all proportion to the size of the Czechoslovak Air Force and the scale of its effort.

It looks very much as if having reaped a bumper harvest in the Royal Air Force, the Czechs now wish to walk out in search of other fields in which to sow. Perhaps we have been too kind to the Czechs, but then we have had Munich thrown in our face.

The Czechoslovaks suffer from a very exaggerated inferiority complex, which is especially in evidence when dealing with big neighbours, in particular with the Poles, and they are always striving to go one better than their neighbour. We have, however, found that it has been a principle with them to ask for more than they think they will get and they often undertake what it is not in their power to accomplish. Perhaps in this instance we could persuade them to abide by the existing Agreement if we offer them certain new concessions and modifications of the old Agreement. For instance, AMP might be willing to introduce a concession over the uniform which would allow them to wear Czechoslovak hat badges or buttons.

We cannot offer them much more; they have as much independence, if not more, than most of the other Allies, but as they are not self-sufficient, they cannot run themselves by themselves.¹⁸³

We shall examine many of the points raised here at a later stage, but for the present we should attempt to establish the authorship. There were only three men who could have written this document: Squadron Leader Hugh Seligman, head of AFL2, the department within the DAFL responsible for the Czechoslovak Section of the RAFVR; Group Captain Alan Dore, the Deputy-Director of the DAFL since July 4th 1940 and Seligman's immediate superior; and the Director himself, Air Commodore Frank Beaumont who was appointed to the post on August 8th 1942.¹⁸⁴ It is almost unthinkable that Beaumont, who three years before had championed the Czechoslovak cause so fervently, who was a former Air Attaché to Prague, who was on first-name terms with Janoušek, and whose wife took a personal interest in the welfare of the Czechoslovak airmen, would have penned such a damning indictment, especially the parts which are so blatantly subjective. This is not to say, of course, that he did not do so, but since the document is unsigned and undated we cannot say for certain either way.

What *is* certain is that the document originated in the office of Seligman, since a simple examination of the typeface indicates that the letter 'c' is slightly raised from the type-line and further letters and minutes signed by Seligman in this same file have the same fault. But would Seligman have had the authority to circulate such views throughout the Air Ministry and the Foreign Office without first obtaining consent from his superior officer? It seems unlikely. This leads us to conclude that Dore at least must have (a) known of the document's contents, and (b) permitted the papers to form

183 AIR/2/5162. This document formed page 3 of the critical examination of the new proposals, and was entitled: "The following general conclusions may be of interest."

184 Group Captain Alan Sydney Whitehorne Dore CB (1882-1953) was educated at Mill Hill and Jesus College, Cambridge; commanded 604 Squadron 1930-1935; Assistant Air Attaché to Norway 1940; DDAFL 1940-1945; High Sheriff of Middlesex 1944-1945.

the basis of the negotiations which followed, and we shall see below how his views on what changes could be made to the Czechoslovak condition had absolute limits. But how much did Beaumont know? Again, this is a question which cannot be answered with confidence, but apart from the Czechoslovaks themselves who were kept in complete ignorance of the document and the subsequent discussions, the thoughts expressed were in common currency throughout the relevant departments of the Foreign Office and the Air Ministry. It is therefore impossible to imagine that Beaumont could not have known about its contents and, to some extent, acceded to their dissemination. To be sure, he may have done so with some reservations, but not one word of criticism of these opinions appears in the correspondence generated, either from him or anyone else involved. If these suppositions are even partially correct, then we are therefore forced to concede that this document represented the unofficial view within the DAFL of the Czechoslovak Air Force in Great Britain. Thus it is no surprise that the paper has been consistently overlooked or ignored by Czechoslovak historians who have worked in this area before.

As regards the date of origin, this is less of a problem. Some considerable time passed between the internal wranglings of Janoušek and the MNO examined above - and we know these took place in the autumn of 1942 - and the submission of a formal notice of revision to the Air Ministry by the Inspector-General in May 1943.¹⁸⁵ At the end of the month, Masaryk sent a widely circulated letter explaining the new proposals and enclosing a copy of the revised draft.¹⁸⁶ It therefore follows that the DAFL's response came after this date, and this would place it in early- to mid-June 1943.

More to the point, the impact of the proposals now involved the Foreign Office because the Czechoslovaks had built in a diplomatic element. In June, Philip Nichols wrote to Eden introducing the Czechoslovak Government's primary motives for seeking a new Agreement. Nichols had been approached by Dr Adolf Procházka who told him that the main reason for the revision "was the desire of the Ministry of National Defence to regularise the position of the Czechoslovak Air Force", and this was rather lamely supported by a legal technicality. In January 1943, a Protocol re-defining the financial terms between the two governments had been signed by Sir Alexander

185 AIR/2/5162: Janoušek to the DAFL, 19.5.43. The Air Vice-Marshal wrote a short letter to "acquaint" the DAFL with the fact that a revision of the military Agreement would soon be broached.

186 AIR/2/5162: Masaryk to Air Ministry and relevant departments, 31.5.43. The Foreign Minister drew particular attention to two points: the fact that (a) the original Agreement had been concluded with a now-defunct body, the Provisional Czechoslovak Government; and (b) that the Czechoslovak Air Force had been placed into the RAFVR by virtue of the prevailing conditions in 1940, and that these conditions no longer applied. "The Czechoslovak Government...would therefore be glad if the Czechoslovak Air Force could be placed upon the same basis as the Air Forces of the other Allied countries now in Great Britain."

Cadogan and Dr Hubert Ripka. Procházka now argued on behalf of the Czechoslovak Government that this was in breach of Article 64 of the Czechoslovak Constitution of February 29th 1920, whereby only the President of the Republic may sign such an instrument.¹⁸⁷ In order to repair "the damage done" by this rash act, the new Agreement would be concluded between the respective Heads of State, namely Beneš and King George VI. Nichols argued that diplomatic agreements of this nature could be conducted at inter-governmental level and that they did not strictly warrant Royal assent, but Procházka stuck firmly to his brief.¹⁸⁸

The papers from the Air Ministry were considered by the Foreign Office towards the end of June. J.G.Ward minuted that the Czechoslovak proposals "would be difficult to oppose", mainly because the other Allies had been granted extended concessions of various types. Even so, he reminded colleagues that the rôle of his office was simply to play the foil to this exercise:

The Air Ministry, who were not aware that the Czechs were going to take the matter up with us diplomatically, would be glad if we could stall as long as possible on this proposal, which they assert is a purely political, prestige-hunting move by the Czechoslovak Government which would not be endorsed by a free vote of the Czechoslovak personnel.¹⁸⁹

He added that the Air Ministry found it considerably easier to deal with Allied air personnel who were in some capacity part of the RAF, and he concurred with the suggestion that the line of refusal should emphasise the danger to the men if they fell into enemy hands wearing the uniform of the Czechoslovak Air Force. This was because, as expressed in a later communication to the Air Ministry, "the German Government have declared on various occasions that in view of their doctrine of the extinction of the Czechoslovak State before the outbreak of the present war, they do not recognise the reconstituted Czechoslovak forces as lawful combatants under international law."¹⁹⁰ Clearly, the Foreign Office thought it better to frighten the

187 VHA 20-9/2: Protocol of 21.1.43; also SVBM-HV/225/43. The Protocol was designed to amend Article 5 of the 1940 Agreement which stated: "Any costs incurred on or behalf of any department of the United Kingdom in connection with the application of the present Agreement will be refunded out of the credit granted by His Majesty's Government to the Provisional Czechoslovak Government to finance the cost of maintaining the Czechoslovak military effort." From the date of the new Protocol, the British Government would no longer claim reimbursement, though payments already made would be retained. Any future supplies would "after the termination of hostilities" be returned to the British if requested. Article 3 of the Protocol stipulated that this in no way would affect materials transferred to the Czechoslovak military under the Lend-Lease Act of March 1941. Adolf Procházka was attached to the Czechoslovak Ministry of Finance and Hubert Ripka was State Secretary for Foreign Affairs under Jan Masaryk.

188 AIR/2/5162: Nichols to Eden, 8.6.43.

189 FO 371/36377: Ward, minute to file, 23.6.43.

190 AIR/2/5162: Unsigned minute from Foreign Office to Air Ministry, 7.7.43. The author,

Czechoslovak Government into withdrawing the scheme rather than persuade them to do it.

Yet this was only a suggestion, open to further discussion. But in one respect Ward was in total disagreement from the outset, and that was the proposed 'Heads of State' format for the new Agreement; objections recorded in a note to the Air Ministry in early July:

The argument that the Agreement of 25th October 1940 and the Protocol of 21st January 1943 were improperly concluded, as they were not in accordance with the requirements of the Czechoslovak Constitution, cannot be accepted without implying the invalidity of these documents over the period during which they have already been in force. Moreover, the argument, if carried to its logical conclusion, would mean that the Czechoslovak Government were implicating themselves in a charge of bad faith. It seems unlikely that [they] realise the full implications of their own argument, and their real motive is doubtless to find a pretext for the conclusion of a 'Heads of State' Treaty which would mark in the eyes of the world their present status as a fully sovereign Allied Government.

This point was further substantiated by noting that all the other agreements made with Allied governments had been conducted at governmental level, and to concur with the wishes of the Czechoslovaks would simply set an unfortunate precedent.¹⁹¹ In his June minutes, however, Ward did observe that political pressure might force them to give way on this point, but "we shall at least have satisfied the Air Ministry by prolonging the present air arrangements."¹⁹²

Later in July, Seligman wrote to Nichols referring to an earlier private discussion between them. Nichols had intimated that he believed the Czechoslovak Government could be persuaded to drop the whole idea if the Air Ministry tabled strong enough objections. Seligman obliged him by enclosing the comments and observations examined above, adding, with some understatement: "From these two papers I think you will see that the Air Ministry is, at any rate, averse to making a change."¹⁹³ A few days later, Nichols replied: "I have read these papers with much interest, and it looks to

probably Ward, added that if the Czechoslovak Government wished to accept these risks, then there was little that could be done to resist the request for independence in terms of current foreign policy.

191 *ibid.* It was also argued that Treaties agreed at Heads of State level needed to be ratified by Parliament, and this necessary involved publication of the documents. "With the exception of the Agreement between Mr Churchill and General de Gaulle on the 7th August 1940, it has been the policy of His Majesty's Government to keep all agreements respecting the Allied Forces confidential."

192 FO 371/36377: Ward, minute to file, 23.6.43. Marginal comments to this minute indicate that other readers were in full agreement. Roberts wrote: "I think the Czechs should for once fit in with our convenience", an echo, perhaps, of the troubles of previous years.

193 AIR/2/5162: Seligman to Nichols, 23.7.43. Seligman, again referring to their discussion, added: "I gathered from you that you would not use the 'ammunition' I am now giving you unless the Czechs return to the charge." It was also noted here that not a word of the present discussions had been conveyed to any member of the Czechoslovak forces or Government.

me, if I may say so, as though you have good reasons for turning down the Czech proposals", and he closed by saying that he would take no further action until he had received guidance from the Foreign Office.¹⁹⁴

All the arguments were eventually distilled, and in some areas sanitised, then assembled into one paper for discussion.¹⁹⁵ By August, the Foreign Office was prepared to move on the issue. Nichols received a note which outlined all of the major obstacles - the risks involved with capture, administrative difficulties for the Air Ministry, the Heads of State format - though in the original draft, the suggestion that the Czechoslovak proposals would not have been welcomed by the rank-and-file was struck out.¹⁹⁶ In a little over a week, Nichols informed Eden that "the substance" of the note had been conveyed directly to Masaryk: "His Excellency took note of these points and promised to reply in due course to my communication, on which, however, at the time he made no comments."¹⁹⁷

Masaryk was true to his word and did indeed reply "in due course", but it took him a whole *year* to do it. Why there was such a delay, it is not possible to state with any certainty at present. Neither the Air Ministry files, the MNO, VKPR or Beneš collections, contain any references to the independence debate between September 1943 and August 1944, so why such an urgent issue for the Czechoslovak Government suddenly became inert must remain an unanswered question for the moment.¹⁹⁸ That there existed this period of silence (and which is not due simply to an absence of

194 AIR/2/5162: Nichols to Seligman, 26.6.43. As regards the contents of Seligman's documents, Nichols wrote: "You may be sure that I shall not in any case make any use of the additional arguments put forward in the papers you have kindly sent me without first consulting you. If I am instructed to turn down definitely the Czech proposals, it might be better to do it in such a way as to prevent the Czechs returning to the charge, in which case I might want to make use of some of the additional ammunition you have sent me." One is tempted to wonder how Beneš would have reacted if the 'ammunition' had ever come before him.

195 CAB 85/21A: (AFO (43) 12: 7.7.43). Although the paper was presented to the AFOSC for discussion, the records indicate that no comments were made, thus we must presume that the proposals met with unanimous agreement. The full list of official replies, also passed it seems without debate, may be read in CAB 85/21A: (AFO (43) 14: 20.9.43.

196 FO 371/36377: Foreign Office to Nichols, 7.8.43.

197 FO 371/36377: Nichols to Eden, 18.8.43.

198 One exception may be found in the Foreign Office records. In early January 1944, Patrick Dean wrote to Nichols and recalled the August despatch to Masaryk. "As you know...we are not at all anxious to proceed with this proposal and the absence of any reply from the Czechs has been very satisfactory to us. We certainly do not wish to stimulate them into action if there is any danger that they will press for the revision they have suggested." Dean noted that the Belgians had been pushing for their own Inspectorate within the RAFVR, and though negotiations had been moving along well, there had been a sudden lull. He thought this might have been due to the Belgians having heard of the Czechoslovak proposals and were now biding time to observe the result. He urged Nichols to find out what was happening and why, but added a nervous coda: "If the Czechs are stirred up either officially or unofficially can we be certain of getting the right answer, or should we let sleeping dogs lie?" [FO 371/36377: Dean to Nichols, 4.1.44.] No reply from Nichols is recorded in these files.

evidence) is confirmed by Masaryk's letter of August 1944 when he wrote to Nichols stating: "I have now been asked by my Government to approach you again in this matter", and he continued by recalling the previous correspondence on the subject, all of which was generated the previous year.¹⁹⁹ He dismissed the question of added insecurity on behalf of the airmen if the contingent withdrew from the RAFVR, noting that his Government "is of the opinion that the increased risk to Czechoslovak airmen in Great Britain cannot be regarded as an obstacle to the formation of an independent Czechoslovak Air Force", and then he accepted that the Heads of State format would cause considerable problems, adding: "The Czechoslovak Government therefore agrees that the present form of the provisions governing the Czechoslovak Air Force should be maintained."²⁰⁰ He closed by requesting that the negotiations be resumed "as soon as possible."

And yet the momentum had long since been lost, and perhaps much of the interest also. Most minds were now focused on the titanic battle then taking place for the liberation of Europe, and it is no surprise that the Foreign Office responded to these new overtures somewhat sluggishly in a letter to the DAFL in mid-August:

Our view here is that it is too late in the day for the Czechs to ask us to embark on any reorganisation which would be inconvenient to you or involve any serious amount of extra work. Our acceptance of the principle of reorganisation cannot be quoted effectively against us in the altogether changed circumstances of a year later, and we cannot be expected to spend much time at this stage of the war on a proposal which has been allowed to lie dormant for as long as that.²⁰¹

Even so, the fact that the British had in 1943 promised to discuss the matter meant therefore that something had to be done, so Stewart suggested a return to the original proposals in the revised draft of 1942 "and consider which of these we could approve without undue convenience to yourselves."²⁰²

199 AIR/2/5162: Masaryk to Nichols, 8.8.44. Also FO 371/42300.

200 *ibid.* Masaryk's argument for rejecting the risk factor was a valid one. "The Czechoslovak Government has given full consideration to the matter, and would like to remark that the risk borne by the Czechoslovak airmen in Great Britain in the event of being captured was already borne by the Czechoslovak land units which fought in France in 1940 and later in the Middle East. The same risk is borne by members of the Czechoslovak army and air force units now fighting in the Soviet Union, and will also be borne by members of the Czechoslovak land units in Great Britain as soon as they join in the fighting on the Continent." He further implied that the whole question of treatment when captured had never been an issue for the Czechoslovaks since the men could never have hidden behind a foreign uniform.

201 AIR/2/5162: D.L. Stewart to Dore, 16.8.44. Also FO 371/42300. In this latter file, Dean minuted that, in his opinion, the Czechoslovaks could have had "no practical reason" for resurrecting this desire for change. "It is clearly simply a matter of prestige."

202 *ibid.* Stewart added: "If it turns out that we can give the Czechs a reasonable amount we could then agree to begin discussions. If we can't, then it would probably be better to turn down the scheme without any further argument."

Dore passed the matter on to Seligman who informed Stewart that the DAFL wanted first to consult the other branches of the Air Ministry which might be affected, "and so it might be a little time before I can give you the views and suggestions of the Air Ministry."²⁰³ In fact, Dore had already begun consulting, for on the same day he minuted the Director of Personal Services:

These proposals are obviously political, and I know that the Czech Air Force had no hand whatsoever in drafting them. We have had an unofficial talk with Air Vice-Marshal Janoušek...who told me quite privately that in his opinion the Czechoslovak Government has merely brought the matter up again for national prestige.²⁰⁴

So, Janoušek had distanced himself, but we know now from the Czechoslovak version that he did not quite speak the whole truth to Dore because a comparison between the original draft and the one sent to the Air Ministry shows that many of Janoušek's amendments were adopted. Even so, we can be sure that he was not the originator of the scheme, and given the virtual shambles it had become perhaps he was more than justified in raising his hands and disowning the whole affair.

In his minute to Venn, Dore had also raised the possibility of permitting the Czechoslovaks to wear their own cap badges and buttons, believing that "in all probability they would be content with this." Venn certainly was not, for he replied in unequivocal terms, stressing that it would be "highly incorrect" to sanction such a modification to RAF uniform, and in fact he was strongly in favour of rejecting any and all proposals whatever they might be.²⁰⁵

Three weeks passed, and in response to a polite nudge from Stewart, Seligman wrote again:

203 AIR/2/5162: Seligman to Stewart, 23.8.44. Also FO 371/42300. The most senior of the "branches" would have been the office of the Air Member for Personnel, who - among a range of related duties such as uniforms, postings and accommodation - would have been responsible for decommissioning and demobilising the officers and airmen from the RAFVR, and Air Members for Training, Supply and Organisation, plus a whole host of lesser directorates, particularly the Directorate of Personal Services. It is most unlikely, given the strong political thrust behind the proposals, that few apart from Janoušek would have given much thought to the enormous complexities involved in what would have appeared to have been a straightforward matter determined by goodwill and the stroke of a pen.

204 AIR/2/5162: Minute from Dore to Venn, 23.8.44. Air Commodore George Oswald Venn CBE; RFC 1916; RAF 1918-1945; Director of Personal Services 1943-1945.

205 AIR/2/5162: Venn to Dore, 7.9.44. He also added an interesting comment as regards the possibility of capture: "The enemy does not recognise Czechoslovakia as a sovereign state and I tremble to think what would happen if a Czech airman were to be captured wearing [the] visible signs of belonging to a Czech fighting service. From the German point of view he would be fighting on the wrong side." Of course, the shoulder flash 'Czechoslovakia' had been standard issue since 1940, but Venn seems to have overlooked that this too would have identified such a prisoner as "fighting on the wrong side." Not that he overlooked the flash itself, because he closed his reply by insisting that "this is sufficient and is as far as we can or should go."

I am more than sorry that it has not been possible to give you any news about the Czech proposals, but when we put forward the suggestion to the Air Ministry that Czech honour could be satisfied in all probability by permitting the Czechs to substitute the RAF cap badge and buttons by Czech equivalents, some divergence of opinion was encountered.²⁰⁶

He added that Group Captain Dore was seeking an interview with Sinclair and would approach the matter from a political angle, "thus I would hope to be in a position to give you an answer one way or the other in the near future."²⁰⁷

Another month went by, and it is clear that the British were happy to play for time as much in 1944 as they had the year before. In late October, Dore wrote to Stewart and agreed that it was far too late now to reorganise the Czechoslovak Air Force, "therefore we suggest that the Czechs should be asked to accept a compromise which will, we hope, satisfy their national prestige, as it will be an outward and physical sign of their independence which is, after all, what we think their Government requires":

Our suggestion, therefore, is that members of the Czechoslovak Air Force now serving in the RAFVR should be allowed to wear their own cap badges and buttons on the Royal Air Force uniform on leaving this country on their way home. That is to say that for all practical purposes the Air Ministry will only agree to a variation of the King's uniform if it is done outside the United Kingdom.²⁰⁸

One thinks back to Ingr's bold vision of full independence in the autumn of 1942, of the sceptical comments and cautious warnings of Janoušek, of the savaging the proposals received at the hands of the British, of the long and seemingly inexplicable delay in seeing the matter through to a conclusion, and one arrives at a handful of nickel buttons and a sewing kit, and even that was not to be used until they each had one foot on the plane home.²⁰⁹

And yet still the torment was not at an end. The customary month slipped by then Stewart replied to Dore with a summary of Masaryk's views: "I confess our first reaction was to wonder whether your proposal would really satisfy the Czechs but [it]

206 AIR/2/5162: Seligman to Stewart, 18.9.44. He continued by explaining that the reason for the "divergence of opinion" had to do with a similar request by the Greeks, made in March 1942, to wear their own cap badges and buttons. Granted "with the rather reluctant agreement of His Majesty the King", it nevertheless constituted a precedent. Furthermore, the Poles had always been allowed to wear their own cap badges even when they were enlisted in the RAFVR.

207 *ibid.* No record has yet come to light of such an interview having taken place.

208 AIR/2/5162: Dore to Stewart, 26.10.44. This was based on the Greek precedent and not the Polish, for the Greek squadrons never operated from bases in the United Kingdom.

209 On receipt of this suggestion, Stewart wrote to Nichols expressing his disbelief "that this gesture might mean something...but we have always found this particular branch of the Air Ministry to be well-informed of feelings in Czechoslovak air circles and they may be right in this case." As an additional minute to file, Dean referred to the scheme as "childish." [FO 371/42300: Stewart to Nichols, 9.11.44.]

apparently went down quite well." He also said Masaryk was pleased but had a further request: "[He] at once asked me if it would include badges of rank."²¹⁰ According to Stewart, Philip Nichols seemed to think that, because the contingent would be out of the country anyway, and that this extra concession would mean "a good deal to the Czechs", there would be little problem in it being approved.

Nichols was wrong. Perhaps as a diplomatist he failed to understand the service perspective of the King's uniform. Only five days passed this time before Dore replied and said, "I am not at all happy about this." Admitting that he had been "very surprised" by this extra request, he added, somewhat obviously:

This would simply mean that both officers and other ranks would cease to hold Royal Air Force ranks and would be known by their Czechoslovak equivalents...If the Czech Foreign Ministry is going to press for inclusion of badges of rank also, then I think we shall have to reconsider the whole subject...You must admit that it is difficult to imagine a more ridiculous situation than to have a body of men serving as officers and other ranks of the Royal Air Force and wearing a uniform which bears no resemblance to that of the Royal Air Force apart from the material of which it is made.²¹¹

Even from a distance of more than fifty years, the indignation is almost tangible.

The whole sorry affair had been wound up officially with a note from Nichols to Masaryk in which the former stated that "my Government, after careful consideration, much regretted that they could not, at this stage of the war, solve the practical and jurisdictional problems arising."²¹² This was not true, because such problems as there were could have been solved if the will had been there to do so, but neither the Foreign Office (who had little interest in the business anyway) nor the Air Ministry (who did not want to be bothered with it right from the start) had any intentions of moving an inch to accommodate the Czechoslovak desires.

Except, of course, for the right to wear their own badges and buttons. In December 1944, Dean wrote Nichols a final line on the matter. Recalling that the Air Ministry had refused to grant the concession over ranks, he added that the Ministry had enlisted the aid "of some of the Czechoslovak Air Force officers" to approach Masaryk and persuade him to drop the idea in favour of the badges and buttons. Who these

210 AIR/2/5162: Stewart to Dore, 23.11.44. Czechoslovak officers and airmen in the RAFVR wore their national badges of rank on their sleeves and RAF badges of rank on their shoulders. In a separate moment of thought, Stewart wrote: "It is astonishing that the Czechs can take this seriously, but it is all to the good that there is a chance of their being satisfied." [FO 371/42300: Minute to file by Stewart, undated.]

211 AIR/2/5162: Dore to Stewart, 28.11.44. In a slightly more balanced passage, he suggested that there might be a way of terminating that part of the Agreement affecting the Air Force so that on leaving the country they automatically ceased to be members of the RAFVR. Also FO 371/42300, in which Stewart minuted on 4.12.44, "I did not think this affair could become even sillier than it was before, but it has succeeded in doing so."

212 FO 371/42300: Nichols to Dean, 18.11.44, referring to the terms presented to Masaryk.

officers were is not recorded; in fact it was all done "with the greatest secrecy." Dean suggested that Masaryk be told of the official view of the Air Ministry, but stressed that the officer involvement be kept strictly confidential.²¹³ This seems to imply that the Air Ministry was up to murky tricks here, sending officers to do their spade work for them with the Czechoslovak Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Perhaps this was so, and perhaps it also proves that the British belief that many if not most of the men in the force would have recoiled from independence was a valid belief after all.

It is intended to reserve interpretation of the thoughts and attitudes connected with this unfortunate episode until the Conclusion to this study, not least because so much of what happened casts so much light upon aspects of the relationship between the British and the Czechoslovak Governments and, at a lower level, between the RAF and the Czechoslovak Air Force. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that much of what emerged was truly ugly, and that feelings were expressed which, if made public or had fallen into the hands of the VKPR or some such body, would have been immensely damaging to all parties concerned. What is important for the moment, therefore, is to keep this incident in mind as we progress to Part Three, for it will become apparent that as the war drew to a close, such ideas were put aside in favour of a new cause - British interests in Central Europe - and again the Czechoslovak Air Force was to be a political lever in the furtherance of those interests.

213 FO 371/42300; Dean to Nichols, 7.12.44. Dean urged Nichols to keep the matter close to his chest because the officers were most concerned that their involvement would come to the notice of their superiors. It seems fair to presume that Janoušek had a hand in this, but the evidence is tantalisingly sparse and thus prevents any solid conclusions.

PART THREE

1944-45

The period covered by these two years, and to some extent parts of 1946, encompasses two distinct strands of thought within the Czechoslovak Government and General Staff. As the war moved on to the continental mainland and Germany was relentlessly squeezed on two powerful fronts, minds within the Beneš Administration began to focus on the likely political and military situations once Germany was defeated. That the Soviet Union would be a major influence in Central Europe was never in doubt, and it was accepted by all that the rôle of the Czechoslovak Air Force, when it returned to the homeland, would be a crucial part of the overall strategic policy. This was the first issue: how to rebuild, equip and train a force capable of effective national defence in the post-war world. Issue number two was how to get that force home in the first place, and it would be this aspect which gave rise to the greatest frustration.

The return of the Czechoslovak air contingent to the homeland in 1945 was an event which virtually all of them had long awaited, but it proved to be a much more complicated and elongated affair than might have been thought at the time. Some blamed the Russians for the delay.¹ As we shall see, this was not the case, for it was the British who delayed matters in the belief that the Russians had not given permission for the squadrons to return. In fact there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that Moscow took more than a passing interest in what the Czechoslovak Air Force did or did not do. We must remember that the Soviet Union, like Germany, was primarily a continental land power, and therefore most Russian influence was directed towards the Czechoslovak Army and not the air contingent. It mattered not to the Soviets if four more squadrons flew into their zone of occupation provided they knew where and when they would arrive and how they would get there.

This, however, was in the summer of 1945. In the autumn of 1944, at the time of the Slovak uprising, the Beneš Government made a fairly determined effort to get their airmen home to support the action, and again the British stood in their way, citing Russian sensibilities as their principal reason for refusing the transfer. There were thus

1 For example, Liškutín wrote: "It was becoming obvious that the Soviet authorities did not want us to go home at all" [Liškutín, *Challenge in the Air*, p179]; Jaromír Foretník said in interview that he believed the Russians had placed political obstacles in the way; Ladislav Valoušek, himself serving with the Czechoslovak air contingent on the eastern front, understood that the Russians wished to consolidate their military position in the country before allowing the squadrons to return.

two attempts at a return to the homeland, not one as previously thought, and it is with this earlier bid that we shall begin.

The return (1): aid to Slovakia

1943 was a good year for the Allies, crowned by the collapse of Italy. Victory in North Africa, the Russian successes on the eastern front and the saturation bombing of Germany, all left the Nazis reeling from the combined onslaught. There was still much to be done, of course, but the war was being won and the London exiles began to talk of home. In late November 1943, Ingr wrote to Portal and outlined certain ideas on which the MNO had been deliberating. Ingr wished to gauge the Chief of the Air Staff's reaction to the despatch of the Czechoslovak air contingent at the very moment when Allied operations in the homeland became feasible. Ingr's vision was that parachute troops would land to support a pre-arranged uprising, the Air Force would provide cover, and then the Brigade would advance from the west. "The ultimate aim", wrote Ingr, "will be to concentrate the Czechoslovak military forces in Czechoslovakia."²

Ingr then went into details. Setting out his stall, he wanted Portal to confirm that he "should be in a position to count on the employment of the Czechoslovak Air Force" so that he could formulate his plans effectively. At a suitable moment, the whole contingent would be released from its attachment to the RAF and would be aided by the latter in its immediate return. More than this, he wanted a further two medium-bomber and "five to six" fighter squadrons to be made available "to make possible a rapid expansion of the existing Air Force when the moment arrives." As if this were not enough, he then required the RAF to accept transport responsibilities for ammunition, fuel, technical equipment, personnel and, "if required", Bomber Command's assistance in attacks on targets specified by him.³

Portal replied in late January 1944. The month before, Churchill and Roosevelt had announced the appointment of Dwight Eisenhower as Supreme Allied Commander, and aside from his contribution to history, a minor effect of his promotion was that it allowed the British to sidestep any difficult questions asked by the Czechoslovaks in regard to their armed forces. In short, the era of buck-passing had begun. Portal immediately pointed out that Ingr's scheme "was a matter for the Supreme Allied

2 ŠVBM-HV 225/43: Ingr to Portal, 27.11.43.

3 *ibid.* When discussing the use of RAF transport, Ingr estimated that he would need the services of four heavy-bomber squadrons for two to three weeks, thereafter reduced to two squadrons for a further four weeks. He also required the RAF to adapt the existing aircraft of 311 Squadron to carry parachute troops and various battlefield supplies.

Commander" and that the proposals should be taken up with him if desired.⁴ Then, after reminding Ingr that what followed were his personal views, Portal continued:

I think it very unlikely on tactical grounds that conditions will occur in which it will be possible to deploy and support fighter squadrons in Czechoslovakia before Germany is defeated...Therefore, although we shall naturally be prepared to release Czechoslovak squadrons to return to Czechoslovakia as soon as conditions make this practicable, I consider it would be a mistake to divert your Liberator squadron...for operations which, when they become feasible, will be undertaken by appropriate forces as part of the general plan.

Another way of putting this was 'no', a word that Ingr and his ilk would become profoundly accustomed to hearing over the next eighteen months or so. But we should not be too hard on Portal. After all, Ingr's request was only half-baked and he sought promises to be made on the strength of a concept rather than a certain eventuality. He was asking the CAS to earmark the services of 50 or 60 bombers plus transport and materiel for something which was more of a hope than a plan. But there are two phrases within Portal's reply which are worth noting for our present purposes: "as soon as conditions make this practicable" (regarding the return of the squadrons) and "appropriate forces" (concerning any military action in Central Europe). Getting the British to define the former would be a difficult task for the Czechoslovaks, and persuading them that the latter did not necessarily have to include the Soviets would be even harder.

So, the initial gambit had failed at the first move. Even so, we cannot accuse Ingr of naivety either; in fact, judging by recent reports which had crossed his desk, he may well have been a deeply-concerned man, anxious to do anything at all which would serve the liberation of his homeland. Throughout the autumn of 1943, the MNO received despatches from the Protectorate which described horrific conditions. Many German troops had been removed from Prague and transferred to the Italian front, leaving the Gestapo in control. It was said that an average of five people a day were being executed in the capital; that the Gestapo imprisoned anyone who laughed aloud in the street; that a thousand Czechs vanished overnight after every speech by Beneš on the BBC. With the Reich growing desperate, cruelty and injustice increased

4 *ibid.* Portal to Ingr, 21.1.44. Portal justified his response thus: "The Allied Air Forces, of which the Czechoslovak Air Force forms a valuable part, have been carefully built up as a balanced force to operate both directly and indirectly in conjunction with continental operations. The co-ordination within a single plan of all air and land operations, including action in occupied territories, will therefore be the responsibility of the Supreme Allied Commander who will ensure that the forces of the Allied Nations act in unison to bring about the final defeat of Germany and the liberation of Europe." These were valid words, but we have seen how the Czechoslovak squadrons had been deployed, and since they formed no substantial part of the march across Europe when it began, this still smacks of convenience on behalf of Portal.

proportionately.⁵ Small wonder, then, that the London group ached to relieve their countrymen of this torture by whatever means available to them.

A few days after Portal's reply, Stanislav Bosý met General Grasett at the War Office and reopened the campaign.⁶ Bosý told Grasett that his Government had approached Portal for assistance in transferring up to eleven parachute groups to the homeland for action in the forthcoming uprising, but that the answer was "unsatisfactory and elusive" and that they were simply told to contact the Supreme Allied Commander. This was not good enough, said Bosý. He told Grasett that the MNO had requested between ten and fifty thousand guns plus ammunition from the War Office but had been bluntly refused, and now he wanted clear answers and valid reasons for this obstruction. Grasett dismissed the idea entirely without a word of explanation, claiming that the Czechoslovak Brigade was not "a viable fighting force", that it would not be ready for battle for another six to eight months, and added, rather insultingly: "I do not know what the policy of your Government is, but as things are now it would be better to take the whole of your Brigade to Russia."⁷ Bosý's report to his superiors does not appear in these or other military files, but we may presume that it was unlikely to have been complimentary.⁸

5 BAV-B 138: Series of reports - 'Conditions in the Protectorate': September-December 1943. At about this time also, the Nazis began to increase the number of shipments of Jews and other prisoners from the Terezín Ghetto to the death camps in Poland, an escalation which reached a peak in the summer of 1944. Terezín is only an hour's drive north-west of Prague, and many of the Nazis stationed in the camp used the capital for recreation. Although no intelligence reports on the camp were discovered in the research for the present study, it seems most likely that the men in London would have heard something of the conditions there. [Benešova M. *et al*: *Terezín 1940-1945* (Terezín Memorial Publications, 1996), *passim*.]

6 Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Edward Grasett KBE CB MC DSO (1888-1971) was mentioned in despatches five times during the Great War; Staff and Imperial Defence Colleges 1920-1937; GOC China 1938-1941; promoted Divisional Commander 1941; Corps Commander 1941-1943; War Office 1944; SHAEF 1944-1945; Lt. Governor and C-in-C Jersey 1945-1953. He was awarded the Order of the Red Banner by the USSR.

7 BA-B 157 (VOJ X-VB 12): Minutes, Bosý and Grasett, 31.1.44. Grasett's point about the Brigade being unable to engage in combat duties stemmed from the removal of 88 officers to oversee the parachute training. Bosý retaliated by pointing out that the Brigade was still 77 officers over establishment even then and he asked for the War Office's understanding that this had been the enduring problem faced by the Czechoslovaks ever since 1940. Numbers in the Czechoslovak Army units in Russia vary according to source. Notes in the MNO and VKPR archives indicate that something like three to five thousand men were involved, but this in itself indicates that even the Government in England had no hard data to work on. Since the escape from Czechoslovakia in 1939, men either went east or west, broadly speaking, and those who went east - and most of those spent the first two years of the war in labour camps - were never accurately counted until the end of the war.

8 An unsigned pencilled comment on the above minutes suggests that some of the British were uneasy about the various Russian connections. "My personal opinion is that [they] dislike us sending to Russia officers who have passed through many specialist courses here in England. It is possible that they are afraid that through this the Russians could receive secret information." Whose opinion this was, it is impossible to say at present. In mid-1943, the Brigade had despatched 150 surplus officers to the Soviet Union, and just recently had also posted a specially-trained liaison officer who had been

When the Slovak Rising began in late August 1944, the Czechoslovaks repeated their desires to have a hand in the action and within a few days had tabled requests to all three partners in the Grand Alliance. From the British, Beneš wanted immediate assistance with the bombing of strategic points and the dropping of supplies to the partisans. In early September, Roberts wrote to the War Cabinet and outlined the position of the Foreign Office:

Slovakia is clearly within the Russian operational sphere of influence and any really effective assistance must come from the Russians...but at the same time we do not wish to discourage the Czechoslovak Government on the first occasion on which any effective resistance to the Germans has come from Czechoslovakia. Nor do we wish to lay ourselves open to any possible accusation that we are less sympathetic to these Slovaks than we have shown ourselves to the Poles fighting in Warsaw.⁹

This sounded the key note for the British response: it was always going to be a matter for the Soviets, but how to make this fact plain without alienating the Beneš administration would be the primary task. The Chiefs of Staff replied the following day, aligning themselves with this policy and totally dismissing long-range bombing operations which, they said, was purely a matter for the Russians.¹⁰ The reactions of the other two major allies were also tentative. The Americans did no more than to recognise belligerent rights in Slovakia and assumed that all combatants were under the command of the Czechoslovak Government in London.¹¹ In Moscow, silence was the rule. The British had received a request from Ingr for five senior staff to be immediately transferred to Slovakia from London, and before agreeing they wanted to be sure that the Soviets did not object.¹² After a delay of some eleven days, a further despatch took the view that no reply meant no objection, so reinforcing could proceed.¹³

Essentially, therefore, nothing was going to come from the western sphere other than thin promises of support. Ingr wrote directly to the War Cabinet on September

detailed to work with the Czechoslovak and Royal Air Forces. Grasett had complained to Bosý about this in the meeting.

9 CAB 121/360: Roberts to War Cabinet, 4.9.44. A report by the Chiefs of Staff, COS (44) 805, formed the basis of the Cabinet's knowledge of the situation in Slovakia. Roberts also took pains to note that the views expressed were shared by Eden.

10 CAB 121/360: Chiefs of Staff to the War Cabinet, 5.9.44.

11 CAB 121/360: Telegram, Halifax to Foreign Office, 8.9.44.

12 CAB 121/360: Foreign Office to Moscow, 14.9.44.

13 CAB 121/360: Foreign Office to Moscow, 25.9.44. This telegram also included a phrase which stated the British opinion of the command structure in Slovakia, that the Slovak forces were "fully controlled by the Czechoslovak Government in London." It is impossible to see how the British could have known this with certainty since all of their information came from the MNO, and this body would have said or done anything to secure Allied assistance. Much more likely is that this phrase was 'bait' to test or provoke a Russian response. Unfortunately, no reply from Moscow appears in this file, if indeed there was one at all.

27th and all but pleaded for Allied reinforcements. He said that an uprising in the Protectorate was now imminent and would begin on a signal from London, therefore he needed arms for 10,000 men to be despatched within six nights and the further preparation of supplies for another 50-60,000 men within two weeks after the action began, all with the appropriate ammunition, food and medical stores.¹⁴ Eight days later, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Alan Brooke, curtly replied that it was still a matter for the Russians, that all air operations should be carried out by them, and the implication was that future supplies should be a Russian problem also.¹⁵

A day later, the views of the Special Operations Executive were expressed. They maintained that hitherto the Czechoslovak Government had offered "little co-operation" in SOE's attempts to organise an effective resistance group in Bohemia and Moravia, but now that the war had progressed favourably for the Allies, the Beneš administration suddenly wished to "pursue the task of promoting such an organisation...to avoid the unenviable position of being the one nation which was not internally prepared for liberation." The report dismissed the claim that the Slovakian action had happened "at the behest" of the Czechoslovak Government, and insisted that responsibility rested with the Russians alone. One crumb of comfort for Ingr, however, lay in SOE's belief that the people of Bohemia and Moravia would nevertheless look to the west for help "and expect their arms and assistance to be delivered by us and not the Russians."¹⁶

14 CAB 121/360: Ingr to War Cabinet, 27.9.44.

15 CAB 121/360: Brooke to Ingr, 5.10.44.

16 CAB 121/360: SOE to War Cabinet, 6.10.44. A final paragraph, struck from the record, noted the political importance of supplying any resistance in Bohemia and Moravia since the ties between the Czechoslovak Government, the home resistance and His Majesty's Government would be weakened if those people were liberated by the Soviets.

SOE's attitude towards the Czechoslovaks generally was not particularly warm. In his studious account of Heydrich's assassination, Callum MacDonald traces the relationship between SOE and the Czechoslovak Intelligence Service and demonstrates that Beneš was clearly culpable of using agents who were often ill-prepared and unsuitable for covert activity to further his political interests rather than achieve any measurable success against the Germans. Before the assassination of Heydrich in May 1942, SOE attempted to place twenty or so agents in the Protectorate, most of whom were caught and killed, whilst some defected to the Nazis and severely dented SOE's faith in the Czechoslovak resistance. One, Karel Čurda, betrayed Heydrich's assassins and was hanged as a traitor in 1946. [MacDonald C: *The Killing of SS Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich* (Macmillan 1989), *passim*.] After Heydrich's death, SOE continued to train and supply agents, but again the success rate was minimal and again some voluntarily surrendered to the Germans. Essentially, the Czechs were on their own after that and SOE confined itself to intelligence gathering rather than active subversion. [Foot M.R.D: *S.O.E. - The Special Operations Executive, 1940-1946* (BBC 1984) pp 199-203.] Bruce Lockhart also supplied the Foreign Office with periodic resumés of resistance activity in the Protectorate covering a wide range of subjects including morale, prices, Gestapo activities and food shortages. There were, however, some doubts concerning the truth and sources of his information at times. In January 1943 he met the then head of MI6 (Major-General Sir Stewart Menzies) who suspected that the Czechoslovak Government in London was "touching up or even faking reports", and Bruce Lockhart admitted that he had often seen reports supposedly sent from the Prague Resistance when he knew from own sources that communications had ceased due to Gestapo activity. It was felt

The Chiefs of Staff Committee minuted in response that all risings must be supported by advancing Allied forces, and since the west was not in a position to assist, all material aid must come from the Russians. The final official decision was that (a) it was a matter for the Soviets to provide active aid, and (b) the west would continue to encourage the Czechoslovaks by supplying small-scale sabotage groups in the Protectorate.¹⁷

An exasperated Beneš tackled Nichols about this stream of intransigence, and the latter wrote to Roberts on October 23rd who then passed the letter to the War Cabinet. Beneš was disinterested in the argument that all risings should be supported by advancing Russian troops, but he made it clear that there was a political dimension to the problem which was virtually being ignored:

The President seemed inclined to allow it to be inferred that he would draw his own conclusions from our attitude on this subject; i.e. that we were content to see Czechoslovakia pass within the political sphere of the Soviet Union. He rehearsed, once again, the reasons why his policy had always been, and would always be, to seek assistance and support from both the east and the west, and why it was in the interests of [Britain] that this should be Czechoslovakia's policy. I replied with some warmth that if he were to draw the conclusion that we were disinterested in Czechoslovakia's future and that we were quite content to see her enter definitely and permanently into the Soviet sphere of political influence, he was completely mistaken.¹⁸

One can see from this why Beneš was so aggrieved, and see also how he came to the opinions that he held. He had received not one particle of evidence to suggest that Nichols was as good as his word, and the permanent insistence that he should apply to Moscow for help must surely have convinced him the Britain was washing her hands of the Czechoslovak problem. Beneš pointedly asked Nichols that, "if we are abandoning him, were we equally abandoning the Poles?", to which the latter replied that the decisions reached by the British Government "did not mean that we had lost interest in his country. On the contrary, we continued to take the most lively interest in the future and in the prosperity of Czechoslovakia."¹⁹

that Moravec and perhaps even SOE had had a hand in the deception. [Bruce Lockhart R.H: *Diaries (Vol 2)*; entry for 20.1.43.] Bruce Lockhart's summaries may be found throughout the FO 371 correspondence series.

17 CAB 121/360: COS Committee, 7.10.44. The report was over the signature of the Vice Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Sir Douglas Evill. In citing the need for Allied support for internal risings, he noted that "these conditions had not obtained in Poland, and as a result the rising had failed. They would not obtain in Czechoslovakia, and if a large-scale rising is staged in that country there is a serious danger that it would suffer the same fate as the Polish rising. Such a failure might lead to very serious difficulties with the Czechoslovak authorities such as we had experienced with [the Polish] over the question of providing aid for the Polish Home Army."

18 CAB 121/360: Nichols to Foreign Office (Roberts), 23.10.44.

19 *ibid.* Nichols added: "Beneš and I spoke with more warmth on this occasion than we do usually. He is in fact very disappointed indeed at our decision, which he clearly realises he can neither

One can forgive Beneš for not believing him, and in the face of such apparent duplicity, only one hope remained - the immediate transfer of his Air Force to the zone of operations. Ten days earlier, on the 13th, Janoušek had written to the DAFL recalling his much earlier correspondence with Portal and its unfortunate results. Ingr had followed Portal's instructions and duly applied with SHAEF, but he had been referred back to Air Vice-Marshal Collier. He in turn had suggested submitting a formal application for transfer to the DAFL. It had therefore taken a year for the circle to be completed without the slightest movement on the side of the major western Allies.

Janoušek requested the return of the squadrons in the event of either sufficient territory being liberated in the eastern part of Czechoslovakia to enable the squadrons to function effectively or, which was less likely, the sudden collapse of Germany which would open up innumerable airfields within range of the homeland. Claiming that his Government had already opened negotiations with the Russians, he again asked for RAF assistance in the move, particularly for transportation of equipment, ground personnel and enough supplies for one month's combat duties. He closed by asking that these requests be approved "with the minimum possible delay", and though he accepted that the British response would "be largely governed by the reply from the USSR", he still hoped that embryonic preparations could proceed.²⁰

No reply to this letter may be found in either the Prague or London archives, and it is quite possible, given the time the Air Ministry liked to take over matters concerning the Czechoslovak Air Force, that he did not receive one. Approximately three weeks passed and then Masaryk himself took up the cause, sending two *aides-memoire* to Sinclair on November 10th, one tabling a request from his Government to purchase eighteen transport aircraft from the USA, and the other asking for the prompt return of the fighter squadrons, adding:

We have acquainted the Soviet Government with this intention and received an official reply that the Soviet Government would welcome the transfer of the fighting squadrons and that they would supply the necessary aerodromes, petrol and other materials which they would happen to have.²¹

question or get reversed. He is by no means anxious to be left in the hands of the Russians alone, and this, I believe, is due not only to his desire to follow a policy of balance but also to his experience up-to-date of Russian methods."

20 ČsL VB 143/CI-3/3/90: Janoušek to the DAFL, 23.10.44.

21 ČsL VB 143/CI-3/4/90: Masaryk to Sinclair, 10.11.44. In the second *aide-memoire*, Masaryk claimed that both SHAEF and the US War Department had no objection to selling the transport aircraft to the Czechoslovak Government if the latter "could prove that their delivery is necessitated by the needs of the war effort." To this end, Masaryk sought Air Ministry support for the scheme, adding that the rapid transfer of commanders, men and materiel would indeed hasten the liberation of Czechoslovakia. Both *aides-memoire* appear also in AIR/8/1257.

Was Masaryk telling the truth here? We cannot tell, for no substantiating document appears in the files. It seems likely that he was, however, for to lay himself so open to a charge of misrepresentation, given the nervousness felt by the British regarding Soviet attitudes, would have been to destroy his credibility entirely.

The following day, Sinclair wrote to Portal and expressed his views on the propositions and also outlined his replies to Masaryk. Regarding the return of the squadrons, he had told Masaryk that they were "playing an important part in our theatre of the war and we should not be able quickly to replace them, but I laid more stress on the difficulties of supply and reinforcements."²² It is difficult to determine how important a rôle the Czech Wing was playing by this time. On the date of this letter, 310 and 313 fighter squadrons were both at North Weald while 312 was at Bradwell Bay. During the month of November, 310 and 313 flew eleven escort missions for bombing raids on Germany while 312 flew twelve.²³ Apart from training, the rest of the period was largely idle. To be sure, any mission was dangerous yet important, but they were hardly racing across Europe in support of the liberating armies, so it is hard to accept that they were somehow indispensable and could not be released given the will to do so.

In reply, Portal argued that one or two of the squadrons could, in theory, be maintained through newly-liberated Ruthenia, though he expressed grave doubts as to whether the squadrons would be maintained properly at all:

Though there are three Czech number plates in Fighter Command [*sic*], there are barely enough Czech personnel to carry out the day-to-day servicing of one and a half squadrons. For 2nd, 3rd and 4th line backing they are entirely dependent on the RAF, and we do not know if these squadrons can be fitted into the Russian maintenance system.²⁴

Another 'no' was clearly looming here, and he added that he could not see a "sound military case" for the move anyway. In recommending the rejection of the proposal, he nevertheless expressed his sympathies for the Czechoslovak desire to fight on their own soil. Three days later, Collier effectively buried the scheme by informing Portal that Janoušek's proposals of October 13th had made "sweeping assumptions" in that the Russians would be willing or able to supply fuel oils etc., and that "there will be

22 AIR/8/1257: Sinclair to Portal, 11.11.44. On the subject of buying transport aircraft from the USA, Sinclair wrote: "I avoided discussion on this project and merely promised to look at it."

23 AIR 27/1683 and AIR 27/1695: Operational record books for 310, 312 and 313 Fighter Squadrons, November 1-30, 1944.

24 AIR/8/1257: Portal to Sinclair, 15.11.44. He also rejected the idea to buy transport aircraft from the USA, claiming that these were in short supply and any surplus allocations would have to wait until British needs had been met. As evidence, he informed Sinclair that he had submitted a purchase order for 660 Dakota transports and had been informed that only 572 would be available for delivery.

immediately available in Czechoslovakia a large number of skilled men who will require little training in service maintenance."²⁵

Portal summarised all these views in a final report to Sinclair and concluded:

If the Czechs are set upon transferring their forces then it seems to me that the proper course is to transfer the responsibility of maintaining them from the RAF to the Russians. It would be up to the Russians to provide aircraft and all the other things needed to maintain the squadrons; on the other hand, we should be rid of the commitment at the cost of finding three squadrons' worth of pilots and 1½ squadrons' worth of ground personnel, which would be difficult but not impossible.²⁶

Obviously, Portal was sorely tempted to "be rid of the commitment", but he finished by recommending that the Czechoslovaks be given a choice:

[Either they] stay where they are or [go] over lock, stock and barrel to the Russians. I do not expect that the Czechs would welcome this alternative since in practice it would probably lead to the virtual disappearance of the Czech Air Force for a considerable time. They would probably be well advised to continue the present arrangements which at least keep the Czech flag flying at no very great cost to themselves.²⁷

Although Portal's views seemed to indicate an utter indifference to the Czechoslovak Air Force or the military position in Slovakia, in essence his was a realistic view for the time. And yet, as we saw with the document issued by the DAFL during the independence debates, there is still this impression of 'the tolerated guest' about the Air Ministry's dealings with the Czechoslovak air contingent. Yes, it would be acceptable if they had not been inclined to trouble themselves overmuch about a very small force and its limited rôle in a gigantic war effort; but the language employed and the tone of its delivery frequently conveys the sense of irritation at having to deal with them at all, as if they should sit patiently on the south coast and wait until the end of the war before kicking up any more fuss.

The *denouement* came in two notes, one from Sinclair to Masaryk, much distilled, which highlighted the problems with the maintenance of communications, and the other from Nichols to Eden which recorded the former's conversations with Masaryk and his reaction to the news that Britain was not going to grant any requests whatsoever:

25 AIR/8/1257: Collier to Portal, 18.11.44. Exactly where Collier obtained his information for this latter criticism is unknown since Janoušek's letter of October 13th in the Prague archive makes no such assumption that a cohort of maintenance crews would be available. Janoušek had only requested the simultaneous transfer of Czechoslovak ground personnel from Britain.

26 AIR/8/1257: Portal to Sinclair, 19.11.44.

27 *ibid.* Portal also rejected the proposal to buy transport aircraft from the USA based on the reasons given by other correspondents in the discussions.

He heard me in silence and his manner betrayed that the answer we had returned was not unexpected. He showed that he appreciated the arguments even if he could not share the conclusions.²⁸

With this, the Beneš Government's first attempt to get their Air Force home came to an end, and it has to be said that, in the main, the attitude adopted by the British Government and the Air Ministry was a reasonable one given the practicalities of the time. It was perfectly true that the Russians were in the best position to assist the Slovak rising, and even if three squadrons of Spitfires had been flown to that zone, maintaining them would have been almost impossible. To rely on men who had worked on the machines would have meant that only one, or at best, two squadrons would have functioned in any effective sense, and even these would have been totally dependent on spares flown through an uncertain communications route from Italian bases.

And yet it is also possible to see these admittedly valid reasons as little more than smoke to obscure the truth of the matter; that is, that the Air Ministry simply did not wish to incur the extra work at a time when the war was entering its final phase. As we saw in the independence debates, the administrative difficulties of separation from the RAF were close to the forefront of the Ministry's mind throughout the period, and it seems that the Czechoslovaks thought that it was merely a question of fuelling the planes and flying east. To transfer the whole contingent to the Russian zone would have meant a complex and laborious demobilisation on the British side, but to send the units east as a detachment of the RAF to fight with the Soviet armies would have raised numerous political complications far in excess of the potential benefit to the war effort. It was therefore easier to do nothing and use logistics as the basis of a negative argument.²⁹

But one thing of great importance emerges from this episode, and that is that the attitude of the British regarding the return of the Air Force to the Slovakian theatre sent all the wrong signals to the Czechoslovaks. By continually advising them to seek aid and permission from the Russians, the British were, at this late stage in 1944, making a rod for themselves to be beaten with. For when less than a year later they were falling

28 AIR/8/1257: Nichols to Eden, 13.11.44; Sinclair to Masaryk, undated. Sinclair had openly suggested that the whole air contingent go over to the Russians, but added: "At the same time I do not hide from you that I should be glad if, on the whole, you would prefer to leave the present arrangement undisturbed and to allow your squadrons to continue to fight alongside ours."

29 The problems of administration were mentioned only once in the correspondence generated by the requests, and this was by Portal in his letter to Sinclair of 15.11.44. Although he only glanced at the difficulties, it was the first point he made. We must also acknowledge that never was a *positive* stance adopted by the Air Ministry apart from Portal's comment that the commitment to maintain the Czechoslovak Air Force could be shaken off if the Russians would pick up the burden. Yet this can scarcely be seen as defending the Czechoslovak cause.

over themselves to give assistance to the Czechoslovaks, the latter effectively snubbed them in favour of their Russian allies.

The return (2): "Let them go back forthwith"

Such arguments as expressed in 1944 could not obtain when the war in Europe ended in early May 1945. With all continental hostilities at an end, the combat effectiveness of the squadrons was no longer a factor, and the Czechoslovaks' desire to go home was now an expectation and not a request. All that mattered to them was how soon the release from the RAF could be achieved, and all that mattered to the British was that the Russians would not be upset in the process.

By the middle of April 1945, Marshal Koniev's First Ukrainian Front had penetrated deep into the eastern half of Czechoslovakia, while Patton's Third Army had advanced into the western areas. This prompted calls from the Czechoslovak Government for the immediate transfer of the Brigade to the western sectors in order to participate in the imminent liberation. Nichols, writing to Eden, relayed and endorsed proposals from Hubert Ripka that such a transfer be made together with a token force of Air Force pilots together with their machines from Britain. Ripka had suggested that the effect on morale "would be out of all proportion to the actual number of airmen concerned."³⁰ There had obviously been no response because a week later Ripka wrote to Nichols and again called for the "immediate despatch" of all possible Army and Air Force units to the fighting front in western Czechoslovakia, insisting that such a move was "essential for home morale."³¹

30 CAB 121/360: Nichols to Eden, 18.4.45. Nichols acknowledged that "technical difficulties" would be involved, but supported the proposal for mainly political reasons, arguing that the Czechoslovaks would need such a force "for administrative purposes" and also because the arrival of the western Brigade "would counter-balance the arrival of Czechoslovak troops who are now advancing with the Red Army on the eastern front." The proposal was forwarded by Ripka and not Masaryk because the latter was ill at the time.

In another letter to Eden on the same day, Nichols reported substantial changes in the Czechoslovak High Command as reported to him by Ripka. Ingr was now out of favour and out of a job, the post of Commander-in-Chief and Minister of National Defence going to General Ludvík Svoboda, the former C-in-C of the Czechoslovak forces in the USSR. The former commander of the Czechoslovak Brigade in Britain, General Bohuš Miroslav, lost his position as Chief-of-Staff to Brigadier-General Bohumil Boček. Brigadier-General Karel Klapálek, who had commanded the troops in North Africa, had been made commander of all Czechoslovak personnel operating with the Red Army. All three publicly aligned themselves with the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia.

31 FO 371/47139: Ripka to Nichols, 25.4.45. Similar letters from Bosý were sent to Portal and Brooke, again calling for the immediate return of all western units.

The question of the Air Force was taken up by Beaumont who drafted a plan which he submitted to the Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (Policy), Air Vice-Marshal W.F. Dickson, in the second week of May, by which time of course all organised resistance to the Allies in the west had ceased.³² Referring to meetings with Janoušek who had been pressing for a decision, Beaumont wrote that the Inspector had asked for the immediate transfer of all Czechoslovak squadrons, minus their British personnel, with an appropriate 'pack-up' of essential spares to be transported by the RAF as required. The units would remain part of the RAF as an official detachment for a period of three months, after which inter-governmental negotiations would take place regarding the termination of the Anglo-Czechoslovak Agreement.³³ Recommending the scheme to Dickson, he added that he had received wholehearted consent from the Foreign Office.³⁴

Dickson replied the next day, dismissing the proposal as "much too immature for approval as it stands." He argued that (a) "we can hardly be a party to the despatch of this Czech force into an area which is under Russian military occupation without having an assurance that the Russians approve"; (b) political approval was also necessary from the USA, through whose occupation zones the planes would fly; (c) transport aircraft would be difficult to come by since they were now working to full capacity in Germany, particularly with the repatriation of POWs; (d) SHAEF would need to liaise closely with the Soviets to ensure the minimum of friction; (e) since this would be the first Allied air contingent to return, a precedent would therefore be created with other allies, and the political implications would need to be studied first; and (f) would the pack-up of spares and other equipment contravene the provisions laid down in COS (44) 120?³⁵

32 Air Marshal Sir William Forster Dickson KBE CBE OBE joined the RAF in 1918; test-pilot 1921-1922; Air Ministry 1923-1926; Staff College, Andover 1927-1928; overseas and home commands 1929-1938; Director of Plans 1941-1942; AOC 9 and 10 Groups, Fighter Command 1942-1943; AOC 83 Group 1943-1944; AOC Desert Air Force 1944; ACAS(P) 1945-1946; VCAS 1946-1948; C-in-C Middle East Air Force 1948-1950.

33 AIR 2/6947: Minutes, Beaumont to Dickson, 11.5.45. Janoušek had conferred with Nichols and Seligman on May 8th. Having heard from SHAEF that the transfer was a political matter and should be dealt with by the appropriate authorities, Janoušek "was extremely depressed by this, for he had hoped to lead his squadrons back to the liberated territories under the auspices of the western powers." Nichols admitted that he could offer him no greater encouragement and called the meeting "a thoroughly depressing interview." [FO 371/47139: Nichols to Warner, 8.5.45.]

34 *ibid.* He also noted that "there may be complications with the Russians with regard to the employment of these squadrons in Czechoslovakia" and that in the absence of RAF assistance with transport, Janoušek was prepared to use 311 Squadron's Liberators, suitably converted. Closing, he added: "I know you are fully aware of the political importance of this move. I suggest that details be arranged with Fighter Command in conjunction with SHAEF. Coastal Command should be asked to put 311 at the disposal of Fighter Command for air transport, and when the latter is completed this squadron would finally assemble in Czechoslovakia." All this was perfectly reasonable to both Beaumont and Janoušek, but at the same time he had let the Russian genie out of the bottle.

35 AIR 2/6947: Dickson to Beaumont, 12.5.45. COS (44) 120 was an important policy document

He closed by distancing himself from the apparent approval granted by the Foreign Office, suggesting that they too had not thought the matter through:

They will let us know when they are satisfied that politically the way is clear. In the meantime, will you as a matter of urgency look more carefully into the points I have raised above. You should also inform Air Vice-Marshal Janoušek that it has been considered essential to ascertain from the Czechoslovak Government whether this proposal has the approval of the Russian authorities.

Reasonably enough, the Air Ministry were prepared to wait for the Foreign Office to give the go-ahead to the plan, but of particular importance here is the insistence that it should be the responsibility of the Beneš Government to provide evidence of Soviet concurrence, and it was this condition which became the key-note of almost everything which followed.

On the same day on which Beaumont was put so resoundingly in his place by Dickson, the Foreign Office was deliberating on the scheme as it had been relayed to them. It was decided that 311 Squadron could not be used immediately for transport purposes, but that the SHAEF problem was minimalised by the fact that the Czechoslovak fighter Wing was technically under sole British command.³⁶ With regard to the Russian question, the water was less clear. As far as the Foreign Office understood it, Svoboda in Prague had contacted Ripka in London with an urgent message from Beneš demanding the return of the squadrons at once with Czechoslovak Air Force markings, but there was no hint of Russian approval.³⁷ That Prague had been designated a Soviet area had recently been agreed between Eisenhower and Antonov, hence the necessity for Russian clearance was now absolute:

As Prague is now in the Russian operational zone, it would be most unwise for Czech aircraft to go in without Russian consent. Otherwise they might well be shot at. Moreover, Russian consent would be necessary for SHAEF to move in by air or ground

issued by the Chiefs of Staff Committee under Churchill's supervision on June 30th, 1944. Entitled 'The Equipping of the Forces of our European Allies', it had two objects: (1) to act as a basis for producing estimates in preparation for Allied re-armament at the war's end; (2) to "ascertain the extent to which demands on British man-power can be reduced by utilising the forces of our European Allies in the occupation of Germany." As a paper which reveals much about the forecasted conditions in Europe after the defeat of Germany, including the likely political scenario as the Red Army advanced, the document is of great value to the strategic and political historian. It may be found in CAB 80/44.

36 AIR 2/6947: FO 371/47139: Ward to Randall, 12.5.45. 311 Squadron had recently converted to the Liberator GR VI in March 1945 as part of its on-going duties of anti-submarine detection in the North Sea. The amount of equipment required to fulfil this function was considerable, and to strip the aircraft for service in a transport rôle was considered to be a lengthy process. Furthermore, the GR (General Reconnaissance) series of the Liberator was essentially designed for maritime activity and in itself would have been unsuitable for land-locked Czechoslovakia.

37 Major-General Ludvík Svoboda had been Commander-in-Chief of all Czechoslovak forces in Russia. According to a briefing paper prepared for a post-war visit, he was "much admired and well-liked by all ranks of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces." [AIR 8/1257: DAFL Briefing Paper, 25.10.45.]

transport the ground crews, petrol etc., without which the Czech Wing would sit rather ridiculously upon the ground at Prague.³⁸

In the eyes of the Foreign Office, this meant that the matter was virtually removed from British hands insofar as executive decisions were concerned. Russian approval was an essential precondition followed by a satisfactory programme of action to be negotiated between the Soviets and SHAEF. When these two elements had been secured, all the British had to do was simply authorise the transfer. With all thought guided by this blueprint, the Foreign Office devised a plan which required (a) that the Air Ministry clearly inform Janoušek that his Government should ask for Russian consent; (b) that the British would take up the matter with SHAEF "urging the political importance of the Czechs going back"; (c) that the British would also liaise with Washington, again emphasising the political importance of an early return and asking for State Department support in persuading SHAEF "to do the necessary"; and (d) that any Anglo-US-SHAEF action would depend entirely on the Soviet response to the Czechoslovaks.³⁹

This seemed practically foolproof in that everything now rested upon the Russian attitude. Letters to that effect were issued swiftly. On May 14th, Alec Randall advised Nichols to fully apprise Ripka of the British position, stressing that "favourable consideration" would be given to the transfer proposals if the Czechoslovak Government duly obtained Soviet consent.⁴⁰ Ripka, however, did not react so sweetly. As far as he was concerned, the transfer proposals had come direct from the MNO in Prague and would certainly have been authorised by Beneš, and this meant that Russian

38 AIR 2/6947: FO 371/47139: Ward to Randall, 12.5.45. General Antonov was the Soviet Deputy Chief of Staff. On the 30th of April both he and Eisenhower had come to a general arrangement of demarcation, apparently to Churchill's fury. Between the 25th and the 30th a series of telegrams flew back and forth across the Atlantic as Churchill tried to halt - in Martin Gilbert's words - "the westward march of Communism." According to Churchill, who had spoken with Eisenhower, the latter had no plans at all to liberate Czechoslovakia, "having never conceived Prague as a military, still less a political objective." The line taken by the British Chiefs-of-Staff was in broad agreement with this, though they urged Churchill to make Eisenhower absolutely aware of the political significance of Czechoslovakia but not to undertake any military operations if this would delay the final collapse of Germany. At last, Churchill wrote directly to Truman (through Eden who supported him) asking for "as much as possible of the territory of Czechoslovakia" to be liberated by US forces. Truman sided with Eisenhower, but accepted that a move into the northern territories might serve some military purposes. The full series of telegrams appears in CAB 120/737. According to Gilbert, the US Chief-of-Staff, General George Marshall, told Eisenhower: "Personally and aside from all logistic, tactical and strategical implications, I would be loath to hazard American lives for purely political purposes." [Gilbert M: *op.cit.*, p680.] As a result, Prague was liberated by the Soviets. [See also *The Eden Memoirs (Volume 1 - The Reckoning)*: Cassells 1965, pp532-533.]

39 AIR 2/6947: J.G.Ward to Air Ministry, 12.5.45. Beaumont forwarded these proposals and the requirement for Soviet approval to Janoušek on the 15th.

40 AIR 2/6947: Randall to Nichols, 14.5.45. Alec Walter George Randall OBE was promoted to 3rd Secretary of the Foreign Office in 1920; 2nd Secretary 1923; Chargé d'Affaires to the Holy See 1925-1930; 1st Secretary 1929; overseas appointments 1930-1938; Counsellor 1940.

approval could be taken for granted as the President would not have acted against his Government's interests while still in the Soviet zone of occupation. Summarising this, Randall wrote to Dickson: "In our opinion this is satisfactory and sufficient for the Air Ministry to now go ahead with making the various arrangements."⁴¹ A Foreign Office minute of the 17th records a conversation between a Miss F. Gatehouse, Beaumont and Seligman in which the latter pair agreed that Russian approval could be assumed from the nature and origins of the request for transfer.⁴² Caution prevailed, however, and an unsigned DAFL minute of the 19th noted that "for safety's sake, the Foreign Office have written to [Nichols] requesting that he should obtain from the Czechoslovak Government the Soviet Government's formal agreement."

The entire state of affairs was passed on to Dickson in a long minute prepared by Pearson-Rogers on May 26th. Upon the core topic of Russian approval, he was positively sanguine. Aligning himself with Randall's view that this could be "assumed with certainty", he added:

Moreover, I suggest that there is nothing that the Russians want more than for us to be difficult in helping the Czechs. The former are offering equipment etc. to the Czech Army with both hands, and they will be delighted at anything which will tend to make the Czechs turn more and more to them for help.⁴³

In passing, he also noted that the US State Department had "replied favourably" to the plan of transfer, as had SHAEF.⁴⁴ Endorsing Janoušek's concept of a three-month detachment from the RAF, he wrote:

The Anglo-Czech Agreement, having no termination clause, allows us, if we so wish, to exercise control over the Czech Air Force indefinitely. The Czechs do not want to divorce themselves from the RAF at this stage and have asked for three months grace in which to consider the return to Czechoslovakia all of their units...They are, however, most anxious for the fighter squadrons to return...and remain there while their deliberations are proceeding.⁴⁵

41 AIR 2/6947: Randall to Dickson, 16.5.45.

42 FO 371/47139: Gatehouse, minute to file, 17.5.45.

43 AIR 2/6947: Pearson-Rogers to Dickson, 25.5.45.

44 The Foreign Office received a telegram from Halifax in Washington to this effect on May 23rd.

45 AIR 2/6947: Pearson-Rogers to Dickson, 25.5.45. The three-month detachment scheme served both parties in different ways. From the point of view of the Czechoslovaks, it meant that the RAF would still be bound to meet their immediate needs in spares and other equipment and simultaneously send a strong signal to the Soviets that they were still, nominally, part of the Royal Air Force and must not be tampered with. From the British standpoint, the scheme allowed them to sidestep any complications which might arise under the COS 120 paper, Lend-Lease and future supply. In other words, the RAF would be supplying its own forces and not those of an independent Allied power.

The irony is exquisite: after five long years of struggling for independence, convenience (and perhaps political expediency) had forced a change of heart, and now the last thing wanted by the Czechoslovaks was to be separated from the RAF.

And yet the problems were still manifold. Pearson-Rogers foresaw three possible options and their attendant benefits and perils if the squadrons were permitted to return at once. Firstly, the RAF could agree to the detachment scheme "on the assumption that they will either return to the UK in three months' time or that by then we shall have come to a permanent arrangement." The problem with this was that the Soviets, while agreeing to having the contingent in their military area, "may resent having squadrons with RAF markings and being technically part of the RAF." He was prepared to accept Foreign Office rulings on this issue, but he also noted that such a scheme would put "an explicit and substantial commitment" on the organs of supply in Britain.

Secondly, the contingent could return as the Czechoslovak Air Force in its own right and be supplied according to COS (44) 120:

This would make things easier for the Russians. On the other hand, course (a) is what the Czechs propose and what they say they have Russian agreement to, and we are not proposing to carry out the operation at all unless the Russians agree.

The second option would lighten the burden of supply, but still in itself would imply a commitment to support the squadrons once home and, he noted, for some considerable time after that, which in effect would turn post-war support into a lengthy peace-time commitment.

The third possibility would be "to allow the squadrons to go and leave it to the Czechs to manage on their own with or without Russian help", but he immediately condemned the very thought of this as being "utterly unacceptable to the Foreign Office and clearly not in the national interest." Concluding with a recommendation to follow the first option, he added:

I do not think it would be desirable to put pressure on the Czechs to persuade them not to go. If their motive was purely a political one - e.g. to show the flag - they might be dissuaded, but Air Vice-Marshal Janoušek's letter shows that they have strong sentimental reasons for going and have made up their minds to do so. To try and dissuade them would be unsuccessful and would give them the impression that we had ulterior motives. I therefore consider that we should do our best to let them go as soon as possible.⁴⁶

46 *ibid.* The letter from Janoušek to which Pearson-Rogers referred was sent to the Air Ministry the day before he despatched this summary. Addressed to "My Dear Frank" [Beaumont], the Inspector wrote: "We have learned...that, almost without exception, one or more members of the family of our officers and airmen serving in this country have not only suffered under Nazi domination, but have actually been killed in the most ghastly manner. You will therefore understand how anxious they are to return home in order to ascertain the nature of their losses in families and relatives." [AIR 2/6947: Janoušek to Beaumont, 25.5.45.]

This was the position as of May 25th, approximately five weeks after Ripka's initial approach to Nichols for the return of the squadrons. On the same day, Pearson-Rogers double-checked with SHAEF if the latter had any objections to the airlift passing through its areas, and a reply over Eisenhower's name confirmed that they had none, subject of course to Russian approval for the move.⁴⁷

The penultimate piece of the puzzle was slotted into place by the Foreign Office at the end of May, yet some minds in Whitehall were not altogether convinced by the argument that Russian consent could be inferred from the original requests. In a minute of the 30th, Gatehouse noted that, while arrangements for the move were proceeding, "we are no further putting it into execution" without hard evidence of Soviet approval. In another minute on the same day, Ward noted that the three options as defined by Pearson-Rogers were of massive political importance. He believed that the option chosen would decide or greatly influence the whole post-war policy towards the Czechoslovak Air Force, and he added: "I believe that the Russians have already collared the Czech Army, but that we still have a chance for the Air Force."⁴⁸ These observations were finally distilled into a note to the Air Ministry on the 31st. Agreeing with the 'detachment' plan, Denis Allen removed another obstacle with the following:

We also think that the aircraft should return with Czech markings, both because we do not want to arouse unnecessary Russian suspicions by playing up the RAF allegiance of the squadrons, and also because the Russians themselves appear generally to have been careful to allow Czech and Polish formations fighting with them to retain their national emblems, and we should not wish to compare unfavourably with them in this respect.⁴⁹

But Janoušek was still a long way from giving the order to leave, for there was still one supreme question to be resolved: "But everything must be thoroughly tied up with the Russians before the Wing leaves. We must be sure that the Russians understand and agree with the basis upon which the aircraft are returning."

47 AIR 2/6947: Telegrams of 25.5.45 and 29.5.45.

48 FO 371/47139: Minutes to file, Gatehouse and Ward, 30.5.45. Ward also commented on COS 120, arguing that the paper was governed by Paragraph 12 which acknowledged that political uncertainties might make it difficult to recommend long-term post-war rearmament policies for Czechoslovakia, Poland and Yugoslavia. The latter's requirements had been met according to the 50:50 agreement with the western Allies supplying the Air and Naval forces, and the Soviets supplying the Army. It was within this context that he proposed targeting the Czechoslovak Air Force for future development with western equipment.

49 AIR 2/6947: Allen to Seligman, 31.5.45. On the matter of Russian consent, Allen argued that this was still a matter for the Czechs to test for themselves, yet if doubts remained the British should intervene through military rather than political channels. This is the first hint from the papers that the British were prepared to push things along at their instigation.

William Denis Allen was educated at Wanganui and Pembroke College, Cambridge; promoted 3rd Secretary 1934; China 1938; 2nd Secretary 1939; Acting Chargé d'Affaires, Chungking, 1942; 1st Secretary 1943.

Meanwhile, six hundred or so miles to the east, the frustration was increasing. According to Bosý, the British were at fault by constantly requesting a formal note to be sent by the Soviets to SHAEF declaring that they had no objections to the transfer, when he himself had heard that the Russian commander in Prague, named as a General Gordov, had verbally given his approval to the Czechoslovak Government. Nichols, who was due to arrive in Prague in the first week of June to take up his ambassadorial duties, would be told to put pressure on the Foreign Office to accelerate the move. As far as Bosý was concerned, the British were stalling for political reasons, hoping that the Russians would show their hand in Prague, both militarily and politically, before they committed themselves to a post-war military association.⁵⁰ In itself, this was a valid idea, but the real reason for the delay, or at least so it would seem at the end of May, was simply a lack of communication between the interested parties.

Early in June, Beneš sent two messages to the officers and men of his Air Force, both of which attempted to soothe nerves and bolster morale. In the first, broadcast from Prague on the 7th, he boldly proclaimed that the long wait was nearly over, and though he was aware that the position of the Czechoslovak Air Force in relation to their British hosts was "delicate", he hoped that they would soon make a speedy return complete with their aircraft.⁵¹ He, and they, would be disappointed. In the second, read to the men in England by Janoušek, he reminded them that he had foreseen some delay in their return when he himself had left England for the homeland, but that negotiations were now under way and would solve "several questions relating to your part in the Royal Air Force."⁵²

In the same period, he also contacted Nichols in Prague on the same theme. Nichols reported the conversation to London and emphasised that Beneš had requested that the Air Force should keep its aircraft, noting that "a great effect would be produced if the Czech squadrons were to fly British machines over the Prague districts." He hoped that the transfer would now be arranged soon, but he accepted

50 20-15/2 (2686) 1945: Bosý to Boček, 30.5.45. Bosý accepted, however, that the Russians were playing a cautious game, and that this led to abundant rumours in London and Prague, but maintained that the British were creating difficulties which did not need to exist.

51 ČsL VB 3/A-III/2/1: Beneš broadcast, 7.6.45.

52 VKPR 54/27/1/20: Beneš to the Czechoslovak Air Force (via Janoušek), 8.6.45. The full text is as follows: "I was with you nearly the whole five years of the war, and I know of your achievements, your requests and desires. We haven't forgotten you here in Prague, and I expect your early flight home. When I left England I told you for some time you would have to remain in your places. Now the time has come when we have begun to negotiate your return home. This demands the resolution of several questions relating to your part in the RAF. These things will be sorted out in the near future, and you will return, I hope, with all your aircraft and arms. I await you with gladness, and the whole Republic will gladly welcome you. We need you to build our future fighting strength of the nation."

Much of this was wishful thinking. Negotiations had not just begun, as we have seen, and only in an oblique sense was the Czechoslovak Air Force's relationship with the RAF a part of those talks.

that much depended on what the Czechoslovak Government arranged with the Russians "with whom they are presumably discussing the subject."⁵³ Two days later, he minuted that the Czechoslovak Armoured Brigade would soon be placed under national command as the core of a new Army, and again the request for the squadrons' transfer was repeated.⁵⁴

The pressure was clearly mounting. Beneš had begun to raise expectations, and Nichols, in his own way, was trying to move things along. In England too, the levels at which the problem was being discussed were also raised. The Chiefs-of-Staff Committee drafted a report for Churchill on June 7th, first with a brief synopsis of the problem, then second with two significant reasons, the sentimental issue and the fact that an immediate post-war association with the Air Force would provide "a valuable connecting link with the Czechoslovak Government." Churchill had recently issued his 'standstill' order regarding Royal Air Force strength in Europe, that there must be no immediate depletion of numbers, hence the Committee's decision to refer this matter to him. After declaring that 311 Liberator Squadron was no longer required as a service unit, and that the three fighter squadrons were "efficient fighter and ground attack units", the Committee decided that "the loss to our fighting strength will not be appreciable" if they returned in the near future.⁵⁵ On the same day, the Air Staff issued a note for general circulation to all relevant departments within the Air Ministry supporting the COS proposals, and though both bodies still emphasised the need for Russian concurrence, it was accepted that a post-war agreement with the Czechoslovaks could be politically useful "at a time when they will be in many respects under the dominating influence of the USSR."⁵⁶ Finally, again on the 7th, Nichols sent a despatch for Cabinet distribution which reviewed the military situation in Prague. Marshal Koniev had received the Freedom of the City, and again Beneš had called for the swift return of his Air Force.⁵⁷ On the 8th, the Air Staff drafted an annex to the COS Committee's report recommending the transfer, and on the 11th, the COS report together with the Air Staff annex was sent to Churchill.⁵⁸ On the 13th he wrote above the document: "Let them go back forthwith."⁵⁹

53 CAB 121/360: Telegram, Nichols to Foreign Office, 5.6.45. Nichols also added that Beneš preferred British aircraft to Soviet.

54 CAB 121/360: Telegram, Nichols to Foreign Office, 7.6.45.

55 AIR 2/6947: COS Committee report for the Prime Minister, 7.6.45. Churchill had declared on 17.5.45 "that no weakening of the Royal Air Force in Europe shall take place until further notice."

56 AIR 2/6947: Air Staff Directive, 7.6.45. The note was also copied to Churchill.

57 AIR 2/6947: Telegram, Nichols to Foreign Office, 7.6.45.

58 COS (45) 379: Air Staff Annex, 8.6.45.

59 CAB 121/360: COS Committee report, 11.6.45.

Once Churchill had spoken, the ball was now in play. On the same day, Dickson issued a general directive stating that the Prime Minister and the Chiefs-of-Staff had decided that the four squadrons were to return at once, and therefore all the relevant directorates should prepare. The general provisions were (a) all three fighter squadrons would return as a Wing with 311 Liberator Squadron providing air lift if possible; (b) no RAF personnel would accompany the squadrons back to Czechoslovak; (c) the squadrons would be liveried in full Czechoslovak Air Force markings; (d) all personnel would be entitled to wear the badges and buttons of the home nation and were to remove any RAF emblems; (e) the 'detachment' scheme would apply, "but the Russians will not be told for the present. To them, the move will appear as the permanent return of the Czechoslovak Air Force to Czechoslovakia." As always, the parcel was tied with the familiar ribbon, "subject to Russian agreement."⁶⁰

We might pause at this moment and consider the final couplet of this directive. On the one hand, the Soviets were to be deceived; on the other, they were expected to give their consent to this deception, albeit unknowingly. Having lost its value as a military arm, the Czechoslovak Air Force had now completed its transformation into a political tool once again. The British were not remotely interested in whether or not the contingent would be a viable force in its homeland because the opportunity to claim a stake in an east-central European country presently occupied by the armies of the Soviet Union was now of far greater importance. Furthermore, 'Russian agreement' was rapidly becoming something of a diplomatic unicorn, sought by many, seen by none. No evidence has come to light during this study which proves conclusively that the Soviets made any pronouncement on the subject, negative or otherwise, and all the contemporary evidence, circumstantial though it was, indicates that what little interest they had in the matter was generally positive.⁶¹

We must also ask the question, in precisely what form did the British expect this Soviet consent to appear? Having already encumbered the Czechoslovaks with the task of securing it, presumably London was waiting for a signed document to that effect; something which could easily have been manufactured in Prague by any party for the sake of convenience. It must also remain an unanswered question as to why the Foreign Office did not simply telegraph Clark Kerr in Moscow and request him to make enquiries. Perhaps protocol was the obstacle here, but considering that the officers and men were still on full pay until they left the country, a slight bending of the procedures

60 AIR 2/6947: Dickson, General Directive, 13.6.45.

61 For example, the personal bodyguard which had been supplied by Stalin and had been with Beneš since March 16th was replaced by Czech troops on June 4th as part of the general hand-over of military command in the Republic. [VHA 20-15/2 (2872) 1945, minute to file, 4.6.45.]

would at least have been cost-effective. Then again, oddly enough, when something which approached consent did finally appear, the British refused to believe it. On June 13th, Seligman wrote to Christopher Warner and told him of a letter, apparently received by the US 5th Army in Plzeň, which stated the new Red Army commander in Prague - named as Major-General Paramzik - had confirmed that the Czechoslovak Government now had "full and unrestricted access" to Prague airport.⁶² An extract, over Paramzik's name, found its way on to Seligman's desk:

Will you please inform the Allied Supreme Council that the High Command of the Red Army have ordered that British aircraft carrying military or civilian persons may fly without restriction and are to land at Ruzýn aerodrome near Prague. The aircraft so landing are guaranteed an unrestricted return flight.⁶³

When Janoušek heard of this, he claimed that this gave *carte-blanche* to the Czechoslovak Air Force to return immediately. Seligman commented: "He was quite emphatic about this, but we do not altogether share the view, although it is true to say that this is the first occasion on which we have seen anything resembling a permit of any sort from the Russians for Czechoslovak personnel to land in their own country."

Warner then transmitted a message to Nichols in Prague:

Authority has now been received for transfer of Czech air squadrons to Czechoslovakia with their aircraft as soon as satisfactory evidence is received that Russians agree. Air Marshal Janoušek has endeavoured to convince the Air Ministry that they have already done so, but the letter from the Major-General of Red Army Prague Command...which he produced as evidence, appeared to the Air Ministry clearly to refer to flights of courier aircraft since it referred to return flights from Czechoslovakia as well as flights in.⁶⁴

This seemed to be taking caution to excess. All parties well knew that the move could never have been accomplished in one straight hop from Britain to Czechoslovakia, and that a substantial degree of ferrying of stores, effects and personnel - civilian and military - would be involved. Even the most critical reading of Paramzik's 'permit' forces the conclusion that all these aspects had been covered, and perhaps the only food for pedants lies in the phrase "British aircraft", which could be interpreted as aircraft

62 Sir Christopher Frederick Ashton Warner (1885-1957) was educated at Winchester and Magdalen College, Oxford; Captain of the Royal Fusiliers 1914-1918; Foreign Office 1920-1923 and 1928-1951; promoted Counsellor 1942; knighted 1943; head of the Northern Department 1945; Ambassador to Belgium 1951-1955.

63 AIR 2/6947: Seligman to Warner, 13.6.45.

64 AIR 2/6947: Foreign Office to Prague, 15.6.45. This telegram was copied through the Air Ministry, including Sinclair. Nichols was also informed that the basic administration in preparation for the move would take approximately ten days. Warner then included a short reminder that to the Soviets *and* the Americans, the contingent was returning under the 'detachment' plan. The reason that the Americans were now being deceived was to avoid complications of supply and maintenance under the COS 120 Paper, for if the Czechoslovak Air Force was designated an independent force of a friendly allied power, then the Americans would have been entitled to a voice in its future.

manufactured in Britain or aircraft with British markings, a distinction which would have affected the proposal to livery the planes in Czechoslovak colours and symbols. Nevertheless, this was not the point which Warner focused upon, and in closing he informed Nichols that a three-month pack-up of spares would be supplied:

It must, of course, be obvious both to the Russians and the Czechs that the former will be able to reduce the squadrons to impotence, if they so desire, by refusing them aviation spirit and by declining to agree to their being supplied from here with the major replacements which will gradually become necessary. The Air Ministry calculate, however, that even in this event the air squadrons should be able to do an adequate amount of flying for a period of about three months to have a good propaganda effect.⁶⁵

Perhaps it would be sensationalistic to interpret these exchanges as but a single note in the overture of the Cold War, but we can be certain that both the Air Ministry and the Foreign Office had little regard for maintaining the Czechoslovak Air Force as a viable fighting arm, and now saw them as a tentative political foothold in the Soviet zone.

For the next two weeks, the devil was in the detail. In addition to a general smartening up of the officers and men, a request from Janoušek for brand new aircraft was not unfavourably received.⁶⁶ Writing to Dickson through Beaumont on June 19th, he drew his attention to the present state of the squadrons' Spitfires which were, "in most cases, old and worn out", and added:

I am sure that you will realise that it is to a large extent a question of prestige, both from the British and the Czechs' point of view, that we should come back to our homeland with aircraft we could really be proud of.⁶⁷

Dickson consulted Beaumont before replying to Janoušek a week later. He learned that the least difficult aircraft to deliver from stock would be either the Spitfire Mk IX HF(E) or the Mk IX LF(E), but a full establishment of either of these would take a minimum of four weeks to supply.⁶⁸ Dickson then contacted Janoušek and agreed that

65 *ibid.* Nichols replied on the 18th and solemnly informed Warner that information he had received from the Czechoslovak Government seemed to indicate that they did not believe that the Soviets would "render them impotent." He also noted that Czechoslovak officials "seemed confident of obtaining satisfactory evidence within the next day or two." [AIR 2/6947: Nichols to Foreign Office, 18.6.45.]

66 Janoušek had written to Seligman on June 19th asking for 1500 new uniforms for the entire contingent. He based his request upon public comments made in Prague on how well the Brigade had been turned out when it came home. Seligman noted that material in RAF blue was in short supply, but forwarded an amended proposal covering shirts, socks and boots. [AIR 2/6947: Minute to file, 19.6.45.]

67 AIR 2/6947: Janoušek to Beaumont and Dickson, 19.6.45. The Inspector baited the hook by suggesting that supplying shop-new aircraft would be more economical in the long run.

68 AIR 2/6947: Beaumont to Dickson, 21.6.45. The LF and HF designations on these Spitfire variants were allotted according to the engine types fitted. The LF used the Merlin 66, and the HF the Merlin 70 Rolls-Royce engines. The engines were identical apart from the supercharger ratios which altered performances at certain altitudes and during climb. The 'E' suffix denoted the wing-type which

his Air Force could not fly home in tired aircraft, but he also rejected the rearmament proposal because of the time factor and the question of ammunition. As a compromise, he offered a general exchange scheme for any unserviceable machines, like for like if available.⁶⁹

Janoušek replied with a compromise of his own. Acting on information he had undoubtedly received through Beaumont, to wit that a limited number of the new planes could be made available within two or three weeks, he suggested rearming one full squadron which would then lead the return to the homeland. After the victory celebrations, the squadrons mounted on older machines would fly back to England for their own rearming. Dickson thought this an acceptable idea.⁷⁰ Then another problem emerged. Someone at the Directorate of Organisation pointed out that to equip the squadrons with the Spitfire IX HF(E) would be an insult to the Russians since they had been refused a request for these aircraft at a late stage in the war. This delayed matters for another week until enquiries had been made concerning the availability of the Mk IX LF(E), and at last, in early July, someone put a date on it - one full squadron would be rearmed with these machines by July 18th, "hopefully."⁷¹

Amidst all this confusion, politics surfaced again. Nichols had been busy in Prague still trying to get cast-iron Soviet consent. He had then been told that all Red Army units were scheduled for withdrawal during the first two weeks of July, and that Beneš and his ministers "were loth to approach the Russians for they did not consider the latter to have any authority in the matter." One purpose of his note was to ask if this withdrawal obviated the need for Soviet approval anyway, though he had heard that a request was shortly to be made of Marshal Koniev if his forces would supply aviation spirit once the squadrons returned. Surely, it was argued, Russian agreement would be implicit if the answer was positive.⁷²

had been modified to accept various armament combinations. The Mark IX variants were still being produced in the highest numbers at this time, though numerous other models, up to the Mk XIX which first flew in July 1944, were either in limited production or still being tested. One other important point regarding the Mk IX HF or LF aircraft was that each had 2 x 50mm wing-mounted Browning machine-guns as auxiliary armament requiring American ammunition. This then raised the problem that the Americans would have to be involved in the supply and maintenance programme, jeopardising the 'detachment' ruse so carefully disseminated.

69 AIR 2/6947: Dickson to Janoušek, 25.6.45.

70 AIR 2/6947: Dickson to the Directorate of Organisation, 3.7.45. Janoušek's knowledge of the supply situation probably came from an earlier note from this Directorate to Dickson which stated that a limited number of Spitfire IX HF's were in stock, but not enough to fully equip all three fighter squadrons. This note was then circulated through various departments including the DAFL. [AIR 2/6947: Directorate of Organisation to Dickson, 27.6.45.]

71 AIR 2/6947: Directorate of Organisation to Dickson, 4.7.45.

72 AIR 2/6947: Nichols to Foreign Office, 3.7.45.

Then General Boček weighed in with a message of his own from Prague, directed through Bosý (recently returned to London to command the Czechoslovak Military Mission), and copied to the Air Ministry by an unknown hand. As far as he was concerned, there was "no need for any special permission from the Red Army for the transfer of the Czechoslovak Air Force units." Adding that the military command in Prague was now wholly Czechoslovak, he curtly requested that Bosý establish the date of the transfer and report back accordingly.⁷³ Confused, and also perhaps growing weary of the affair, a hand at the Air Ministry penned a telegram to SHAEF which stated that the Czechoslovaks were insisting that Soviet permission was no longer necessary, though maybe this was another way of saying that it was never going to come in a form acceptable to the west. After asking if SHAEF had any objections to the transfer being routed "through and over the American zone and not through the Russian zone", an early reply was sought "because the Czechs are pressing very strongly."⁷⁴ The reply from Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder came the same day:

There is no objection to these units being routed through and over the American zone provided, of course, that they then cease to have any connection with the RAF and revert to the control of their own national government. We do not desire to become involved in Czech-Russian agreements and we consider it most wise for the Czech Government to formalise their arrangements with the Russians before entry is made.⁷⁵

It seems from this that Tedder was unaware of the 'detachment' plan, or if he was, he was distancing himself from it. If this caused any frowns in London, then it would seem that none were translated on to paper, but in essence the way was now entirely clear for the transfer. The route had been established, the rearmament question was almost resolved, and with regard to the Russians, the British were now largely content that at least they did not object. Dickson wrote to Janoušek on the 11th and informed him of the news, also that full rearmament was possible by August 3rd with reserves by August 12th.⁷⁶ Janoušek replied swiftly and announced that he was content to wait for full

73 AIR 2/6947: Boček to Bosý, 5.7.45. In all probability it was Janoušek who copied the note and forwarded it to the Air Ministry, since by this time anything which even remotely hinted at non-interference from the Soviets would have stood as 'evidence' to the Czechoslovak military mind. Furthermore, he informed Beaumont of its contents on the same day. Major-General Bohumil Boček had been a senior member of the MNO in London until he went to the USSR as Svoboda's deputy in 1944. He was a holder of the British Military Cross.

74 AIR 2/6947: Air Ministry to SHAEF, 7.7.45.

75 AIR 2/6947: SHAEF (Tedder) to Air Ministry, 7.7.45. Air Marshal Sir Arthur William Tedder (1890-1967) was C-in-C RAF Middle East Command 1941-1943 and appointed Deputy Supreme Commander under Eisenhower from 1943-1945.

76 AIR 2/6947: Dickson to Janoušek, 11.7.45.

rearmament on the new Spitfires and that he would leave sixteen pilots behind to fly in the reserves when available.⁷⁷

Much of what followed was simply a question of logistics, and the enthusiast may trace the art of preparing, tuning, testing and gunning-up three squadrons' worth of shiny Spitfires by examining the detailed correspondence which appears in AIR 2/6947 after mid-July 1945 to the day when those aircraft took off for home. Dickson gave the 'go' order on July 18th, a decision made public on the 19th, and by the 21st the date of the return had been settled as August 7th.⁷⁸ In all, 70 new Spitfires had been procured including reserves.⁷⁹ A grand total of 1602 officers and men would be repatriated to the homeland, and following them would be 642,616 pounds (286 tons) of freight and baggage conveyed in 149 separate transport lifts, 132 of these completed by the converted Liberators of 311 Squadron.⁸⁰ Another 405,501 pounds (181 tons) of spares forming the three-month pack-up were shifted in 137 lifts by Transport Command's Stirlings, and the whole operation was declared accomplished by September 11th.⁸¹

The squadrons were reviewed prior to departure by Air Marshal Sir John Slessor on August 3rd. In a speech originally drafted for Portal, he paid a handsome tribute to the officers and men of this gallant little force and made useful references to a desire for post-war collaboration and friendship.⁸² The 54 Spitfires landed at Ruzyn Airport in

77 AIR 2/6947: Janoušek to Dickson, 13.7.45.

78 *The Times* carried a short report on July 18th which cast the Air Ministry as the principal culprit for the delay and implying that the Prague Government was being placed under unreasonable pressure to secure Russian approval. On the 19th the same paper declared that "preparations for their departure are almost complete", though no mention was made of the political dimension to the problem.

79 It should not be thought that these new aircraft were a gift to the Czechoslovaks because they would ultimately meet the costs of this rearmament, though the reserve aircraft and the pack-up came within the parameters of the Mutual Aid Agreement and no charge was levied.

80 Part of this total load was made up by a gift of a personal pack-up for each man containing such scarce items as cheese, powdered eggs, tea, soap, razor blades, toothbrushes etc., plus a month's supply of cigarettes for everyone. It seems that the idea originated with Air Commodore C.E.H. Allen CB DFC who urged the DAFL to agree: "As there are comparatively few Czechs in the Czechoslovak Air Force, it seems that a slight relaxation of the rationing rules in their favour... would result in a spontaneous accession of goodwill to this country, brought about by the arrival in Czechoslovakia of these Czechs with their small but very welcome presents." [AIR 2/6947: Allen to the DAFL, 26.7.45.]

81 By this date, some 200 personnel, including Janoušek's staff, remained at the Wilmslow Depot to perform various tasks of disengagement. These men were repatriated after September 16th and virtually all were back in the homeland by the middle of October.

82 AIR 2/6947: Draft speech, 3.8.45. Slessor concluded with the Czech phrase *Letu' zdar!* (Hail the air!), the traditional ejaculation which ended all the official speeches given by Czechoslovak politicians and the military which the men had endured over the years. The idea came from Seligman, who wrote on the draft speech: "If the CAS will say this it would be a source of the very greatest pleasure to the Czechs."

It was Portal as CAS who had been invited to review the squadrons by Janoušek, but an "urgent Government meeting" had kept him away at the last moment, hence Slessor's appearance. In point of

Prague at two in the afternoon on Monday, August 13th 1945, having twice flown low in close formation across the city. In theory, they should have gone home the week before, but bad weather and a few technical hitches delayed departure from Manston. They were welcomed by General Boček who "emphasised what Great Britain had done for the Czechoslovak Air Force."⁸³ On Tuesday the 14th, Nichols gave a luncheon for various dignitaries, and on Wednesday Svoboda formally inspected the Air Force "and gave a speech of welcome which was outstandingly pro-British in its sentiment."⁸⁴ In all, the celebrations, parades, buffets and ceremonies took more than a week to complete, culminating in a speech by Beneš in the Old Town Square on the 21st. He strongly supported Svoboda's glowing tribute to the British and reminded everyone that the re-building of the nation's defences had already begun, but that there would be "no Germans and no Hungarians" in the reconstituted national forces.⁸⁵

Present at this address, and for various junkets the day prior, was an outstanding array of Royal Air Force commanders, many of whom received the Order of the White Lion from the hands of the President.⁸⁶ Nichols returned a detailed report of this event also, drawing Ernest Bevin's attention to the valuable opportunities afforded for high-level discussions between British and Czechoslovak officers. As far as the Ambassador

fact, Janoušek's *first* choice had been The King, and he based his request on the precedent that His Majesty had already reviewed the squadrons in 1940, an event which he said "had always remained firmly fixed in Czechoslovak memories." Slessor was Air Member for Personnel at the time. [AIR 2/6947: Various correspondence, 19.7, 31.7 and 7.8.45.]

83 AIR 2/6947: Report, Nichols to Ernest Bevin, 20.8.45. Nichols also referred to the speech made by Janoušek "in which he stressed the keenness and gallantry of the Czechoslovak airmen whose duties...were more difficult than those of the other Allied air forces because they had no reserves and could not replace their losses."

84 FO 371/47141: Report of Group-Captain G.M.Wyatt, British Air Attaché to Prague, 16.8.45. Svoboda closed his speech with the words: "Long live the friendship between Great Britain and Czechoslovakia! Long live the free and independent Republic and its great President Dr Edvard Beneš! Glory and renown to the Czechoslovak Air Force!" According to Wyatt, the Wednesday parade "was extremely well-organised, and the smartness and general bearing of the officers and men was most marked. The return of the Czechoslovak Air Force has, in my opinion, boosted British prestige considerably, and has given the people of this country something for which they have been waiting a long time." Wyatt also noted that, while General Molotov ("complete with sword") and several other high-ranking Russian officers were present, he "failed to notice American representation."

85 VKPR 54/29/1/20: Beneš, speech of 21.8.45.

86 The recipients of the award were: Air Chief Marshal Sir W. Sholto-Douglas KCB MC DFC; Air Marshal Sir John Baldwin KBE CB; Air Vice-Marshal G.R.Bromet CB CBE DSO; Air Commodore Frank Beaumont; Wing-Commander S.R.K.Glanville; Wing-Commander Hugh Seligman; Dr Archibald MacIndoe, the plastic surgeon; and Lady Portal on behalf of the Chief of the Air Staff. Other persons in attendance were Air Marshal Sir Douglas Evill KCB DSC AFC; Air Vice-Marshal A.C.Collier CB CBE; Group-Captain G.Burgess VC OBE DFC; Group-Captain R.Faville CBE; and Mrs Frank Beaumont. Beneš and Sholto-Douglas took the salute, and the parade was followed by a cocktail party for 350 people. All the RAF men had left by August 23rd. [FO 371/47141: Report of Wyatt to Air Ministry, 27.8.45.]

was concerned, this did much "to serve the interests of His Majesty's Government", and the jolly atmosphere "demonstrated that the mutual respect and good fellowship established under war conditions...are still potent factors in the relations between the two countries."⁸⁷

And so it had all ended in handshakes, medals and smiles all round. In that last week of August 1945, the Czechoslovak Air Force was the nearest it ever came to being a true ally, at least in British eyes and those of the Czechoslovak press. All the quibbles and niggles of five long years of war were put aside or forgotten amidst the swirl of parties and speeches, but, as we shall see, the bonhomie was not to last long. Nevertheless, we can be certain of one thing in the light of the events described in this chapter, and that is the Soviets at no time whatsoever placed obstacles in the way of the returning squadrons. Such obstacles as existed were (a) caused by British insistence on Russian consent, and (b) a self-imposed delay caused by the desires of Janoušek and others to have the squadrons mounted on new machines. It is perfectly easy to understand why Beneš did not want to go cap in hand to the Soviets and ask their permission for his Air Force to return to its homeland; such an action would have been contrary to all his beliefs about the sovereignty of his country and his hunger for prestige. In effect, then, the British were demanding something which was never going to come unless they themselves sought answers through diplomatic channels, and when something which approximated consent did appear - Paramzik's note of mid-July - it was conveyed obliquely through the US Army and thus saved face in Prague. Finally, it could be assumed from this that the British were overly concerned about crossing the Soviets, yet it is highly unlikely that any self-respecting member of the British High Command would have been disconcerted by the prospect if the subject of the dispute really mattered. Quite simply, the return of the Czechoslovak Air Force to its homeland was not something worth riling the Russians for, so the British were playing as safe a game as possible. Very soon, however, the conflict would become real and not imagined.

Demobilisation

Before we turn our thoughts towards the problems which lay ahead, we may briefly consider the immediate concerns of both the British and the Czechoslovak governments in the field of demobilisation from the RAFVR and the Czechoslovak Air Force itself.

87 FO 371/47141: Report, Nichols to Bevin, 27.8.45.

The issue of demobilisation was viewed in two different ways by the authorities involved. From the British perspective, the only real point at issue was demobilisation into the United Kingdom by men who, for political or other reasons, preferred not to return to the newly-liberated homeland. From the Czechoslovak side, the main question was the retention of the skilled core of experience developed during the war for the future development of the armed forces.

The basic parameters of the British policy on demobilisation in respect of the Allied Forces had been constructed surprisingly early. In February 1941, the War Office produced a circular which envisaged four potential conditions at the war's end. Firstly, it was assumed that complete contingents would be transported wholesale back to their respective homelands, and the only problem would be who would undertake responsibility for the transportation and future supplies. Secondly, any personnel released from Allied service into civilian life in Britain would be a matter to be solved by discussion between the Foreign Office, the Home Office and the governments concerned. Third, any wounded or sick service personnel would be medically treated in Britain until such time as they were fit to return home, but a question mark was placed next to the possibility that such persons might prefer to remain in Britain especially if they were permanently disabled. In such a case, the payment of pensions and other benefits would need clarification. Finally, men who had been transferred to the Pioneer Corps might want to avoid repatriation completely for political reasons, and it was agreed that all the major offices would somehow have to frame an acceptable policy in this event.⁸⁸

The document was discussed and distilled for circulation to all the exiled governments, and each received requests from the Foreign Office not to demobilise any personnel on British territory - then or in the future - except in cases of physical incapacity or where the individual would be more suitably employed in the war industry.⁸⁹ Accepting these principles, the Czechoslovak Government emphasised that only in very exceptional cases would men be released on anything other than medical grounds, and that should these cases arise then the British would be consulted accordingly. As far as the Foreign Office was concerned, this was "a very satisfactory reply."⁹⁰

88 FO 371/26442: War Office circular, 19.2.41. The paper concluded that this last category "might well present one of the most difficult problems of demobilisation", though it accepted that *all* Allied Forces had undesirable elements among their numbers.

89 FO 371/26442: J.G.Ward to Karel Lisický, the Czechoslovak Chargé d'Affaires, 19.3.41. In the Czechoslovak case, a further condition permitted limited demobilisation "where the agreed establishment of officers is exceeded."

90 FO 371/26442: Lisický to Eden, 3.7.41. He also made clear that any individuals formally demobilised on medical grounds would continue to be paid by the Ministry of National Defence. The

This remained the informal agreement between the two parties throughout the war, and it was not until the early months of 1945, when victory seemed inevitable, that any serious thought was again applied to the looming problems of demobilisation. Referring directly to the notes of March and July 1941, the Foreign Office approached the Czechoslovak Government again in February 1945 with a slightly revised scheme which appertained more precisely to service personnel wishing to be demobilised into the United Kingdom. Acknowledging that these arrangements had been operative throughout the war "to the general satisfaction of the governments concerned", the British now wanted to modify the scheme "in the light of the altered war situation."⁹¹

It was felt that demobilisation in the case of surplus officers no longer applied, and that cases of essential war work would arise "only in exceptional circumstances." Furthermore, because it would appear that repatriation might soon become a reality, discharge on medical grounds required "a more rigid criterion" to be applied. The revised conditions for discharge into the United Kingdom were thus:

- (a) Persons who were permanently resident in this country before joining the Allied Forces in question.
- (b) Persons who were required for civilian service in Allied Government Offices.
- (c) Persons who had been certified as insane or had been certified as suffering from tuberculosis.
- (d) Members of the Women's Sections of the Allied Forces who were pregnant.
- (e) Officers cashiered by sentence of courts-martial.⁹²

Lobkowitz was informed that this policy had been effective from December 1st 1944, and though exceptional applications falling outside of these categories would still be considered, it was the belief of the Foreign Office that they did not "greatly differ from those hitherto in force." And yet they did, and in the case of (c) the difference was substantial. What it meant was that all the physically and psychologically disabled personnel would now become the responsibility of the Czechoslovak Government, whereas under the previous scheme such men would have been permitted to remain in Britain as war-wounded dependants. Section (d) did not apply, since the Czechoslovak forces in Britain did not employ uniformed females, and section (e) depended largely on

British response was expressed by Ward in an attached minute. The full document sent by Lisický can be read in VHA 20-17/4 (59) 1941.

91 VHA 20-17/4 (59) 1941: Foreign Office to Maximilian Lobkowitz, 1.2.45. Lobkowitz was the Czechoslovak Ambassador to the United Kingdom.

92 *ibid.* The first condition had actually applied from the beginning of the Czechoslovak involvement in Britain, and had been expressed in notes to the Provisional Czechoslovak Government by Halifax in November 1940, and at the time of the 1941 correspondence greater emphasis was placed upon wounded and surplus personnel because of the war situation at that time. Now, in 1945, the fracturing of the Allied Forces into sub-groups became a real possibility, hence the British authorities wanted to make their policy on release into the United Kingdom absolutely clear with this document.

the outcome of the courts-martial. If the individual was sentenced to custody, then under the terms of the 1940 Agreement he would be imprisoned in a British jail, but if a custodial sentence was not imposed, he would have been subject to Czechoslovak military law once the homeland had been liberated and hence repatriated anyway.⁹³ In effect, these new categories meant that the British Government were determined to enforce repatriation of all but the most exceptional cases, leaving to one side those who had a right to remain on residential grounds.

This presented the Czechoslovak Government with a potential crisis, for it was now clear that political and racial asylum (as discussed in the 1941 War Office document) was apparently no longer on the agenda. In a draft paper on the subject produced for the MNO, it was accepted that the British would expect full repatriation "at the earliest opportunity" at the war's end, and that British citizenship would not be readily forthcoming to everyone who applied. As a result, the Beneš administration foresaw a fairly substantial number of cases where servicemen and refugees, many of whom had arrived in Britain without formal evidence of Czechoslovak citizenship, would need to be absorbed and cared for by the liberated State.⁹⁴

By May, this had crystallised into a formal policy document which applied to all groups holding or claiming Czechoslovak citizenship. In all, there were five classes: (a) foreign nationals (such as recruited personnel from Canada) who had joined the Czechoslovak forces abroad; (b) Czechoslovak citizens who had lived abroad and had volunteered for service in the forces; (c) citizens who had been members of the armed forces before they had escaped from the Republic and/or those who had lived in the Republic and did not want to return; (d) persons from classes (b) and (c) who wanted to remain in Britain for the purposes of study or continuing occupation; (e) persons who wanted to be directly transferred into the British home forces (and this was specifically directed at the officers and men of the RAFVR) when the European war was over. As far as Janoušek was concerned, the last category should be dealt with *after* all the air units had left Britain, thus fulfilling the British desire of wholesale repatriation.⁹⁵

In May, this was a fine idea, but in June - with the negotiations for the transfer of the squadrons gathering pace - it became problematic. As Janoušek correctly argued, at no time had the Air Force been an independent entity, and the RAF legally and technically regarded Czech and Slovak members of the émigré force as still being under

93 There were only seven members of the entire Czechoslovak military serving custodial sentences in British jails in August 1945. [VHA 20-17/4: Foreign Office to Jaroslav Císař, 9.8.45.] Císař was created Chargé d'Affaires in London upon the Czechoslovak Government's return to the Republic.

94 VHA 20-17/4 (664) 1945: Draft report to the MNO by the Ministry of Social Affairs, 20.2.45.

95 ČsL VB 321/1838CI-2B/3: MNO Policy Document, 25.5.45.

its jurisdiction. Any demobilisation on permanent grounds would, in theory, require British documentation and medical examinations to avoid any future claims for compensation. If the men were in Czechoslovakia at the time, this would be virtually impossible. The 'detachment' plan shelved this problem almost as a by-product, but he reminded the MNO that they would still be entirely responsible for all demobilisation costs even though they did not have the power to demobilise anyone without British consent.⁹⁶

By late July, virtually all of the active personnel in the Armoured Brigade were back in Czechoslovakia but, as we have seen, the position of the Air Force was much more fluid. The five-point policy agreed in the MNO document was conveyed to the Foreign Office on the 24th with special emphasis now laid upon the members of the Air Force who wished to be discharged into Britain.⁹⁷ Before a formal reply was received, however, a policy statement was issued from the Foreign Office almost on the eve of the squadrons' departure from British territory, and this time the categories had been revised to almost the total exclusion of all conditions except prior residence in the United Kingdom; and this did not include men who had escaped before the German invasion and had sought semi-permanent asylum in Britain.⁹⁸ The rationale behind this decision was the British understanding that nearly all service personnel were either back in the homeland or, like the squadrons, awaiting repatriation. In all cases - crooked, crippled, pregnant or mad - the individuals were still under the command of the Czechoslovak Government, and the British "felt confident" that they would "in the near future be recalled into military service by the Czechoslovak authorities and repatriated in the same manner as members of the Czechoslovak Forces now serving." This meant that everyone was to leave the country except those who had permanently resided in Britain before the outbreak of war, and this was even to include residents of countries outside the Empire, including the United States, who were to be transported to Czechoslovakia and apply for their homecoming visas from there. This was to be a clear-out on a grand scale.⁹⁹

Thus the letter of July 24th from the MNO was given short shrift in the official reply of August 18th which bluntly referred the reader to the "general principles governing demobilisation" laid down in the policy statement of the 9th.¹⁰⁰ By this time,

96 MNO 104/3053/1945: Janoušek to the MNO, 27.6.45.

97 MNO 104/350/1945: Jaroslav Císař to Sir John Anderson, 24.7.45. Císař was created Chargé d'Affaires in London upon the Czechoslovak Government's return to the Republic. Anderson was deputising for Eden who was at the Potsdam Conference.

98 VHA 20-17/4: Foreign Office to Císař, 9.8.45.

99 Not forgotten were the seven men in jail who should be repatriated and complete their sentences in Czechoslovakia.

100 VHA 20-17/4: Foreign Office to Císař, 18.8.45.

of course, the squadrons were home, and the steady transfer of all men and equipment was still in train. As the month of August drew to a close and all the celebrations were over, Wyatt in Prague reapproached the Air Ministry with a request for guidance. He claimed that a number of applications had been received from men (a) who wished to now be demobilised onto British territory; (b) who had served in England and requested British nationality; (c) who wished to re-enlist in the RAF.¹⁰¹

The reply he received does not appear in the records, but an unsigned and undated draft issued from AFL2 has survived, possibly issued from Seligman's office. After acknowledging that the 'detachment' plan had been "a pretty ropey arrangement" which would sooner or later give rise to "a host of problems", the writer continued:

We want...to keep on friendly terms and to avoid giving them the impression that we are cold-shouldering the Czechoslovaks now that they have gone back to their own country, and until the situation is cleared up we must put up with the fact that our relationship is confused and ill-defined. But obviously we cannot encourage a lot of Czechs to take advantage of the present situation to try to get into England and generally exploit matters to meet their individual and personal wishes.¹⁰²

Turning to the three points raised by Wyatt, the answer to (a) was that this was a political matter to be settled by the governments concerned; all applications regarding (b) should be made through the Czechoslovak Government, "but it may be assumed that no Czechoslovak would be allowed to return to England...unless he had good pre-war residential qualifications"; and all applications under (c) should be made through the Czechoslovak military authorities. In short, Wyatt was guided rather haphazardly. The draft closed with:

The situation is tricky and needs careful handling because...we don't want the impression to get about that once a Czechoslovak goes back to his own country, he is completely blocked. At this end we are doing all we can to persuade the remaining Czechs to return, unless there are very strong reasons to the contrary, and if they get to hear that once they leave the UK there is no hope of getting back, we may be faced with desertions and all kinds of difficulties.¹⁰³

101 FO 371/47104: Wyatt to Air Ministry, 27.8.45. The latter category (c) contained only two applications by this date, both from medical specialists. No figures were given for the other two groups.

102 FO 371/47104: Draft reply from AFL2 to Wyatt, undated.

103 *ibid.* The Air Ministry did not know exactly how many men had stayed with the Czechoslovak Military Mission which was to oversee repatriation of all nationals, literally until the last one was settled. A request to the Inspectorate, despatched some time in September, was answered with a full nominal roll of 299 names and locations, of which nearly half sought residential qualifications in the UK. [MNO 104/4430/1945: Inspectorate to Air Ministry, 15.11.45.]

Finally, Wyatt was advised to tell any enquirer that he had "no say in the matter", and he was to avoid giving the slightest encouragement that a return to Britain was going to be an easy thing to achieve.

Janoušek's decision to haul them all back before considering demobilisation had thus played into the Air Ministry's hands. Once out of the country and on their own soil, men who felt entitled to live in the land which they helped to victory would find themselves faced by a double wall of bureaucracy, one erected by their own government who did not want to sanction the emigration of trained personnel, and another by a government which felt no obligation to grant their wishes. Furthermore, it was the policy of the Czechoslovak Government and the MNO to actively restrict demobilisation under any category, for a report issued by Janoušek, also in late August, outlined his intention to release, in stages, only men over the age of 30. All others "would remain on active service as members of the Czechoslovak Air Force."¹⁰⁴ The MNO Commission which met on September 3rd produced a full list of those entitled to demobilisation and were also claiming overseas repatriation. The figures for Britain were 108 in total, of which 46 had pre-war residency qualifications.¹⁰⁵ By the time an official communication was passed to the Air Ministry in mid-September, this latter number had risen to 52.¹⁰⁶ A further 103 had applied for either permanent or temporary residence in Britain on political or racial grounds.¹⁰⁷

The intransigence of the British to accept men without strong residency qualifications can ultimately be traced directly to the Home Office. One MP who took up the cause of the Czechoslovaks was Major A.L. Symonds who wrote to the new Home Secretary, James Chuter Ede, on September 16th.¹⁰⁸ Working with slightly inaccurate figures, he guessed that approximately one hundred men were applying for

104 ČsL VB 321/1838/CI-2B/4: Janoušek to the MNO, 28.8.45. Under this scheme, a full list of those eligible for release and those scheduled to remain in the forces would be decided by an MNO commission of five members who would meet on 3.9.45.

105 VHA 20-17/4: MNO Demobilisation Commission Report, 4.9.45. The next highest numbers were 24 (France), 18 (Canada), and 15 (USA). Some 20 other countries were listed. Argentina had 5 applicants, and Belgium, Algeria, Morocco and Bolivia had 4 each.

106 MNO 104/3989/1945: Inspectorate to Air Ministry, 18.9.45. It was, of course, the responsibility of the Air Ministry to ultimately discharge all RAFVR members irrespective of their nationality or citizenship. For this reason, this note drew attention to the various nationals from other countries awaiting repatriation and sought clearance for demobilisation at the earliest opportunity.

107 MNO 104/4430/1945: Inspectorate to Air Ministry, 15.11.45. This note, referring to earlier correspondence, provided a nominal roll of all members of the Air Force who had applied for demobilisation into Britain under all categories.

108 Major Arthur Leslie Symonds entered Parliament as Labour MP for the Borough of Cambridge in 1945. He had served throughout the war and had twice been mentioned in despatches. James Chuter Ede (1882-1965) was educated at Epsom and Christ College, Cambridge. Entered Parliament as Labour MP for South Shields on three occasions, the longest being from 1935-1964. Served as Home Secretary from 1945-1951; created Life Peer 1964.

residential permits without pre-war qualifications, of which half were interested in permanent citizenship.¹⁰⁹ Symonds argued that the men were concerned that their applications were being ignored or lost; that they had sworn allegiance to the King in 1940 and now deserved their reward; that they feared being forcibly repatriated without time to make arrangements for wives or children; and that they felt discriminated against because many who had left Czechoslovakia before the war and taken up English residence now had the right to stay, whereas those "who fought their way here" were denied.¹¹⁰

In reply, Chuter-Ede summarised the existing military policy noted above, then clearly stated the official political position:

The Government have not felt able to allow them to settle in this country and compete with our own people for the limited housing accommodation available and in business on the labour market... You will appreciate that it would be extremely difficult and invidious to distinguish either between nationalities, or between individuals on the basis of their records of gallantry.¹¹¹

The only crumb of comfort for Symonds was that Chuter-Ede considered temporary residence as presenting no particular problems as far as he was concerned, but the 66 men who sought British citizenship were to be denied.

In the main, demobilisation was not a particularly difficult problem for either government, though official release from the RAFVR took longer due to the legal complexities involved, largely arising from the termination of the Anglo-Czechoslovak Military Agreement (see below). Furthermore, the British in 1948 recognised the rights of many men who had given loyal service to the RAF during the war by relaxing enlistment requirements for overseas applicants, though an attached condition was that all would have to apply for British nationalisation - not that this was a problem since many were refugees from the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia and several had arrived at Allied bases in Germany in a poor state of health.¹¹²

109 The actual figures in the Inspectorate nominal roll of November were 66 (permanent) and 37 (temporary). This latter group wished to remain in the United Kingdom until they could arrange visa and transport to other countries.

110 HO 213/1040: Symonds to Chuter-Ede, 16.9.45. Symonds also made reference to a "rumour" about some secret agreement supposedly made in 1942 whereby the men would revert to Czechoslovak Air Force membership at the war's end and lose their status as RAFVR volunteers. That much was true, but no evidence has come to light of any agreements made in 1942, secret or otherwise.

111 HO 213/1040: Chuter-Ede to Symonds, 31.10.45.

112 AIR 2/10739 contains all the relevant correspondence for the re-enlistment procedures and conditions laid down by the Air Council in 1948, together with substantial records of the men who applied. This 'open door' policy was abruptly halted in 1951 when it was felt that any who could have escaped from Czechoslovakia had by then probably done so.

The way ahead

With demobilisation settled and the Second World War at an end, the future relationship between Czechoslovakia and Britain became a prominent subject. By early 1945, the Foreign Office was already well aware that Soviet political and military influence in Czechoslovakia would be difficult to resist and, from London, even more difficult to parry. To be sure, there would be economic and cultural dimensions to the British attempt to retain influence in Prague, but although the Foreign Office remained sceptical about any political alliance (which could have led, perhaps, to dangerous obligations in the face of an aggressive Soviet action), still it was accepted that the military association created and sustained during the war promised the best and most likely opportunities for continued Anglo-Czechoslovak cooperation.¹¹³ We have seen how the British had identified the Czechoslovak Air Force as being the most likely point of contact in the military relations between the two countries, the Army being largely the province of the Soviets, so to close this part of the study we might examine the differing views and the conflicts generated by this pursuit of post-war harmony.

Beneš had been making preparations for his return to the homeland since July 1941 when the Russians joined the war on the Allied side. It was his belief that the war would now be won and that the Soviets would expect and deserve a substantial voice in the peace-making process, and that their influence would almost certainly be strongly felt in the geographical region of Czechoslovakia. As a prelude to the eventual liberation, he urged his commanders to think positively in terms of the post-war defences of the nation and to produce periodical reports as and when they thought necessary.¹¹⁴

By the end of 1941, it was agreed that a properly organised and well-trained civilian air industry would be the foundation of a healthy Air Force, providing materials, airfields and air crews which in time of war or crisis could be swiftly utilised in military

113 Brivati B, Jones H (eds): *What Difference Did The War Make?* (Leicester University Press 1993): Cornwall M: 'The rise and fall of a special relationship?: Britain and Czechoslovakia, 1930-48', pp 142-148. In tracing the course of Anglo-Czechoslovak relations for the period, Cornwall notes that Nichols had pointed to the future maintenance of the Czechoslovak Air Force as a window of opportunity for the British to retain some influence. Cornwall uses the document prepared by Nichols in March 1945 in which he also stressed the need for improved commercial exchanges. In April, Nichols also wrote of the Air Force: "The truth is, so far as relations with Czechoslovakia are concerned, we have not so many cards in our hands as the Russians, and we cannot afford to waste this one." [FO/47107: Nichols to Warner, 6.4.45.]

114 MNO 17/1827/1941: Minutes of MNO Meeting, 9.7.41. Beneš also thought that post-war Soviet political activity would bring benefits to the Czechoslovakian position because they would otherwise be at the mercy of the Anglo-American concepts of European security "with a strong Polish influence against us."

rôles.¹¹⁵ By the middle of 1942, this line of thinking had developed into a full-scale post-war development programme which envisaged an Air Force containing 200 single-engined fighter pilots, over 300 pilots of twin- or multiple-engined machines, plus 300 each of observers, gunners and radio operators.¹¹⁶ The emphasis was clearly on a defensive rôle, and in line with the predictions made by Beneš on the post-war balance of power, this is not surprising. Besides, Czechoslovakia as a sovereign entity always was and always would be a tempting conquest for her powerful neighbours, so an Air Force capable of high-quality defence and rapid deployment, combined with a limited amount of tactical offensive capability, was by far the most logical objective. By the autumn of 1943, this development programme had expanded even further. Based on a six-year fighting capacity, a total of 51 fighter squadrons, each with an establishment of 14 aircraft, and a further 27 light-bomber squadrons, each with ten machines, was seen as the core of a feasible air defence network costing some 920 million Czechoslovak crowns in 1943 prices. By comparison, the pre-war budget for the Air Force had been 350 million crowns (and even this was open to raiding by the Army), so the decision to approach the British Government and Air Ministry "at the appropriate time" for rearmament and supply was laid down in an Inspectorate report.¹¹⁷

These plans were conveyed to the Air Ministry in March 1944, along with a request for permission to manufacture the necessary aircraft under licence until such time as the home industry was operating at full capacity. In a meeting between Janoušek and Air Vice-Marshal Longmore, the latter offered three full fighter squadrons and possible specialist assistance if the Czechoslovaks found themselves unable to meet maintenance and training demands in the immediate post-war environment.¹¹⁸ In his appended comments to the document, Janoušek noted that Ingr had earlier requested Portal for five or six fighter squadrons mounted on Spitfires and another two on Mosquitoes plus adequate reserves. Clearly, that level of establishment was not on the table at the time, so Janoušek raised another suggestion, made in his 1943 report, that some German materials and equipment could be confiscated as reparations in order to prime the post-war development. Rejecting this without

115 VKPR 25/6/1/3: Report by Janoušek to VKPR, 10.12.41. Janoušek based his argument on the German example whereby Lufthansa had acted as a cover for training and development.

116 ČsL VB 141/CI-3/1/190: Internal Inspectorate Report on post-war requirements, 18.7.42.

117 ŠVBM-HV/170/43: Report on Post-War Expansion by Inspectorate, 21.9.43. For light equipment and the bulk of aviation fuel, it was also decided that the USSR should be approached for possible supply at the war's end. This, of course, was near to the Moscow Agreement referred to above.

118 ŠVBM-HV 387/44: Minutes, Janoušek and Longmore, 22.3.44. Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Murray Longmore GCB KCB CB DSO served in France and with the RNAS at the Battle of Jutland 1914-1918; RAF Cranwell 1929-1933; AOC Coastal Command 1934-1936; Commandant Imperial Defence College 1936-1938; AOC Training Command 1939; AOC RAF Middle East 1940-1941; Inspector-General of the RAF 1941-1942; Air Ministry 1942-1945.

condition, Longmore also dithered on the question of manufacturing licences, and thus by the spring of 1944 it would seem that British aid was not going to be particularly generous.¹¹⁹

The situation changed dramatically in June 1944 with the procedures and post-war targets laid down in COS (44) 120. Such were the recommendations for post-war Allied reconstruction, the subject ceased to be a matter for debate and became a series of fixed aims to which the British Government were wedded. The protocol of the paper was as follows:

Each of our Allies will wish to build up their Air Forces after the defeat of Germany, and we will have a long-term strategic interest in encouraging them to do so since they will, for instance, give more depth to the air defences of Great Britain.¹²⁰

Deep politics are embedded in this, and it is tempting to ask, defences against whom? Certainly not Germany, since the very existence of the paper already implied an Allied victory, so again we can view the document as a prelude to Cold War, or at least as a hedge against it.

The projected post-war expansion of the Allied air forces was governed by five factors: (a) the British capacity to supply aircraft; (b) the potential capacity for training; (c) the extent of Allied assistance regarding British commitments in Europe; (d) the Allied contribution made to the RAF war effort in Europe; and (e) the likely degree of future co-operation with the various Allied forces. The paper noted that it was desirable to equip these forces "with aircraft of limited offensive power", and the minimum recommendations which followed closely reflected this intention.¹²¹ Divided into two columns, the first being the likely air strength at the war's end and the second showing the intended development for the first twelve months of peace, the figures for the three East European allies were:

Poland	9 single-engined fighter squadrons	>	12
	1 light-bomber squadron	=	1
	1 twin-engined fighter squadron	>	2
	2 transport squadrons	=	2
Czechoslovakia	3 single-engined fighter squadrons	>	5
	1 transport squadron	=	1
Yugoslavia	1 single-engined fighter squadron	>	2

119 *ibid.* Janoušek's argument was sound enough. He drew attention to the extremely productive mechanised industries of pre-war Czechoslovakia and rightly claimed that these would form the training centres for a whole new generation of specialists and technicians. Thus within six years - the scope of the rearmament plan - the maintenance echelons for the new Air Force would be fully trained and operational. No comment by Longmore was recorded in the minutes on this point.

120 AIR 2/1257: COS (44) 120: Paragraph 31, "The Equipping of the Forces of Our European Allies", Protocol.

121 AIR 2/1257: COS (44) 120: Paragraph 32.

This was following to the letter the desire to minimise the offensive striking power of the Allies, since by design the fighter is a defensive weapon with a limited amount of ground-attack capability depending on the model or variant. Neither was it intended to develop the air forces in a broader context; i.e. the Czechoslovaks were not going to be allocated equipment types which they had not previously operated, such as twin-engined fighters.¹²² Lastly, these three countries were not necessarily destined to receive even this modest expansion because all fell under a clause which stated: "The equipment of the Polish, Czech and Yugoslav air forces will depend on the political situation in each country and on its relations with the USSR."

As we saw earlier, COS (44) 120 was still regarded as the touchstone regarding rearmament at the time when the squadrons returned in August 1945, and yet all that was undertaken in the first instance was aircraft replacement rather than expansion. But very soon after the return, even before the celebrations had fully run their course, minds in Britain began to contemplate the next stage of the Anglo-Czechoslovak relationship, and to concentrate on maintaining and developing the Czechoslovak Air Force and then using it as a means of establishing a military and political foothold in the Soviet zone of influence. The first tangible product of this programme was to be the 'staging post', the building and equipping of an area within Ruzýn airport (or another airport should this prove unsuitable) which would act as a temporary base for Allied aircraft passing through or to the country according to the immediate post-war demands. After this had been established, so the theory ran, full reconstruction of the Czechoslovak Air Force could begin in earnest.

On August 23rd, Nichols wrote to Warner and drew his attention to three pressing issues: the staging post, the supply of petrol, oil and lubricants (POL) to the

122 AIR 2/1257 COS (44) 120: Paragraph 32. For interest's sake, the figures for the other European allies were:

France	5 single-engined fighter	>	10
	1 general reconnaissance	>	2
	1 fighter-bomber	=	1
	2 heavy-bomber	>	4
	2 transport	=	2
Holland	1 single-engined fighter	>	4
	0 transport	>	1
Belgium	2 single-engined fighter	>	4
	½ transport	=	½
Norway	2 single-engined fighter	>	3
	1 fighter-bomber	=	1
Greece	2 single-engined fighter	>	4

Holland was thus the only exception as regards new equipment, but this was only a transport unit. From these figures it is clear that the western allies were to be developed to a greater degree, reflecting the paper's aims of ultimately strengthening the air defences of Great Britain.

squadrons now home, and the eventual expansion of the force. On the subject of the staging post, he declared this to be "virtually settled", and that the Czechoslovaks were keen to keep and maintain it until all repatriation was complete:

It saves the Czechs' faces and once we have our men and equipment on the ground I do not think their will be much question of their leaving. I gathered from one of the Air Marshals...that we should eventually be quite ready to hand over this equipment to the Czechs and not even ask for payment, if and when we are satisfied that they can make proper use of it.¹²³

But a forthcoming problem, continued Nichols, was that the Soviets and the Americans *also* required staging post facilities at Ruzýn, and the Czechoslovaks, "while anxious to see services to the west increased and maintained at a high level, did not wish to see Ruzýn airfield in the possession of three different air forces."

Turning to the expansion programme, Nichols informed Warner that both Svoboda and Boček were shortly to depart to Moscow to ask the Soviets if their earlier promise to assist in the rearmament of the Czechoslovak military forces did or did not include the Air Force:

If the Russians hold that it does, and take a strong line, then I imagine that it is goodbye to our hopes of maintaining their Air Force and thus keeping them close to us in this important field. On the other hand, the Russians may be content to equip the Army and leave some, if not all, of the Air Force to us.

Nichols closed with advance notification that the two emissaries would visit Britain after their Moscow mission, and that Beneš himself had told him that his officers had only shown interest in Spitfires and Mosquitoes as the best possible aircraft with which to begin reconstruction.¹²⁴

Things began to go sour in early September. A telegram from Prague to the Foreign Office, unsigned though probably from Nichols, indicated that the MNO, "whose attitude towards the establishment of British staging posts has been unhelpful", now required clear terms of reference before any further progress could be made.

123 FO 371/47141: Nichols to Warner, 23.8.45. The point about repatriation not yet being completed referred to the 2000 or so civilians still awaiting their own return to the homeland, and this continued on into the late autumn of 1945. The Air Marshal to whom Nichols spoke, according to his recollection, was Collier, then the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Transport Command.

124 *ibid.* On the subject of POL, it seems that the squadrons were already grounded - as the Air Ministry had anticipated - through a lack of 100-octane fuel. The Soviets claimed they had none to spare and the Americans were refusing to supply any "unless the matter was taken up on the highest level." Janoušek argued that, since the Czechoslovak Air Force was still technically a 'detachment' of the RAF, it was up to the British to supply the necessary POL. After discussions with the top brass present for the festivities, it was agreed that a suitable route overland by truck - each carrying 2,500 gallons - could be established, and a constant convoy of 40 trucks could supply 100,000 gallons a month, the amount regarded as an absolute minimum for operational flying and training.

Beneš, so it was claimed, had authorised the despatch of only 25 men, no more than a basic working echelon.¹²⁵ There are clear signs of an internal power struggle here, as Nichols referred to Masaryk as his prime source. A day later, Nichols telegraphed with the news that Colonel Alois Kubita had been transferred out of the centre of influence seemingly at Masaryk's request. Nichols wrote: "Masaryk liked him as his Air Attaché in London but he had found [him] more and more difficult in the last two years and he could not tolerate the attitude he had taken up...on the staging post."¹²⁶

Then came sudden news of a major upheaval in the organisation of the Czechoslovak Air Force itself. The new Director of the DAFL, Air Commodore Ferdinand West, informed Warner that Janoušek had been removed as Commander-in-Chief and replaced by Slezák, who had now reverted to his real name of Vicherek:

It seems that the Headquarters of the Czechoslovak Air Force in Prague has been almost entirely re-staffed. Those Czech officers of high rank who held appointments in the RAFVR have been dispersed and, in nearly every case, are filling relatively unimportant posts. An exception has been made in the case of Group-Captain Kubita, who attempted an intrigue against Air Marshal Janoušek some time ago in England.¹²⁷

So, the wheel had turned full circle, and the man who had deposed the hated Slezák in 1940 now found himself pushed aside in favour of him. Kubita also had reappeared, and his time in exile at the hands of Masaryk was therefore probably one of the shortest in Czechoslovak politics. West continued:

I gather this internal trouble is largely political and Janoušek has been accused of being too Anglophile in his tendencies and not sufficiently appreciative of the Russians. Extreme leftists have even labelled him as a Fascist and anti-Jew leader.¹²⁸

And here is yet another turn of the wheel. The memories of the troubles at Cholmondeley Camp, and the bitter accusations that flew all around, had all been revived and churned out again as the pendulum swung and the once-reviled became masters of the scene.

125 FO 371/47141: Prague to Foreign Office, 3.9.45.

126 FO 371/47141: Nichols to Foreign Office, 4.9.45.

127 FO 371/47141: West to Warner, 7.9.45. Air Commodore Ferdinand West VC CBE MC had been Air Attaché to the British Legations in Helsingfors, Riga, Tallin and Kovno before the war. He won his VC at Noyes in France in August 1918, losing his left leg in the action. Kubita, as mentioned in this despatch, was appearing under his RAFVR rank. No details have yet come to light concerning the "intrigue" he was supposed to have attempted against Janoušek.

128 *ibid.* West closed his despatch with: "I mention these changes because we have always been extremely generous towards the Czechs and, as far as the Air Force is concerned, we have succeeded in establishing a very sincere spirit of goodwill between the Czechs and ourselves. We have recently supplied them with a large quantity of equipment and have received other substantial requests for fuel, stores, clothing etc. within the last few days."

West had been responding, through Warner, to an urgent telegram from Prague to the Air Ministry two days before. It noted that the majority of the returning airmen were "dissatisfied with the present regime", and it was thought that dangerous emotions would only increase if Janoušek had been placed "in intimate contact" with the Air Force. In a passage which was only partially deciphered, reasons were given:

Reshuffle is due to a desire [undeciphered] personalities are known for their Russophile tendencies. Russians are displeased that most personalities holding executive positions in other ministries are those with wartime experience in England and who possess no undue communist tendencies.¹²⁹

Now we may glimpse the Soviet strategy regarding the return of the squadrons in August, for it would have been counter-productive to place any obstacles in the way of the transfer when the overall aim was to get the men home and then begin the process of discarding the 'dangerous' elements.

Warner acted fast and held a series of consultations with Nichols and Dickson before replying to West:

Our view is that you should continue to help the Czechoslovak Air Force. There is a struggle going on in Czechoslovakia between the Communists and the 'Communisers' who look to Moscow and who are the most influential element at the moment, although certainly a smallish minority, and those who support the traditional 'liberal' outlook associated with Czechoslovakia between the two wars. These latter are most anxious to keep up contact with the west and President Beneš is wholeheartedly on their side... We should not, therefore, abandon our friends who wish the Czechoslovak Air Force to maintain their links with this country, but on the contrary, should strengthen their hands.¹³⁰

With this, the decision had been taken to continue with the programme of post-war expansion and take whatever steps were necessary to maintain the increasingly shaky grasp on the Czechoslovak Air Force as a source of British influence in Central Europe. As far as Warner and others were concerned, this was not necessarily a lost cause.¹³¹

What happened next was the effective smothering of the staging post idea. The Czechoslovak general staff informed Wyatt that even the term itself should be

129 FO 371/47141: Telegram (probably Nichols or Wyatt) to Air Ministry, 5.9.45.

130 FO 371/47141: Warner (through Allen) to West, 13.9.45. Warner's closing remarks are also worth noting: "Although Russian influence is bound to be considerable in Czechoslovakia, the tide is by no means necessarily running in their favour. Compared with the Balkans, Czechoslovakia is geographically and by tradition a border-line case, and our Secretary of State [Bevin] is most anxious that every effort should be made to strengthen western influences there."

131 Also in this file is a series of memoranda concerning the British No.22 Liaison Mission to the MNO in Prague. This Mission had a long history, dating back to the arrival of the Czechoslovak Army in 1940. One such memo, unsigned, reads: "Mr Bevin considers that for political reasons every effort should be made to retain the goodwill of the Czechoslovak Army with the object of ensuring that Czechoslovakia should not fall completely under the aegis of the [USSR]."

abandoned in favour of "temporary RAF detachments." They accepted that much more equipment, especially for signalling, was required to bring Ruzýn Airport up to international standards, but they made it quite clear that all RAF personnel should be withdrawn after a short period of instruction in its use.¹³² Two short notes were then exchanged between the Air Ministry and Prague. In the first, the former recorded no objections to changing 'staging post' to 'transit control', and that they were ready to proceed on the general understanding that Transit Control Prague would be a Czechoslovak unit "under temporary RAF tutelage."¹³³ In the second, Prague responded that the Czechoslovaks were "not happy with any changes whatsoever", and that only 15 or 20 engineers would be required to install the new equipment and train new users. In Prague's eyes, "the difficulties in this matter are due to the return of Kubita with more say than before."¹³⁴

So it was that British hopes of securing any meaningful presence on the ground in Czechoslovakia were rapidly diminishing by late September 1945. Only one opportunity now remained, and that was to re-equip the Czechoslovak Air Force and so tie it to the west for supply, training and maintenance.

The first move towards accomplishing that aim was to discover exactly what the Czechoslovaks themselves wanted from any arrangement, and the chance to do so arose with the promised visit of Svoboda and Boček after their sojourn to Moscow. The omens looked good. The Prague office telegraphed the Air Ministry in mid-October and informed them that "as a temporary measure", they would ask for 60 Spitfires in 1945 and a further 175 in 1946, thus revitalising part of the grandiose expansion plans of 1943.¹³⁵ In a briefing paper prepared by the DAFL for senior officers, the reshuffle in the Czechoslovak Air Force was considered to have "led to dissatisfaction among a proportion of personnel", but that arrangements were in hand to re-equip 311 Squadron, still transferring the 2000 or so civilians back to the Republic, with Mosquitoes as soon as the operation was completed.¹³⁶

In the event, the visit proved to be a grave disappointment to all parties; in fact the Foreign Office was even unsure if it had taken place at all. Writing to Pearson-

132 FO 371/47141: Wyatt to Air Ministry, 8.9.45. Wyatt was told that Ruzýn Airport had to serve all countries, thus no part of it could come under the control of any one nation. Also denied was the permission to use code and cypher for signalling purposes.

133 FO 371/47141: Air Ministry to British Embassy in Prague, 18.9.45. Added to these general comments were the words: "Please suggest as tactfully as possible to the Czechs that they should appoint their best men in order to ensure smooth running and regularity, especially during winter."

134 FO 371/47141: Prague to Air Ministry, 27.9.45. The Czechoslovak excuse for requesting such a small number of RAF personnel was "due to accommodation and rationing difficulties."

135 AIR 8/1257: Prague to Air Ministry, 18.10.45.

136 AIR 8/1257: DAFL Briefing Paper, 25.10.45.

Rogers at the DAFL on October 29th, Warner simply reiterated the current policy of maintaining contacts with the Czechoslovak Air Force:

We do therefore attach very considerable importance on political grounds to the continuance of your present arrangements for short term supplies at least until such time as some more permanent agreement is reached.¹³⁷

Warner closed by hoping that the Air Ministry would concur despite the cost and inconvenience of having to maintain the three squadrons "for whatever further period may be necessary."

It would appear that Boček and Svoboda merely inspected the Military Mission in London and then had a brief audience with Portal. Pearson-Rogers answered Warner's letter in early November and assured him that the Air Ministry would continue to support the Czechoslovak Air Force but would not supply another three-month pack-up unless the Treasury gave prior clearance. Of greater importance was the urgent approach of the three-month deadline itself, and if the Czechoslovaks wanted to extend the relationship into the new year then a Mission must be sent swiftly to re-negotiate a wide range of issues. As for Boček and Svoboda, they raised only the general question of equipment but were told by Portal to formulate all their queries and requirements and prepare a thorough agenda for the Mission.¹³⁸

The focus now shifted to the organisation of a full expedition with the authority to negotiate on behalf of the Czechoslovak Government. Janoušek had been sent from Prague to wind up the Inspectorate in London, but he called on Pearson-Rogers and led him to believe that he would head the Mission when it came. This was at least welcome news, and a short agenda was sent to Warner by the DAFL identifying three areas which a new Agreement would cover: (a) the future supply of aircraft, equipment, and the financial terms on which this would be based; (b) the training of aircrew and specialists in Britain; and (c) a final settlement on POL supplies.¹³⁹ Warner had already

137 FO 371/47141: Warner to Pearson-Rogers, 29.10.45. As to the visit by Boček and Svoboda, Warner was of the opinion that "it had probably taken place." He also claimed that Janoušek had informed him that neither of the two generals had intended to discuss Czechoslovak Air Force requirements in any detail.

138 FO 371/47141: Pearson-Rogers to Warner, 8.11.45. He also informed Warner that it was not the business of the Air Ministry "to decide that the terms of any Agreement should be generous or otherwise", and that if the Foreign Office felt that the terms should be particularly favourable then they themselves should approach the Treasury accordingly. Warner answered this point on the 10th and confirmed that his office wanted to present the Czechoslovaks with as much aid as possible. Pearson-Rogers may or may not have been aware, but the day he wrote this letter was also the official expiry date of the three-month detachment plan.

139 FO 371/47141: Pearson-Rogers to Warner, 14.11.45. Janoušek also told the DAFL that 106 men were still in the country awaiting Home Office decisions on whether or not they could be demobilised into Britain

acted on this, for he had telegraphed Prague and reminded them of the expiry of the detachment period. Urging them to persuade anyone who would listen of the importance of an early Mission to London, he baited the hook by letting it be known that assistance would be "on a generous scale."¹⁴⁰

Towards the end of November, the Air Ministry heard that a Mission of four senior Czechoslovak officers would arrive in Britain on December 9th, headed by Janoušek.¹⁴¹ What followed then was a series of postponements. In early December, Wyatt telegraphed from Prague to inform the Air Ministry that the Mission would not be empowered to negotiate anything until costs and terms were agreed in advance. This, thought Wyatt, was little more than smoke to obscure the real reason, that the Mission could not proceed "until the Russian attitude has been made clear."¹⁴² The Air Ministry had already been informed of this list of requirements, a total of thirteen squadrons of Spitfires plus spares for one year's peacetime flying and arms and ammunition for ten days' combat, to be delivered in a staggered pattern from March 1946 to April 1947.¹⁴³ Reacting to Wyatt, Warner wrote to Nichols and sought his opinion on Wyatt's thesis:

If you consider that postponement is due to the intervention of the Soviet authorities or pro-Soviet Czechoslovak influences, it may be advisable that you or the Air Attaché should let it be seen in appropriate quarters that we suspect this. Such action may strengthen the hands of those who favour continued collaboration with the RAF. You may consider it advisable to consult Air Marshal Janoušek.¹⁴⁴

Nichols replied after two weeks, refuting the accusation of Soviet interference and maintaining that the Czechoslovak request to have full costings in place before sending the Mission to be "not unreasonable." He supported this by arguing that they were unwilling to commit themselves to what would be a substantial arms order in the United Kingdom before they knew exactly what the Soviets would supply.¹⁴⁵

Christmas came and went, and by early February 1946 there had been no sign of the Mission, nor do the records contain any correspondence concerned with it. Then, on February 6th, the DAFL issued a note to all the relevant directorates that the Mission would shortly come to Britain, though no date was mentioned. More to the

140 AIR 8/1257: Warner to Prague, 10.11.45.

141 AIR 8/1257: Prague to Air Ministry, 27.11.45.

142 FO 371/47141: Wyatt to Air Ministry, 2.12.45. According to Wyatt, the Soviets had already offered one fighter-bomber division to the Czechoslovaks following Boček and Svoboda's visit to Moscow.

143 AIR 8/1257: MNO (Vicherek) to Air Ministry, 29.11.45. Vicherek also requested the supply of spares to the existing squadrons to be maintained.

144 FO 371/47141: Warner to Nichols, 6.12.45.

145 FO 371/47141: Nichols to Warner, 21.12.45. Nichols did not consult Janoušek on the matter.

point, the Czechoslovaks had requested another pack-up of spares to maintain the existing Spitfire squadrons, but, as the minute stated, "we cannot go on indefinitely sending supplies until the policy and financial aspects of the matter are settled."¹⁴⁶ By late February, a sense of urgency was creeping into the despatches - not panic exactly, but something tangential to it as it became apparent to all that the last chance of holding on to a position if influence was sliding away. Wyatt was informed that costing was nearly complete, yet he should not delay any longer "but approach the Czechs in the strongest possible terms and press them to send an Air Mission." As more bait, the Air Ministry suggested that he tell them at once that any discussions now would not commit them to a final decision and to perhaps hint that growing shortages of materials would mean action sooner rather than later might be in their favour.¹⁴⁷

Wyatt replied quickly, having consulted Nichols, and both were agreed that there was "practically no chance of persuading the Czechoslovak Government to discuss future equipment" at that time. The reason given was that the impending elections in Czechoslovakia made it likely that the Government would not "risk discussions on this subject with us until Russian intentions are clearer."¹⁴⁸ Within five days, however, Wyatt telegraphed again and told London that a Mission would be despatched soon, but Janoušek "frankly disliked the idea of heading a Mission whose function was to sever rather than enhance connexions with the RAF."¹⁴⁹

After another short postponement, the first meeting of the Czechoslovak Air Mission and representatives of the Royal Air Force, HM Treasury, the Foreign Office and the Home Office convened under the chairmanship of Air Vice-Marshal Sir Thomas Elmhirst at York House on Wednesday, April 3rd, 1946. In total there were thirteen

146 AIR 8/1257: DAFL circulated minute, 6.2.46. The note also recorded that 311 Squadron now existed "in name only", all the Liberators having been returned to Britain, but that the replacement establishment of Mosquitoes had been delayed pending the question of finance.

147 AIR 8/1257: Air Ministry to Wyatt, 23.2.46. The Ministry also recommended reminding the Czechoslovaks that their existing spares were dwindling, that no future spares would be forthcoming without a new Agreement, and that very soon their three fighter squadrons would become "non-effective."

148 AIR 8/1257: Wyatt to Air Ministry, 28.2.46. The Election was fixed for May 1946. The Soviets had let it be known that at polling time they intended to move a large body of troops which had participated in the occupation of Austria across Czechoslovak territory to eastern Germany. This had been postponed after protests, "but nevertheless a large number of voters had been frightened by the prospect." [Ripka H: *Czechoslovakia Enslaved* (Victor Gollancz, 1950), p47. The Communists succeeded in winning 114 seats in the National Assembly with 38% of the vote, which with the 39 seats (12.1%) won by the Social Democrats gave them, in theory at least, a controlling majority. [Bradley J.F.N: *Czechoslovakia: A Short History* (Edinburgh UP 1971), p171.] As a result, Klement Gottwald, leader of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, became Prime Minister. Taborsky records that it became the sole aim of Beneš after that moment to prevent the Social Democrats from succumbing to Communist pressure and so hand total power to the Left. [Taborsky E: *Between East and West*, pp 217-218.]

149 AIR 8/1257: Wyatt to Air Ministry, 5.3.46.

members of the Czechoslovak party led by Janoušek, now reverted to his pre-war rank of Divisional-General, but Slezák was not among them. Almost immediately a series of sub-committees was formed to examine various aspects of the agenda; these were Personnel, Finance, Maintenance and Supply, Training and POL.¹⁵⁰ Six days later, the conference returned and the conclusions of the sub-committees were studied.

On the subject of personnel, it was agreed that the official discharge of all officers and men from the RAFVR would take effect from the day after each section left Britain for the homeland. Nominal rolls would be supplied by the Inspectorate as soon as possible. As for the remaining members of the Inspectorate and the skeleton crew at the Cosford Depot, these would be discharged on June 30th, 1946. The conference then agreed that from this date the Czechoslovak Section (RAFVR) would cease to exist as a legal and military entity:

The Chairman then referred to the termination of the Anglo-Czechoslovak Armed Forces Agreement of 25.10.1940. Air Marshal Janoušek said he was empowered on behalf of the Czechoslovak Government to terminate this Agreement and that the operative date of termination should be June 30th, 1946.¹⁵¹

And so it was all over, and Janoušek had been right - he had been sent to cut the links and not to strengthen them. The Mission was also presented with the costs of the proposed expansion plans, and for £354,000 they could have 72 Spitfires, 24 Mosquitoes, 3 Auster Mk Is, and 1 Anson Mk I plus enough bombs, ammunition and auxiliary equipment to meet their immediate strategic needs.¹⁵² At the end of the Conference, after many warm words of thanks for the efforts and sacrifices of all the officers and men of the Czechoslovak Air Force and promises of close collaboration in the future, an association which had begun in the awesome chaos of the summer of 1940 came to an end.

Janoušek and his team returned to Prague with the draft of the new Agreement and the Air Ministry could do nothing but wait upon events. Five weeks of silence passed. Then, in mid-May, a Top Secret telegram arrived from Wyatt which indicated that new Soviet aircraft, possibly as many as 90, were flying in from Russian bases and being positioned under hangars in aerodromes across the Republic. In a state of some alarm, he admitted that all "previous direct and indirect enquiries regarding Russian equipment...have always received indefinite and evasive answers." He contacted Janoušek who told him that the draft Agreement had yet to reach the Cabinet for

150 AIR 8/1257: Minutes, Czechoslovak Air Mission, 1st Meeting, 3.4.46.

151 AIR 8/1257: Minutes, Czechoslovak Air Mission, 2nd Meeting, 9.3.46.

152 *ibid.* The Austers and the Anson were for communications and training purposes. Warner had also succeeded in wresting truly generous terms from the Treasury, for the actual cost to the British Government of this equipment was £1,750,000.

discussion. Wyatt noted: "The delivery of Russian aircraft at this time may be a Communist pre-election gambit, for the people are being told the aircraft are a gift from the Russians." Janoušek told him that unofficial sources said otherwise, that a high price was being charged, and that, in any case, the General Staff were now said to be disinterested in purchasing British aircraft.¹⁵³

In early June, the Air Ministry lost patience and told Wyatt to ascertain whether there would be firm orders or not and set July 31st as the deadline, after which the aircraft would be supplied to another buyer.¹⁵⁴ If Wyatt replied, the document has not survived, but a note from him to the Air Ministry sent September 2nd confirmed that the Agreement had still not yet been signed.¹⁵⁵ From that date onwards, the files are silent.

153 AIR 8/1257: Wyatt to Air Ministry, 17.5.46.

154 AIR 8/1257: Air Ministry to Wyatt, 3.6.46.

155 AIR 8/1257: Wyatt to Air Ministry, 2.9.46.

CONCLUSION

The desperate summer of 1940 has received much attention from historians over the years, with the three principal events - the Dunkirk evacuations, the defeat of France and the Battle of Britain - all featuring high on the list. Nevertheless, Operation *Aerial*, which brought the majority of the foreign personnel to British shores in June, should also rank as a major event not least because of its scale, but also because of the dilemma which it presented to the military and political leadership of the day.¹ Only a small proportion of the thousands rescued were foreign servicemen, but we saw that Anthony Eden briefly entertained the idea of giving Polish personnel preference over the Czechoslovak contingent; a sign, albeit a momentary one, that even at the highest levels the idea of absorbing Czechoslovak troops into the Allied ranks was not a comfortable option to contemplate.² It is this uneasiness, this sense of doubt which persisted almost to the end of the war in Europe, that lies at the very core of this thesis.

Eden was not alone in his concerns. It has been seen that the offer to establish a bomber squadron in Britain composed of redundant Czechoslovak personnel had been quashed from the first approach, a process of outright rejection which had only been halted by the collapse of France. More to the point, that refusal had come not from a politician, whose ideas and perceptions might have been stuck in the tramlines of party politics, but from the Director of Intelligence within the Air Ministry, a military man whose worldview was supposedly dictated by calculated assessment. This is not to say that Archibald Boyle was immune to prejudice or a tendency to unjustly condemn a fighting force of which he could have had little knowledge. Nevertheless, when he wrote that he doubted the integrity of the Czechoslovaks, and if there were any pilots "worthy of the name", he was expressing an opinion which - if not widespread - was nonetheless in common parlance throughout the British military and political establishment.³ Some in the Home Office doubted, some in the Foreign Office doubted, some in the Air Ministry doubted, and even Churchill himself had at one stage doubted, the policy of having

1 The full report on the Operations *Cycle* and *Aerial* was submitted to the Admiralty on 18.9.40. *Cycle*, the smaller operation, concerned evacuations from Le Havre, whereas *Aerial* was directed at the ports of Cherbourg and St.Malo with the majority of the troop transports sailing from Southampton, Portsmouth and Newhaven. [ADM 1/10481: 18.9.40.] Martin Gilbert mentions Operation *Aerial* in *Second World War* (Fontana 1990) p98, but misspells it as 'Ariel'.

2 CAB 65/7: War Cabinet 19.6.40. See also pp 18-19 of the present study.

3 AIR 2/5153: Boyle to Porri, 2.6.40. It is also worth recalling that Boyle sat on the Joint Intelligence Committee which approved and issued the memorandum of May 1940 which included 'Czechs' in the list of enemy aliens, a document later condemned by the Home Office. [CAB 81/97: (J.I.C. (40) 86): 30.5.40; CAB 81/98: Home Office to Foreign Office, 14.9.40. See also pp 32-33.]

Czechoslovak refugees roaming loose among the populace.⁴ The policy from the start had been to assist the Czechoslovak political leadership in recruiting suitable material for service, but on the strict understanding that any such service was conducted overseas. From the British point of view, the fewer Czechs and Slovaks there were in Britain, the better.⁵ Thus when the Czechoslovak servicemen arrived in the summer of 1940, they may have been met with welcome smiles at ports and camps across the land, but in the offices and corridors of the men of power, the doubts persisted.

Why should this have been so? Such evidence which has come to light during research for the present study which might have accounted for the negative attitude towards the Czechoslovak military is scanty at best. Slessor's notes on the weakness of the Czechoslovak Air Force in 1938 were second-hand, and even then he chose not to disseminate them officially; a few French commanders had indulged in a conspiracy of contempt before the war, choosing not to extend staff talks with the Czechoslovaks and permitting critical comments to be published; and it is quite possible that informal contact between senior French and British commanders may have resulted in the establishment of a prejudicial attitude before the war and during the months to June 1940.⁶ It is possible, but not proven. This is most certainly an area which warrants further study, and could perhaps lead to a parallel military work to Callcott's examination of British political attitudes towards Czechoslovakia as a nation.⁷

It is also possible that doubts over military proficiency acted as little more than a smokescreen for a deeper level of prejudice. There were always two types of doubt: one was concerned with military proficiency, the other with military spirit. It can be argued with more success that, as far as the British were concerned, it was the latter concern which was the most germane of the two. Fighting spirit - literally, the will to engage the enemy in combat - was a much easier target for the western allies to aim at in regard to the Czechoslovak armed forces.⁸ Eden was already aware by the time of Operation

4 FO 371/24365: Inter-departmental minutes, 26.1.40; 29.4.40; 11.6.40; 17.6.40. See also pp 21-22 and p31 and CAB 65/7: 15.5.40 for Churchill's comments. Churchill's *volte face* seems to confirm that he was prepared to put aside his prejudices in favour of the propaganda value of having Czechoslovaks in the Allied ranks, though it seems also that Halifax retained his doubts even at the point of evacuation. [CAB 65/7: 21.6.40.]

5 Literally, the Home Office was "anxious to get rid of as many Czechs and Slovaks as possible", an phrase used by Cooper in 1940, and one which resonates with Portal's inclination to "be rid of the commitment" in 1944 at the time of the Slovak Uprising. [FO 371/24365: Minutes of 26.1.40 and AIR/8/1257: Portal to Sinclair, 19.11.44. See also pp 21-22 and p157.]

6 AIR/75/2: Notes of Air Marshal Sir John Slessor, 22.9.38. See also p17.

7 Callcott, W.R: *British Attitudes to the Czechoslovak State, 1914-1938*: (PhD, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1986.)

8 As Halifax termed it at the time of the evacuation, there "were strong political arguments in favour of a quick comb-out of those aliens who were willing to fight for us." [CAB 65/7: 21/6/40.] Also Boyle's comment concerning those pilots "worthy of the name" comes to mind. [AIR 2/5153: Boyle to Porri, 2.6.40.] But perhaps Dowding's determination to roll-up British squadrons before using foreign pilots as

Aerial that many Czech and Slovak troops were probably going to take their chances with the occupying power in France and stay behind, and in the event this left only the professional officers and a few thousand other ranks to regroup on British soil. Thus an army of thirty-six divisions plus reserves in 1938 had dwindled to the point where scarcely a brigade could be mustered in 1940; and this without any sustained combat, and relatively negligible losses in action.⁹ The inescapable conclusion which must have been drawn by many in Paris and London was that the vast majority of Czech and Slovak service personnel simply did not want to fight for their country or the cause of the allies in the west. Add to this the dismal returns for the British-sponsored recruitment drive in the spring of 1940, plus the belief that many of the civilian refugees in Britain had suspect political allegiances - and this was again flagged by Dill when the first troops began to arrive, and virtually confirmed after the extensive troubles in Cholmondeley Camp - and it is not difficult to see how this negative attitude regarding the morale of the Czechs and Slovaks had been established.¹⁰ Halifax had been warned by the French in May that the Czechoslovak group contained political undesirables and agitators, and since this point had not been refuted by senior members of the Czechoslovak National Committee, it is hardly surprising that many men of influence in Britain therefore saw *all* of the displaced people - in uniform or not - as being worthy of cautious handling.¹¹

In fact, we know now that many Czechoslovaks acquitted themselves well during their service in the Allied armies of the west. Yet at the time, if we look through the eyes of those who had to make the decisions, these were people who had given up just a little too easily and appeared far too willing to entertain unwelcome political ideas of either extreme; and as such they were only just on the right side of the line which divided 'enemy' from 'friendly' alien. This was not just 'Fifth Column fever'; it was an assessment based on the ease with which the Nazis had absorbed the truncated Czechoslovakian state in March 1939. There had been no real resistance from the armed forces, the national organisations, the communists or the general population to establishment of the Protectorate. By May 1939, the rightist National Assembly in Prague had more than two

replacements carries greater weight, though it is unclear from the available evidence if he objected on grounds of proficiency or spirit. It is probable, though, that he reacted against the flood of unexpected and uninvited allies as many others did, for he too was relieved when France fell, telling Halifax "Thank God we're alone now." [Calder A: *The Myth of the Blitz* (Pimlico 1995), p30.]

9 Including regulars and first-line reserves, the total number of men under arms at the time of Munich was in the region of 380,000, a number which increased to a potential 500,000 if volunteer militia were included. [Lukáš I: *op.cit.*, pp 143-148 and pp 223-225.] It is worth noting in passing that Lukáš also quotes a visiting American major as declaring "spirit, discipline and morale to be excellent." [*ibid.* p146.]

10 FO 371/24365: Inter-departmental meetings of 21.6.40 and 11.6.40; CAB 65/7: 25.6.40. See also pp 21-22, p34 and pp 47-48.

11 FO 371/24288 (71-73): 15-18.5.40. Correspondence between Halifax and Campbell. Also p39.

million members, or 98% of all adults qualified to join.¹² By the outbreak of war in September, there were 80,000 Czech contract workers in Germany - all volunteers - and in the Protectorate itself there was a manpower shortage as industrial production in service of the Germans got into full swing.¹³ This was hardly the kind of vision to inspire the west into trusting a Czech or Slovak as an automatic ally, and it goes a long way towards explaining the suspicious attitudes of 1940 in civilian and military circles. That the War Cabinet was aware of this is demonstrated by the memoranda supplied by Bruce Lockhart in which he drew the Government's attention to the possible collapse of pro-Allied support without steps to improve morale.¹⁴ In short, the Poles could shrug off suspicion relatively quickly once the German atrocities in Poland became known, but at least until the appointment of Heydrich as Reich Protector, the attitude of the Czechoslovak population as a whole did not reflect the qualities expected of a committed ally; hence the doubts, hence the ambivalence.

All this was forced to be rapidly adapted once the Czechoslovak servicemen arrived in Britain. Prejudices, where they existed - and some existed for quite some time, as was seen with Sir Alexander Maxwell's corrective letter to the Foreign Office - had to be dismissed or buried if the Prime Minister's directions were to be obeyed.¹⁵ In seeking to give the British war effort a "broad international character", and by hoping therefore to impress and mobilise favourable opinion in the United States, Churchill had at least made some political capital out of the French collapse. But with the notable exceptions of 302 and 303 (Polish) and 310 (Czechoslovak) fighter squadrons, the national contingents had little physical impact on the Allied cause until after the Battle of Britain. This was largely because it took several weeks to organise, equip and train the units, but in the main it was always to be the foreign air forces which saw most of the action until the Allies eventually engaged in land war with the Axis. Nevertheless, as with Medhurst, some regarded the sudden influx as an irritating and possibly dangerous imposition, and it took time for these attitudes to be changed.¹⁶ Even in the House of Commons during the debate for the Allied Forces Act, political figures voiced yet more doubts, not over military proficiency

12 Mamatey & Luža (eds): *op.cit.*; Gotthold Rhode *op.cit.*, p302. The National Assembly (Národní Soubor) was a collective movement headed by a National Committee (Národní Výbor) consisting of fifty members appointed by Emil Hácha and was composed of representatives of all the major parties with the exception of the communists. Membership was restricted to adult males. Its first proclamation denounced Freemasons and Jews.

13 *ibid.* Rhode quotes figures for unemployment as dropping from 93,000 in March 1939 to 57,000 in May and less than 17,000 in June.

14 Bruce Lockhart's memoranda throughout the recognition period are highly informative as regards the conditions and spirit in the Protectorate, but his most concentrated assessment of the prevailing morale appears in FO 371/24288: Memorandum of 14.6.40. See also pp 36-40.

15 CAB 81/98: Sir Alexander Maxwell to Foreign Office, 14.9.40.

16 AIR 8/295: Memorandum by Medhurst, 16.7.40. See also pp 26-30.

or fighting spirit, but this time over the civility of some of the nationalities involved, as if Britain was running the risk of moral contamination by absorbing them into the ranks, and that barbaric practices and discrimination of every hue would sully rather than enhance the reputation of the western allies.¹⁷ This indicates that prejudice was not the only obstacle to integration; blind ignorance was also a factor, and not a little pomposity either. Taken together, the events of the summer of 1940 brought out a raw xenophobia which, like most prejudices, was based not on fact but on ignorance, and was laced with a superiority complex borne of a long tradition of imperialism.

In time, however, the doubts gradually subsided. The British public took the foreign service personnel, particularly the pilots, to their hearts and treated them as friends and heroes.¹⁸ The popular and the quality press ran dozens of favourable stories in the same vein; successful pilots such as Karel Kuttelwascher gave frequent radio interviews to enthralled audiences; and high-profile visits to the squadron bases by air marshals, cabinet members and even royalty all contributed to the rehabilitation of the foreign air crews as men who could be relied upon to fight hard for the Allied cause.¹⁹ The Air Ministry should take some of the credit for this, for in fact it had done a remarkable job in fulfilling Churchill's wishes. By the spring of 1941, it had successfully integrated thousands of foreign air personnel into its complex organisation; had equipped, trained and deployed them, and sent them into combat in a wide range of rôles. Progress reports submitted by

17 See pp 48-52. One contributor to the debate, Eleanor Rathbone (MP for the Combined English Universities), cornered the Government on the question of conscription by first asking if conscription powers would be granted (to which the answer from Grigg was an emphatic "No") and then replying that if this were to be the case then all foreign service personnel were technically volunteers. [*Parliamentary Debates; 5th Series; Vol. 364.*] Grigg agreed, and therefore had the RAF wished to press the point, it could have insisted that *all* foreign air contingents were drafted into the RAFVR irrespective of nationality or political pressure. Even so, volunteer status for any individual was a protective shield of sorts, for as Air Vice-Marshal Collier told Kalla in January 1941, voluntary service was different from conscripted service and brought with it a relaxation of normal military discipline. This was a useful tool for the British, for it enabled them to block attempts by the Allied governments to use their own punishment codes whilst on British soil. [MNO 13/67/1941: Collier to Kalla, 9.1.41.] See also pp 71-74.

18 Zamoyski's work, *The Forgotten Few*, contains numerous anecdotes which illustrate this.

19 Until at least the autumn of 1941, the VKPR kept meticulous track of all the reports and features which appeared in the British press. From August 1940 to October 1941, journals and newspapers - national and provincial - from every corner of the United Kingdom covered the activities of the Czechoslovak Air Force within the permitted limits of censorship. The full registry, together with a packet of selected cuttings, appears in VKPR 36/3/2/4.

A typical month at an RAF station hosting a Czechoslovak squadron might see four or five high-profile visits from a range of dignitaries. At RAF Duxford, for example, between the end of July 1940 and Christmas 1940, 310 and 312 (Fighter) Squadrons were inspected by H.R.H. Group Captain The Duke of Kent, Beneš, Masaryk, Ingr, Slezák, Nižborsky, Janoušek, Kalla, Beaumont, Leigh-Mallory, Dowding, Park, Churchill, Sinclair and a whole menagerie of journalists from Britain, the USA and Canada. Many of the RAF officers made frequent visits. In return, the Czechoslovaks often arranged entertainment, usually a dance, a lunch, or a choral recital. [AIR 28/232: Duxford ORB, July-December 1940.] Some of the reports drafted by Canadian journalists appear in a clippings file in VKPR 33/36/64/1.

station commanders with Polish and Czechoslovak units under their command spoke with a unanimous voice that the Slavs were acquitting themselves well.²⁰

And yet, behind the very visual public images of collaboration and mutual congratulations, the Air Ministry had organised its new recruits in a fashion acceptable to itself. It interpreted Churchill's instructions literally: that the air crews were to be organised into national contingents and armed accordingly. At no time did Churchill specify that they should enjoy full independence, and the Air Ministry had no intention of granting any of them that status if it could possibly avoid it. Neither did Churchill lay down any guidelines regarding their training, education or deployment, and we have seen that the Air Ministry's attitude to language training was relatively indifferent, at least in terms of formal training.²¹ Having once mastered the basics - and these, logically enough, were mainly restricted to operational and military terms - the men were left to acquire what skills they could in the language by contact with other native speakers. The British Council laboured away, often with extremely low levels of resources, to plug the gaps in the men's linguistic education, and the tests conducted by the Czechoslovaks themselves in 1942 indicate how difficult it must have been for many who had yet to surpass even the beginner's level of spoken English.²² In this sense, the Air Ministry - and to a parallel extent, the War Office - were guilty of neglect. They had been instructed to foot the bill for language-training, and they had no intention of exceeding the cost of what they perceived to be an absolute minimum attainment. Of course a case can be made for this

20 A compendium of some of these reports appears in ČsL VB 119/C1-2d/1/75. Not all the reports were entirely adulatory, and some interesting distinctions were noted between the Czechoslovak and Polish pilots. The Station Commander at Warmwell in October 1940 noted that the Poles were "keen and enthusiastic about flying for its own sake and would rather fly and fight than do anything else." Of the Czechoslovaks, he wrote: "They are as hardworking and conscientious as Polish personnel but not usually so good from the flying point of view and the pilots I have met seem to be less enthusiastic than most fighter pilots." [*ibid.* 7.10.40.] The Station Commander at Exeter also had slight reservations about his new comrades: "[The Czechoslovaks] without exception appear keen. They have not the terrific hatred for all things German that the Poles have, but they certainly do not compare unfavourably with British pilots in their offensive spirit. Their morale is good, but not so striking as that of the Poles." Of the Poles, he observed: "He [the Polish pilot] appears to be almost British. He talks about the same things, enjoys similar jokes, grumbles about the food, and drinks very moderately but makes the most of the party. His manners are better, especially towards women and his superior officers, but he eats less daintily and does not play cricket." [*ibid.* 15.10.40.]

21 See pp 77-81. In the progress reports referred to above, this lack of linguistic ability was flagged as a problem by other station commanders. Noting that the Czechoslovaks "were of a quieter nature than the Poles", the Commander at Middle Wallop ascribed this to poor language-training, observing that they had extreme problems with R/T speech. [ČsL VB 119/C1-2d/1/75: Middle Wallop Report, 8.12.40.] The Commander at Exeter wrote: "Only one of the Czechs is good at English, and others speak practically not a word. I am of the opinion that this situation is not wholly satisfactory." [*ibid.* 15.10.40.]

22 ČsL VB 131/C1-3/1/76: English Examination Results, January 1942. See also p80. It is worth mentioning here that the lowest scores were generally achieved by other ranks, and in most cases this would mean that the worst deficiencies were in the ground crew. Given the difficulties the Czechoslovaks had with recruiting ground crew, this weakness would have severely compounded the problem, especially in the training of technical skills.

attitude; that, especially in war, budgets need to be adhered to. But still this element serves to illustrate again the point that the Air Ministry frequently behaved as if they resented the responsibilities which had been foisted upon them; that they were prepared only to do what was enough to fulfil the orders they had been given.

And yet while the purely military aspects were being considered and attended to, there was a concomitant political dimension of even greater complexity. Even before the French defeat, when Beneš was attempting to mobilise Czechs and Slovaks on British soil, men like Frank Roberts in the Foreign Office suspected his motives; that he [Beneš] was less interested in creating a viable fighting force and more concerned with acquiring political legitimacy for himself and his followers. By promoting the existence of a military arm, Beneš hoped to demonstrate that Czechoslovakia still existed as a state which some thought was worth defending. This was a reasonable assumption in itself, but one which held little credibility because of the low numbers who either volunteered or sought escape from one place to another to continue the fight.

The British and French governments were, until the German attack in the west, both pursuing a policy of granting Beneš only the minimum political recognition possible to justify his presence in London and Paris. Both, at various points in time, feared alienating other national governments - especially the Polish, Hungarians, the Dominions and even the Germans - if they officially recognised Beneš and his committee as the true and legal representatives of the dismembered state. What altered this position was the rescue of the men from France and the collapse of France itself. As Halifax said, most of the objectors had either thrown in their lot with the Axis or had met with military defeat, and aside from some protests from the Dominions, little else of a practical nature barred the way to greater recognition.²³ More to the point, this advance had been occasioned by the arrival of the troops, for the British had no desire to assume the various responsibilities which their absorption into the Allied ranks required and created; and even then, only a half-hearted recognition was finally granted. For the sake of convenience, the British were largely prepared to ignore the internal wranglings within the Beneš camp and so avoid an uncomfortable entanglement in the politics of central Europe. That is why provisional

23 CAB 67/7: WP(G)40(168): Report by Halifax to the War Cabinet, 3.7.40. Other examples of the British and French positions regarding the political legitimacy of Beneš and his attempts to enhance it can be found in FO 371/24365: Minute by Roberts, 3.5.40; FO 371/24287 (70): Unsigned minute of 6.12.39 and FO 371/24287: French Embassy to Foreign Office, 20.2.40. See also p23 and pp 34-47.

In fact it was Roger Makins who circulated the first papers concerning the advantages and pitfalls of recognising the Provisional Government. He accepted that Hungary was no longer a serious factor, and that adversity had brought the Czechs and Poles closer together. Concluding, he wrote: "Our own position has changed for the worse, and, having less to lose, we can perhaps afford to take on the Czechs." [FO 371/24289: Makins, minute to file, 24.6.40.] Strang pencilled comment was: "I am coming round to the view that we should act as Mr Makins suggests", and from this it is clear that Beneš was not "taken on" for any other reason than simple political convenience.

status meant nothing more than a temporary acknowledgement of a disputable mandate, and this understandably irritated both Beneš and Masaryk.²⁴

But at this point in 1940, the military and political spheres were quite separate. Having assumed titular control of the Czechoslovak Air Force and Army under the rank of Commander-in-Chief, Beneš at last could broadcast to the Protectorate and truthfully state that Czechoslovak forces were genuinely fighting the Axis and that lives were being sacrificed for the Allied cause, all of them at that time from the air contingent. This at least gained him more credibility and prestige at no cost, and it also served as excellent propaganda for the British. In point of fact, that was the image which prevailed for the rest of the war, and people both in Britain and the Protectorate could look to the Czechoslovak Air Force as a valiant ally. Full political recognition in 1941 merely strengthened that image, and though again the British hand was forced by external circumstances - mainly the precipitate action by the Soviets - still the public vision was one of Czechoslovak bravery on behalf of a mutual and noble cause.²⁵ That was precisely the image that Churchill had in mind when he demanded their utilisation, and if we add the similar images created by the other Allied nations so treated in 1940, then he succeeded in giving the British war effort that "broad international character" he had wanted.²⁶

But this was only ever an image in the Czechoslovak case, for behind the newsreels and the radio interviews and the tales of heroism in the press, the relationship between Beneš and the British Government continued to be lukewarm. One of the principal reasons for this was that many men of influence simply disliked him as an individual and as a politician. His habit of discoursing at considerable, almost punishing length, lecturing rather than debating, irritated many in the Foreign Office and in the wider world.²⁷ Here

24 Provisional status also exercised Masaryk's wry humour. He often signed his personal letters "Provisionally yours", and had been known to ask if the airmen killed in the Battle of Britain were "provisionally dead." [Zeman Z: *The Masaryks*, p183.]

25 FO 371/26394: Minute to file (possibly Makins), 14.7.41. Zeman has Beneš "warning" the British about Soviet intentions to act positively in regard to the political status of the governments in exile, and the President believed that this information, when conveyed to the British "had the effect of a bomb blast." According to Zeman, the British considered their position on the 14th of July 1941 and extended full recognition on the 18th, yet still leaving open the question of post-war frontiers. [Zeman Z: *The Life of Edvard Beneš*, p179.] All this is accurate enough, but the author has omitted the significant detail that London was forced to compromise in order to get the consent of the Dominions. 'Full' recognition, so-called and so-presented to Beneš, was therefore little more than a diplomatic veneer because it did not recognise the territorial existence of the state, the juridical continuity of the Beneš Government, nor did it grant legislative authority (another foil to conscriptive powers). Quite simply, the only reason that the British 'recognised' the Czechoslovak Government was to keep pace with the Soviets, and not because of some sea-change in British political opinion. [FO 371/26394: Unsigned minute to file, 14.7.41. See also pp 101-102.]

26 AIR 8/370: Churchill to the Chiefs of Staff (through Ismay), 12.7.40.

27 See pp 101-102. As Masaryk told Bruce Lockhart, the latter was the only English friend that Beneš ever had. [Bruce Lockhart R.H: *Diaries (Vol 2)*; Entry for 17.2.45.] Lockhart also acknowledged in one of his books that "it was true that in our Foreign Office there were high officials who were

was a man who, in Zeman's words, was "just noticeably taller than a dwarf"; a man who could be "didactic, smug and dull"; who suffered from an "utter lack of charm"; and who rarely placed unqualified support in his political colleagues and chose to deal with everything himself.²⁸ His hunger for prestige; his determination to be noticed and heard at all times, and his insistence on gaining every last scrap of benefit for himself and his cause, sometimes over and above what he had originally requested, all militated against him being fully welcomed into the stuffy, sombre, ponderous world of British foreign policy, and in the eyes of some who had to deal with him directly, he was an irritating little man who never knew when to be content with his lot.

For the years until 1943, this political friction had little impact on the organisation and service of the air contingent. The men whom Beneš had such a knack of exasperating nevertheless continued with their professional duties and did not actively obstruct the course of Anglo-Czechoslovak relations, though it could be successfully argued that they never made an extraordinary effort to accommodate him. Correspondence between the Foreign Office and the Air Ministry was largely confined to matters of procedure; as long as the former was content that diplomatic protocol or Government policy was unaffected, the latter could act as it pleased. In fact the only major point of contact between the two departments, and where the Foreign Office exerted its supremacy over the military, was in 1940 with the negotiations for the military agreements. Even so, Strang listened carefully to the requirements of the Air Ministry in regard to the absorption of the airmen into the RAFVR, and his own position was largely determined by his belief that it was only prestige which dictated the agenda of the Czechoslovaks.²⁹ He was prejudiced against Beneš in any case, so the Air Ministry's proposals - which diluted the powers of the Czechoslovak political lobby to almost nil - perfectly suited his attitude and his assessment of the overall Anglo-Czechoslovak relationship.³⁰ Both the Foreign Office and the Air Ministry knew that the Czechoslovaks simply did not have enough men to create an independent force which would be anything other than a token example of its kind, so their arguments for creating a national section within the RAFVR were little short of pulverising. Not only could the Czechoslovaks fail to demonstrate that the decision was wrong, they also lacked the political support to have the situation amended; so from that point onwards they were condemned to the status of lesser ally.³¹ This status was compounded by the formation of the Czechoslovak Air Inspectorate which, under Janoušek, was never an arbitrary body which functioned as a channel of communication

suspicious of Dr Beneš and thought him too clever." [Bruce Lockhart R.H: *Comes The Reckoning*, p64.]

28 Zeman Z: *The Masaryks*, pp 157-159; Taborsky E: *op.cit.*, pp 21-25.

29 CAB 85/19: AFOSC Minutes, 29.7.40; 15.8.40.

30 Bruce Lockhart R.H: *Diaries (Vol 2)*; Entry for 13.6.40. See also pp 55-56.

31 See pp 52-59.

between the Air Ministry and the MNO; rather it was tantamount to an executive body through which the wishes of the Air Ministry were expressed, leaving Janoušek in the unenviable position of having to defend British requirements and decisions to his political masters and military superiors.³² The flow was essentially one-way from the beginning, and even when the MNO or VKPR wanted to convey ideas or promote policies, as with the independence debates, Janoušek was the filter through which all communication passed.

This was yet another example of the virtual paralysis rendered upon the Czechoslovak Air Force command by the British decision to incorporate the crews into the RAFVR, and Janoušek must be seen as a willing accomplice to the system. This does not mean that he was the Air Ministry's dupe, but it certainly indicates that he was the most senior Czechoslovak commander who fully comprehended the realities of the relationship in *all* its political and military dimensions. As was seen with the independence debates of 1942-1944, and also with the programme for the return of the squadrons in 1945, he had an informed and sensitive touch in his dealings with the British.³³ He knew exactly what he could ask for and how to ask for it, whereas the attitudes of others such as Ingr, Slezák and Bosý tended to grate upon British nerves, most likely through lack of contact and experience; but also because they were more inclined to overlook or underestimate the subordinate position in which they had been placed by the nature of the military agreements and British usage of Czechoslovak manpower down to 1944. With the Brigade in Britain doing little but train until the invasion of Europe, the Army commanders were scarcely in a position to demand anything from the War Office in terms of privileges earned in the field. Janoušek, however, had a proven force to bargain with. At present, it is not possible to state with certainty whether it was he or some other party who was ultimately responsible for the deployment patterns examined earlier, but we can be sure that his sympathies lay with his men; that their trust in him was substantial; and that he wanted to preserve as much of his force as possible at the war's end, partly for humanitarian reasons, but also because he was aware that the return home would bring new and potentially dangerous challenges.³⁴

32 That Janoušek, in the eyes of Beneš at least, should have borne much of the blame for the imbalanced relationship between the Air Ministry, the Czechoslovak Air Inspectorate and the Czechoslovak political leadership emerged from the MNO meetings in February 1941. [MNO 14/317/1941: Minutes of 18.2.41 and MNO 14/427/1941: Minutes of 18.2.41. See also pp 128-131.]

33 See pp 124-130; 135-137 and 170.

34 From the interviews conducted for this study, it would seem that the faith placed in Janoušek by the officers and other ranks was almost total, and he remained a figure of admiration for those who survived both the war and the Communist seizure of power. Even after serving eleven years in prison, he was still capable of remembering names and faces of all ranks when he attended occasional reunions. [Interview with Squadron Leader Marcel Ludikar, April 1997.]

Janoušek's task was made all the more difficult by the inevitable losses which proved so difficult to replace. His battles with Ingr over the transfer of suitable men from the Brigade into the Air Force were often long and occasionally bitter, and his cause was scarcely aided by Beneš himself.³⁵ Ingr was a thoroughbred army man, and he seemed incapable of grasping the stark fact that air power was going to be at the core of future warfare; that the development of a highly-trained air contingent whilst RAF equipment and facilities were at their disposal was a chance too valuable to scorn. His concern with maintaining the Brigade at something approaching fighting strength hobbled Janoušek's efforts to construct a free-flowing system of loss and replacement, and for most of the war all Janoušek could do was to take what he was offered, hope that recruitment would improve, and fill the substantial gaps by using RAF personnel.³⁶ The net result was that the Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain was much too dependent on British ground crew to achieve anything like the prestige which would have accrued to it had Ingr and Beneš been prepared to throw their support behind the force at the expense of the Brigade. In trying to ride two horses at once, they denied themselves the opportunity of returning home with a fully-functioning, well-equipped Air Force which had been created, trained and toughened under war conditions. More than that, by keeping the contingent in a weak condition, they handed their British hosts the perfect excuse to virtually assume full control of what it did and where it went, and this was even extended to include the dictation of the circumstances under which it was allowed to return home. In short, the Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain had the potential to be a bonafide national force in every sense of the word, but it was the internal wranglings within the MNO and VKPR which prevented it from becoming so. Military myopia, a hunger for prestige, and what amounted to delusions of grandeur, were all combined in policies which ultimately spread the manpower too thinly for either the Brigade or the Air Force to function as viable fighting units in their own right.

And yet the political leadership cannot be wholly blamed for failing to increase recruitment from the embarrassing trickle of volunteers from across the globe. To be sure, by insisting on keeping the forces in Britain as ethnically pure as possible, they denied themselves the services of those Austrians and Sudetendeutsche who stepped forward. But in one sense this was also a practical measure because we know that the Air

35 It is difficult to determine whether Beneš actually disliked Janoušek or simply used his popularity with the British to keep Ingr happy. There may even have been a hint of jealousy there, given the predilection of the President to consider himself foremost in all things. What *is* certain, however, is that all of the senior Czechoslovak commanders knew that Janoušek, as far as the British were concerned, was the favoured leader of the air contingent. As Beneš phrased it, Janoušek was "suitable to the British, and even against our interests they will keep him there." [MNO/14/427/1941: Minutes of 18.2.41. See also pp 128-131.]

36 See pp 95-97 and 103-109.

Force personnel in particular were not inclined to tolerate men in their midst who could be accused of creating their predicament in the first place.³⁷ In any case, judging from the files in the VHA, it would seem that the numbers who applied for service were far too low to have made any substantial difference to the recruitment figures, and by far the biggest problem faced by the Beneš administration was its inability to attract even suitable volunteers to the colours.

Making a measurable political impact abroad had always been a difficult task for Czech and Slovak politicians, as the elder Masaryk and Beneš discovered at the time of the Great War. Once resolved upon the policy to destroy the Austro-Hungarian Empire and claim independence for a Czecho-Slovak state, they discovered that they had virtually no constituency abroad when they went into exile. Czechs and Slovaks who had emigrated from what Zeman called "their comfortless countries of origin" displayed little interest in the appeals of the statesmen, and Beneš was to encounter precisely that same attitude twenty-five years later when he attempted to draw the next generation into the European war on behalf of the western Allies.³⁸ The Dominions of the British Empire did not actively place obstacles in the way of the Czechoslovak recruiting missions, but then neither did they facilitate enlistment by overtly promoting the cause. Distrust of Beneš and his sometimes dubious collection of followers, and the natural tendency to protect persons who had forsaken one nationality and claimed another, led the Canadians and the Australians to adopt a policy of passive support.³⁹ It would be an interesting study which examined the motives of those men who *did* volunteer for action from overseas, particularly those from Canada. Were they, for example, inspired by the nobility of the cause, or just the chance of an exciting adventure? Was it sentiment, boredom, youthful impetuosity or genuine patriotism which lay behind their decisions to risk their lives in a hot war thousands of miles away? At this moment it is not possible to say. They were certainly not mercenaries, and such were the low numbers it is tempting to speculate that it *was* genuine patriotism which led them to Britain; a love of country inherited perhaps from their forebears. But whatever the reasons, we can be sure that the appeal in Canada and the USA for help in the liberation of Czechoslovakia fell largely on deaf ears, and that this was also a matter for embarrassment for Beneš.⁴⁰

37 VKPR 29/3/1/8: Report by Janoušek on the Czechoslovak Air Force, 15.3.43. See also p106.

38 Zeman Z: *The Life of Edvard Beneš*, p21.

39 See pp 99-102.

40 White L.M (ed.): *On All Fronts: Czechoslovaks in World War II, Volume 1*: Barbara Podoski: 'Me Too', pp 291-220. Podoski recalls an event in May 1943 when Beneš visited the USA for talks with Roosevelt. At an official reception at the Czechoslovak Embassy, Beneš was told that she was shortly to join the United States Army: "President Beneš shook my hand and then, turning halfway to the rest of the gathering, said with a smile, 'I'm glad one of you is going off to fight.'" (Podoski had been married to a Czechoslovak citizen at the time and assumed American citizenship in June 1943.)

The Czechoslovaks were not helped either by the British refusal to permit them to conscript. Of course, it must be remembered that this ban was not confined to the Czechoslovaks only, but even the introduction of the Allied Powers (War Service) Act of 1942 failed to ease the dire problems of recruitment. Yet again, the British displayed their wariness concerning the political dimensions by permitting the foreign national who was called up by 'his' governing body a period of two months' grace, during which he might ignore his enlistment papers and then present himself for service in the British forces.⁴¹ The central concern of the British Government was for the protection of such men who, as refugees or émigrés, might have had genuine political, racial or religious reasons for leaving their homelands; and if such men were to fall under the military jurisdiction of the Allied forces whose military codes were suspect, then whatever fate befell them would, by implication, have been the partial responsibility of the host nation.

A cynical interpretation of this policy might lead one to conclude that the British simply wished to ensure that no such charge could be laid before them; that, by creating an escape route for a man into the British forces, they could in turn keep potential difficulties and messy entanglements at a safe distance. And yet the evidence seems to indicate otherwise, for we have seen how the Air Ministry reacted to the heavy-handed tactics employed by the Czechoslovaks in the cases of reluctant fliers, and we have seen how heated the debates in the Commons became during August 1940 when military jurisdiction was the question at hand.⁴² The British knew full well that the Slavs in particular could mete out some serious punishment for offences which would attract lesser censure in a British court, and it seems likely that the policies which guaranteed at least some form of protection for the exiled other ranks were designed not to minimise real or potential conflict, but to make manifest genuine liberal values concerning the continuing welfare of the refugees and exiles. They might have been reluctant or even unwanted guests, but guests they were nevertheless, and the British treated them accordingly.

But if this interpretation is accurate, then the concern for the welfare of the Allied other ranks contrasts sharply with the attitude displayed by the British regarding the Czechoslovak Air Force as a whole, for, as has been seen, the independence debates of 1942-1944 sparked off correspondence which was anything but liberal in its tone. The DAFL document of midsummer 1943 contained within it a compendium of opinions which threw much light upon the realities of the Anglo-Czechoslovak relationship in the air, at least as seen from the point of view of the hosts. In the first instance, the Air Ministry recognised at once that the demand for independence was almost wholly political in its origin and motivation, but the telling line was undoubtedly: "We have always

41 See pp 112-114.

42 MNO 13/67/1941: Collier to Kalla, 9.1.41; see also pp 47-52 and pp 72-73.

recognised the Czechoslovak Air Force as a political necessity; at the same time we cannot but regard it as a military luxury."⁴³ In this one sentence, senior figures in the RAF confirmed that the whole affair - in their view at least - was simply an exercise in propaganda; that the cosy rhetoric of 1940 which proclaimed a united effort in a common cause was little more than imagery designed to reap the maximum benefit from Churchill's directions, and in itself this short clause confirms one of the central tenets of this thesis.

Yet the description of the force as a "military luxury" opens up wider avenues of interpretation, none of them charitable. Taken literally, one could draw the conclusion that the RAF had absorbed, trained and deployed the air contingent against its better judgement; that, if left to its own devices, it would have used the best of the Czechoslovak aircrew and ground staff within its own establishments and shunted off the rest to ferrying duties and associated tasks, or as a last resort returned them to the land forces. Medhurst would have happily used such a tactic with the Poles in 1940, so it seems likely that the same formula would have been applied to the Czechoslovaks if he and others had been given the chance.⁴⁴ Again, describing them as a "luxury" also implies that whatever needed to be done to assimilate them would be done, but no more. This might explain the apparent disinterest shown by the Air Ministry with regard to the men's language training beyond the bare necessities; and indeed, it might also explain the deployment patterns. Perhaps the Czechoslovaks were placed in relatively quiet sectors at the instigation of the British because that old feeling of poor faith in their military spirit and proficiency meant that convoy patrols and fighter sweeps would be the safest option. However, what we *can* be sure of is that some high-level commanders within the DAFL - the very organ of administration which maintained the Allied air forces on behalf of the RAF - felt that the Czechoslovak Air Force was more of an appendix to the air fighting strength than a vital part of it, and though more research needs to be done to ascertain if this was a rogue opinion or part of a widespread distaste of the Allied forces overall, we now know that the Czechoslovaks at least were tolerated rather than embraced.

How much this had to do with the political relationship is unclear, yet the 1943 document drew the attention of its readers to political issues nonetheless - an unusual step

43 AIR/2/5162: Unsigned critique of Czechoslovak proposals for independence, *circa* June 1943. See also pp 137-140. It is a curiosity that this document has been entirely overlooked by Czech and Slovak historians working in this area, at least in regard to the research conducted for the present study. It is curious because it appears in a single file which has been thoroughly examined in other respects, to the point where copies of some documents are on display in the Military Museum in Prague. The only possible reason is that the document has been deliberately overlooked, for perhaps some writers have felt that it would be deeply embarrassing or damaging to the somewhat mythical history of the Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain which is typical of the work to date. If this *is* the case, then they need not have been so sensitive, for it is clear that the political leadership and military High Command are the targets for the DAFL's invective and not the officers and men of the air contingent.

44 AIR/2/5153: Medhurst to Sholto-Douglas, 3.7.40. See also pp 26-27.

for the executive arms of the Air Ministry, which generally confined themselves to military matters only. In fact, the 1943 document remains the finest example so far of a perfect merger of military and political issues. When the DAFL officer wrote: "Perhaps we have been too kind to the Czechs, but then we have had Munich thrown in our face", he expressed a view which the cynics of the day would doubtlessly have applauded.⁴⁵ What that one comment reveals is that the Air Ministry had from the start behaved in the most patronising manner towards the Czechoslovak air contingent, as if they were somehow deserving of inclusion in the Allied war effort not by dint of skill or bravery, but because the British owed them a favour, a gesture of apology. Even then, it would seem from the tone of the document that the apology had been demanded rather than offered, and given the capacity of Beneš to make many of his requests sound like demands - that pushiness, for example, which so enraged the mandarins of the Foreign Office in 1941 - one gets the impression that not only were the Czechoslovaks tolerated in the RAF, but that tolerance was grudgingly bestowed.⁴⁶ "Sympathetic and generous" treatment hardly speaks of a partnership based on mutual admiration and trust, and in the end we are forced to conclude that this was an air force kept in being simply because it was politically desirable to do so, and that by order rather than free will.

One other element in the 1943 document deserves a brief examination, for it goes some way to confirming opinions ventured by the British and at least one Czechoslovak commander, Karel Janoušek. When the DAFL officer wrote that significant changes to the 1940 Agreement would be "bitterly resented" by some members of the Czechoslovak Air Force, he was in tune with views expressed two years earlier by Wing-Commander Porri and others.⁴⁷ Without doubt, some men (almost certainly other ranks) preferred to remain under the protective canopy of the RAFVR rather than face service life working to Czechoslovak military codes or being directly responsible to political masters in whom they may have had little or no faith. Even Janoušek was bold enough to draw that fact to the attention of his superiors.⁴⁸ Considering the political upheavals which had attended its arrival, followed by the disputes over leadership and discipline, it would seem that the

45 AIR/2/5162: Unsigned critique of Czechoslovak proposals for independence, *circa* June 1943. See also pp 137-140.

46 Beneš caused a storm in Whitehall in April 1941 when he petitioned Churchill to grant full recognition to the Provisional Government. In doing so, he declared that the major obstacles to political progress had been concocted by the Foreign Office as a "remnant of the Munich policy." [FO 371/26394: Beneš to Churchill, 19.4.41. See also p101.] As for the repudiation of the Munich Agreement in a speech by Eden in August 1942, even this almost certainly was not what Beneš really wanted, for Eden only declared that Britain was no longer bound by its terms, nor would be influenced by its effects. What he did not say was: "We are sorry, we were wrong."

47 AIR/2/5162: Unsigned critique of Czechoslovak proposals for independence, *circa* June 1943; CAB 85/19: Minutes AFOSC 29.7.40; See also p51, p55 and pp 137-140.

48 ČsL VB 215/CIII-2e/1/212: Remarks to the New Version of the Czechoslovak-British Air Force Agreement, Janoušek 16.11.42. See also pp 135-137.

Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain would have been impossible to resurrect and maintain as a viable force unless the British had kept a firm hold over all aspects of its existence, most especially in the fields of discipline, command and control. This is not to say that the majority of the men who served in the force were necessarily suspect politically or militarily, but most certainly they were content to serve the needs of their country by the act of serving the needs of another, and it was with immense pride that they wore RAF uniforms and earned RAF decorations.

Thus the years of the Czechoslovak Air Force's exile in Britain were a mixture of image and reality. In terms of image, it could do no wrong. From 1940 onwards, all those dignitaries who visited the squadrons and associated themselves with 'the common cause' could bask in the warm publicity generated by their presence. Although some newspapers and commentators occasionally criticised the Beneš Government, the squadrons were immune from such attacks, and even as late as 1944 the British Government were content to use their presence for propaganda purposes.⁴⁹ Accepted by the public and lauded by the press, the huge majority of the officers and men of the air contingent enjoyed their time in Britain, for they at least were treated as real allies. They won medals, lost comrades and made marriages; they behaved as ordinary men in extraordinary circumstances, and the people of Britain saw them and treated them as such.

But the reality was kept firmly behind closed doors. While the British Government kept Beneš at arm's length, persistently refusing to endorse any Czechoslovak policy which might engender post-war commitments, the Air Ministry too had accepted the presence of the air contingent with indifference. It was a force which had been imposed upon it, and it was a force which could not have functioned effectively, or perhaps even at all, without considerable British assistance in ground crew. It is not possible to read the minds of the senior RAF men involved, but it would not be surprising if many thought that they were shackled with a lame ally; a token representation of a troubled country kept in being only for the purposes of propaganda, Allied solidarity and - or so it would appear from the 1943 document - a sense of guilt also. These were not good preconditions for a truly mutual and successful military partnership, so while the public face was one of

49 In 1944, the Ministry of Information published a pamphlet commissioned by the Air Ministry entitled *There's Freedom in the Air* (HMSO 1944). It covered the experiences and adventures of all the major foreign air contingents in a torrent of mawkish prose and heroic illustrations, and a good example of the general tenor can be found on page 8: "In these [French] squadrons, the Czechoslovaks fought themselves to the point of exhaustion...they fought with an extreme fanatical zeal and to the limits of endurance...pilots losing consciousness in the air and recovering just in time to make a safe landing." Of perhaps greater interest is the declaration on the same page that, on July 12th 1940 after the escape to England, "the Independent Czechoslovak Air Force was reborn." One can imagine the reaction in the MNO and the VKPR when that line was translated for general consumption.

friendship and admiration, the private view was based on baleful tolerance, reluctant concessions, and perhaps even a little contempt.

The reality of the relationship was never more so apparent than in the period when the war was all but won and thoughts turned towards the liberation of Europe. Until that time, the British relationship with the Czechoslovak Air Force had bumped along through a series of relatively minor disagreements which were set against the wider aspect of the air war; meaning that although disputes over recruitment, independence and the wearing of badges had occurred, still the primary rôle of the force had been fulfilled as an active participant in the struggle against the Axis. This was all well and good from the British point of view because they retained full control over the contingent whilst reaping the propaganda rewards, but when Beneš wished to claim back his armed forces to liberate their homeland - as in the case of the Slovak Rising - the British attitude hardened swiftly. The protests offered by the RAF against the transfer were realistic enough. To move the fighter squadrons to the east without any hope of effective supply or maintenance would have been a risky venture, so in that respect the British rejection was rooted in common sense. But Portal's desire "to be rid of the commitment" merely highlights again that sense of indifference felt by RAF senior commanders as to what the Czechoslovak Air Force did or did not do so long as British interests were neither threatened or compromised.⁵⁰ Their refusal to approve the transfer was also indicative of the desire to ensure that Soviet sensibilities were not offended by what would have been a largely futile military exercise, and the general acceptance that the Russians had full control of the eastern front was not even dented by the request to shift the squadrons east. Besides, if the pressure from Beneš had been strong enough, the British could always have fallen back on the need for American approval, and essentially this is what they did from the start, creating a fine *caveat* for themselves and raising administrative obstacles which were insurmountable in the time scale allowed for the operation.⁵¹

The British refusal to transfer the squadrons to the east in late 1944 must have again clearly demonstrated to the Czechoslovak political and military leaders the shocking impotence from which they suffered in respect of command and control of the squadrons. All through the war it had been the British who made the main decisions. It had been they who created the legislative and administrative systems for the existence of the contingent as a national group; it had been they who retained all political, disciplinary and military control; and it was to be they who decided when and how and under what conditions that contingent would return home. Thus when the request for full repatriation came in the

50 AIR/8/1257: Portal to Sinclair, 19.11.44. See also pp 149-158.

51 ŠVBM-HV 225/43: Portal to Ingr, 21.1.44.

early summer of 1945, the political considerations were very much at the forefront of the discussions within and between the Air Ministry and the Foreign Office.

We have seen how pedantic and meticulous were the deliberations concerning the repatriation of the squadrons to Czechoslovakia, and all of these - save the purely technical details of rearmament and transportation - were wholly focused upon the need to avoid giving offence to the Soviets. This was carried forward to a remarkable extent, to the point where documents which supposedly indicated Russian approval were disbelieved.⁵² The major question which arises from this episode is, why did the British not simply utilise existing diplomatic channels to secure consent? By all but forcing the Czechoslovaks to provide the necessary evidence, the British succeeded in alienating sections of the political and military leadership who, as the British well knew, were themselves in a dangerously unstable situation and vulnerable to counter-propaganda.⁵³ In effect, the British, who had spent the war treating Beneš as a junior statesman, confirmed their view of him by expecting him to seek permission from the Soviets for his armed forces to return home. This was the very worst thing the British could have done. Here was a man who had grown dismally accustomed to having the great powers dictate his actions for him, and with a successful war at his back and an uncertain future ahead, he most definitely would have recoiled from the prospect of signalling his inferior or insecure status to the Russians by asking them if it was in order for his own Air Force to fly over Prague. Of all the major and minor events which were a part of the Anglo-Czechoslovak relationship during the Second World War, this was the biggest mistake the British made. By treating the Czechoslovaks as a second-class ally, both during and immediately after the war, they handed the Soviets a propaganda gift which was gilt-edged. Those military commanders who were pro-Communist took control of the forces and made their deals with Moscow. Those who were not were retired, posted or sidelined to await an uncertain fate.

Attempts to restore harmony after the return were hollow and superficial. Behind the handshakes and smiles, Soviet influence was inexorable and pervasive. Janoušek knew it would be almost his final act to return to Britain and negotiate a new agreement which stood little chance of becoming active, and he was grimly aware that his mission was to sever ties with Britain, not sustain them.⁵⁴ The British had had their chance and lost it. If they had politely yet firmly informed the Russians, subject to diplomatic protocol, that the Air Force was due to return on a given date, perhaps this might have set a precedent for support which could have been used successfully by those commanders or politicians who

52 AIR 2/6947: Seligman to Warner, 13.6.45. See also pp 159-172.

53 FO 371/47141: West to Warner, 7.9.45. See also pp 187-188.

54 AIR 8/1257: Wyatt to Air Ministry, 5.3.46.

were threatened. By treating the Czechoslovak Air Force as an irrelevance - something to be disposed of peacefully as possible - they humiliated themselves and their Czech and Slovak comrades in war. Small wonder, therefore, that the die was already cast long before Janoušek returned, in effect, to say his goodbyes; and small wonder also that the desperate deal of 1946 was smothered at birth by unseen hands in Prague. The reluctant investment made in 1940 and barely tended in the subsequent years had paid its rightful dividend - failure.

APPENDIX A

Squadron movements, locations and durations

[n.b. Post-Overlord European stations are italicised.]

310 (Czech)

Date	Location	Area	Days	Grp
10.July.40	Duxford (Cambridgeshire)	SE	351	12
26.June.41	Martlesham Heath (Suffolk)	SE	24	11
20.July.41	Dyce (Aberdeen)	NE	159	13
26.Dec.41	Perranporth (Cornwall)	SW	45	10
9.Feb.42	Predannack (Cornwall)	SW	2	10
11.Feb.42	Perranporth	SW	25	10
8.Mar.42	Warmwell (Dorset)	S	13	11
21.Mar.42	Perranporth	SW	47	10
7.May.42	Exeter (Devon)	SW	54	10
1.July.42	Redhill (Surrey)	S	6	11
7.July.42	Exeter	SW	40	10
16.Aug.42	Redhill	S	5	11
21.Aug.42	Exeter	SW	309	10
26.Jun.43	Castletown (Scotland)	N	86	13
19.Sep.43	Ibsley (Hants)	S	73	10
2.Dec.43	Llanbedr (Merioneth)	SW	13	9
15.Dec.43	Ibsley	S	66	10
19.Feb.44	Mendlesham (Suffolk)	SE	2	12
21.Feb.44	Hutton Cranswick (Yorks)	NE	4	12
25.Feb.44	Mendlesham	SE	31	11
28.Mar.44	Rochford (Southend, Essex)	SE	6	11
3.Apr.44	Appledram (Sussex)	S	64 (to D-Day)	11
6.June.44	Appledram	S	16	11
22.Jun.44	Tangmere (Sussex)	S	9	11
28.Jun.44	<i>B.10 Plumetot</i>		1	
1.July.44	Lympne (Kent)	SE	10	11
11.July.44	Digby (Lincs)	NE	48	12
28.Aug.44	North Weald (Essex)	SE	123	11
29.Dec.44	Bradwell Bay (Essex)	SE	60	11
27.Feb.45	Manston (Kent)	SE	70 (to VE Day)	11
7.Aug.45	Hildesheim (Germany)		6	
13.Aug.45	Prague (Czechoslovakia)		-	

312 (Czech)

Date	Location	Area	Days	Grp
29.Aug.40	Duxford	SE	31	12
29.Sep.40	Speke (Lancs)	NW	184	9
3.Mar.41	Valley (Anglesey)	NW	53	9
25.Apr.41	Jurby (Isle of Man)	NW	34	9
29.May.41	Kenley (Surrey)	S	52	11
20.July.41	Martlesham Heath	SE	29	11
19.Aug.41	Ayr (Ayrshire)	NW	134	13
1.Jan.42	Fairwood Common (Glamorgan)	W	23	10
24.Jan.42	Angle (Pembroke)	W	84	10
18.Apr.42	Fairwood Common	W	2	10

20.Apr.42	Warmwell	S	2	10
24.Apr.42	Fairwood Common	W	8	10
2.May.42	Harrowbeer (Devon)	SW	59	10
1.Jul.42	Redhill (Surrey)	S	7	11
8.Jul.42	Harrowbeer	SW	39	10
16.Aug.42	Redhill	S	4	11
20.Aug.42	Harrowbeer	SW	51	10
10.Oct.42	Church Stanton (Somerset)	SW	133	10
20.Feb.43	Warmwell	S	22	10
14.Mar.43	Church Stanton	SW	102	10
24.Jun.43	Skaebrae (Orkneys)	N	59	13/14/13
21.Sep.43	Ibsley	S	73	10
2.Dec.43	Llanbedr	SW	16	9
18.Dec.43	Ibsley	S	53	10
19.Feb.44	Mendlesham	SE	4	12
23.Feb.44	Rochford	SE	8	11
3.Mar.44	Mendlesham	SE	32	12
4.Apr.44	Appledram	S	63 (to D-Day)	11
6.June.44	Appledram	S	16	11
22.Jun.44	Tangmere	S	12	11
28.Jun.44	<i>B.10 Plumetot</i>		1	
4.Jul.44	Lympne	SE	7	11
11.Jul.44	Coltishall (Norfolk)	SE	47	12
27.Aug.44	North Weald	SE	37	11
3.Oct.44	Bradwell Bay	SE	147	11
27.Feb.45	Manston	SE	70 (to VE-Day)	11
7.Aug.45	Hildesheim		6	
13.Aug.45	Prague		-	

313 (Czech)

Date	Location	Area	Days	Grp
10.May.41	Catterick (Yorks)	N	52	13
1.Jul.41	Leconfield (Yorks)	NE	56	13
26.Aug.41	Portreath (Cornwall)	SW	89	10
23.Nov.41	Warmwell	S	6	10
29.Nov.41	Portreath	SW	16	10
15.Dec.41	Hornchurch (Essex)	SE	53	11
6.Feb.42	Rochford	SE	29	11
7.Mar.42	Hornchurch	SE	53	11
29.Apr.42	Fairlop	SE	9	11
8.June.42	Church Stanton	SW	385	10
28.June.43	Peterhead (Aberdeen)	NE	58	14/13
21.Aug.43	Hawkinge (Kent)	SE	28	11
18.Sep.43	Ibsley	S	110	10
6.Jan.44	Woodvale (Lancashire)	NW	4	9/12
10.Jan.44	Ayr	NW	10	13
20.Jan.44	Ibsley	S	31	10
20.Feb.44	Mendlesham	SE	22	12
14.Mar.44	Rochford	SE	6	11
20.Mar.44	Mendlesham	SE	15	12
4.Apr.44	Appledram	S	63 (to D-Day)	11
6.June.44	Appledram	S	16	11
22.Jun.44	Tangmere	S	12	11
28.Jun.44	<i>B.10 Plumetot</i>		1	

4.Jul.44	Lympne	SE	7	11
11.Jul.44	Skabrae (Orkneys)	N	85	13/14
4.Oct.44	North Weald	SE	86	11
29.Dec.44	Bradwell Bay	SE	60	11
27.Feb.45	Manston	SE	70 (to VE-Day)	11
7.Aug.45	Hildesheim		6	
13.Aug.45	Prague		-	

302 (Polish)

Date	Location	Area	Days	Grp
13.July.40	Leconfield	NE	90	13
11.Oct.40	Northolt (Middlesex)	SE	43	11/84/2TAF
23.Nov.40	Westhampnett (Sussex)	S	135	11
7.Apr.41	Kenley (Surrey)	S	52	11
29.May.41	Jurby	NW	70	9
7.Aug.41	Church Stanton	SW	29	10
5.Sep.41	Warmwell	S	36	11
11.Oct.41	Ibsley	S	21	10/11
1.Nov.41	Harrowbeer	SW	177	10
27.Apr.42	Warmwell	S	4	11
1.May.42	Harrowbeer	SW	4	10
5.May.42	Heston (Middlesex)	SE	56	11
30.June.42	Croydon (Surrey)	SE	7	11
7.July.42	Heston	SE	75	11
21.Sep.42	Ipswich	SE	8	12
29.Sep.42	Heston	SE	125	11
1.Feb.43	Kirton-in-Lindsey (Lincs)	E	75	12/9
17.Apr.43	Hutton Cranswick	NW	45	12
1.Jun.43	Heston	SE	19	11
20.Jun.43	Perranporth	SW	60	10
19.Aug.43	Fairlop	SE	30	11
18.Sep.43	Tangmere	S	3	11
21.Sep.43	Northolt	SE	73	11/84/2TAF
2.Dec.43	Fairwood Common	W	17	10
19.Dec.43	Northolt	SE	72	11/84/2TAF
1.Mar.44	Llanbedr	SW	6	9
7.Mar.44	Northolt	SE	25	11/84/2TAF
1.Apr.44	Deanland (Sussex)	SE	11	11/84/2TAF
12.Apr.44	Rochford	SE	2	11
14.Apr.44	Deanland	SE	12	84/2TAF
26.Apr.44	Chailey (Sussex)	SE	41 (to D-Day)	11/84/2TAF
6.June.44	Chailey	SE	12	11/84/2TAF
28.Jun.44	Appledram	S	18	11
16.Jul.44	Ford (Sussex)	SE	19	11/84/2TAF
4.Aug.44	<i>B.10 Plumetot</i>		26	
30.Aug.44	Fairwood Common	W	17	10
16.Sep.44	<i>B.51 Lille/Vendeville</i>		17	
3.Oct.44	<i>Deurne</i>		8	
11.Oct.44	<i>B.61 St.Denis Westrem</i>		104	
23.Jan.45	<i>B.60 Grimbergen</i>		44	
9.Mar.45	<i>B.77 Gilze-Rijen</i>		4	
13.Mar.45	<i>B.101 Nordhorn</i>		48	
30.Apr.45	<i>B.113 Varrelbusch</i>		8 (to VE-Day)	

Various European stations until 18 December 1946 when the squadron was disbanded.

303 (Polish)

Date	Location	Area	Days	Grp
22.Jul.40	Northolt	SE	80	11/84/2TAF
11.Oct.40	Leconfield	NE	84	13
3.Jan.41	Northolt	SE	163	11/84/2TAF
15.July.41	Speke	NW	83	9
7.Oct.41	Northolt	SE	252	11/84/2TAF
16.Jun.42	Kirton-in-Lindsey	E	60	12/9
15.Aug.42	Redhill	SE	5	11
20.Aug.42	Kirton-in-Lindsey	E	166	12/9
2.Feb.43	Northolt	SE	3	11/84/2TAF
5.Feb.43	Heston	SE	28	11
5.Mar.43	Debden (Essex)	SE	7	11
12.Mar.43	Heston	SE	14	11
26.Mar.43	Martlesham Heath	SE	13	11
8.Apr.43	Heston	SE	54	11
1.Jun.43	Northolt	SE	133	11/84/2TAF
12.Nov.43	Ballyhalbert (County Down, NI)	W	169	13/82
30.Apr.44	Horne (Surrey)	SE	6 (to D-Day)	11
6.June.44	Horne	SE	13	11
19.June.44	Westhampnett	S	97	11
25.Sep.44	Coltishall (Norfolk)	SE	191	12
4.Apr.45	Andrew's Field (Essex)	SE	34 (to VE-Day)	11
16.May.45	Coltishall	SE	85	12
10.Aug.45	Andrew's Field	SE	113	11
1.Dec.45	Turnhouse (Midlothian)	N	-	13

303 remained in Scotland until March 1946, disbanding on December 11th 1946.

306 (Polish)

Date	Location	Area	Days	Grp
28.Aug.40	Church Fenton (Yorkshire)	NE	26	11/12/81
7.Nov.40	Tern Hill (Shropshire)	SW	147	9
3.Apr.41	Northolt	SE	187	11
7.Oct.41	Speke	NW	66	9
12.Dec.41	Church Stanton	SW	142	10
3.May.42	Kirton-in-Lindsey	E	44	12/9
16.June.42	Northolt	SE	270	11
13.Mar.43	Hutton Cranswick	NE	78	12
30.May.43	Catterick	N	73	13
11.Aug.43	Gravesend (Kent)	SE	7	11
19.Aug.43	Friston (Sussex)	SE	33	11
21.Sep.43	Heston	SE	89	11
19.Dec.43	Llanbedr	SW	13	9
1.Jan.44	Heston	SE	73	11
15.Mar.44	Llanbedr	SW	4	9
20.Mar.44	Heston	SE	12	11
1.Apr.44	Coolham (Sussex)	SE	66 (to D-Day)	11/84/2TAF
6.June.44	Coolham	SE	16	11/84/2TAF
22.June.44	Holmsley South (Hampshire)	S	4	10
27.June.44	Ford (Sussex)	SE	12	11/84/2TAF
9.July.44	Brenzett (Kent)	SE	93	11/84/2TAF
10.Oct.44	Andrew's Field	SE	241 (to VE-Day)	11

10.Aug.45	Coltishall	SE	59	12
8.Oct.45	Fairwood Common	W	41	10
18.Nov.45	Coltishall	SE	414	12

306 (Polish) Squadron disbanded on January 6th, 1947

308 (Polish)

Date	Location	Area	Days	Grp
9.Sep.40	Blackpool (Lancs)	NW	2	-
12.Sep.40	Speke	NW	12	9
25.Sep.40	Baginton (Warwickshire)	W	249	9
1.June.41	Chilbolton (Hampshire)	S	22	10/9
24.June.41	Northolt	SE	171	11
12.Dec.41	Woodvale	NW	110	9/12
1.Apr.42	Exeter	SW	36	10
7.May.42	Hutton Cranswick	NE	55	12
1.July.42	Redhill	S	5	11
7.July.42	Hutton Cranswick	NE	22	12
30.July.42	Heston	SE	33	11
1.Sep.42	Ipswich	SE	19	12
21.Sep.42	Heston	SE	38	11
29.Oct.42	Northolt	SE	182	11
29.Apr.43	Church Fenton	NE	67	11/12
5.July.43	Hutton Cranswick	NE	64	12
7.Sep.43	Friston	SE	13	11
21.Sep.43	Heston	SE	38	11
29.Oct.43	Northolt	SE	130	11
8.Mar.44	Llanbedr	SW	6	9
15.Mar.44	Northolt	SE	17	11
1.Apr.44	Deanland	SE	24	11/84/2TAF
26.Apr.44	Chailey	SE	41 (to D-Day)	11/84/2TAF
6.June.44	Chailey	SE	22	11/84/2TAF
28.June.44	Appledram	S	18	11
16.July.44	Ford	SE	18	11/84/2TAF
3.Aug.44	<i>B.10 Plumetot</i>		34	
6.Sep.44	<i>B.31 Londonières</i>		27	
3.Oct.44	<i>B.70 Deurne</i>		7	
11.Oct.44	<i>B.61 St.Denis Westrem</i>		95	
14.Jan.45	<i>B.60 Grimbergen</i>		54	
9.Mar.45	<i>B.77 Gilze-Rijen</i>		35	
13.Apr.45	<i>B.101 Nordhorn</i>		12	
26.Apr.45	Fairwood Common	W	12 (to VE-Day)	10
2.June.45	<i>B.113 Varrelbusch</i>		106	
16.Sep.45	<i>B.111 Ahlhorn</i>		458	

308 (Polish) Squadron served with the occupation forces until disbandment on December 18th, 1946

315 (Polish)

Date	Location	Area	Days	Grp
21.Jan.41	Acklington (Northumberland)	NE	51	13
13.Mar.41	Speke	NW	125	9
16.July.41	Northolt	SE	259	11/84/2TAF
1.Apr.42	Woodvale	NW	158	9/12

6.Sep.42	Northolt	SE	268	11/84/2TAF
1.June.43	Hutton Cranswick	NE	34	12
5.July.43	Ballyhalbert	W	131	13/82
13.Nov.43	Heston	SE	131	11
24.Mar.44	Llanbedr	SW	3	9
28.Mar.44	Heston	SE	3	11
<u>1.Apr.44</u>	<u>Coolham</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>66 (to D-Day)</u>	<u>11/84/2TAF</u>
6.June.44	Coolham	SE	20	11/84/2TAF
26.June.44	Holmsley South	S	1	10
26.June.44	Ford	SE	14	11/84/2TAF
10.July.44	Brenzett	SE	92	11/84/2TAF
10.Oct.44	Andrew's Field	SE	13	11
24.Oct.44	Coltishall	SE	7	12
1.Nov.44	Peterhead	NE	75	14/13
<u>15.Jan.45</u>	<u>Andrew's Field</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>144 (to VE-Day)</u>	<u>11</u>
8.Aug.45	Coltishall	SE	103	12
19.Nov.45	Fairwood Common	W	31	10
26.Dec.45	Coltishall	SE	25	12

315 (Polish) Squadron remained with Fighter Command until disbandment on 14.1.47.

316 (Polish)

Date	Location	Area	Days	Grp
15.Feb.41	Pembrey (Carmarthenshire)	W	123	10
18.June.41	Colerne	S	1	10
2..Aug.41	Church Stanton	SW	132	10
12.Dec.41	Northolt	SE	131	11/84/2TAF
22.Apr.42	Heston	SE	99	11
30.July.42	Hutton Cranswick	NE	225	12
12.Mar.43	Northolt	SE	194	11/84/2TAF
22.Sep.43	Acklington	NE	147	13
16.Feb.44	Woodvale	NW	71	9/12
<u>26.Apr.44</u>	<u>Coltishall</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>41 (to D-Day)</u>	<u>12</u>
6.June.44	Coltishall	SE	28	12
4.July.44	West Malling (Kent)	SE	6	11
11.July.44	Friston	SE	47	11
27.Aug.44	Coltishall	SE	58	12
<u>24.Oct.44</u>	<u>Andrew's Field</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>196 (to VE-Day)</u>	<u>11</u>
16.May.45	Coltishall	SE	86	12
10.Aug.45	Andrews Field	SE	38	11
17.Sep.45	Fairwood Common	W	18	10
5.Oct.45	Andrew's Field	SE	54	11
28.Nov.45	Wick (Caithness)	N	107	13
15.Mar.46	Hethel (?)		271	

316 (Polish) Squadron disbanded on December 11th, 1946.

317 (Polish)

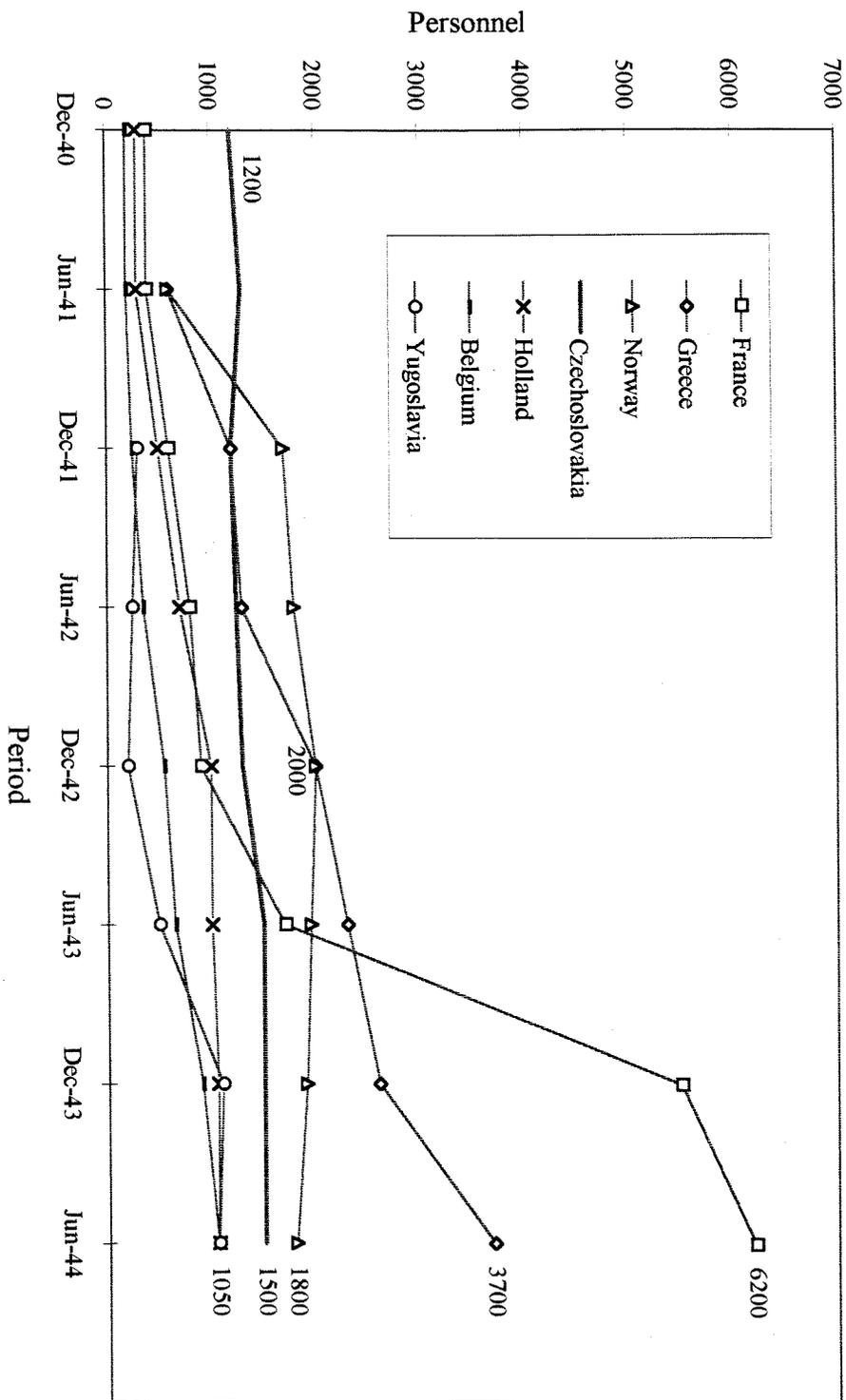
Date	Location	Area	Days	Grp
19.Feb.41	Acklington	NE	77	13
29.Apr.41	Ouston (Northumberland)	NE	58	13/12/9
26.Jun.41	Colerne	S	1	10
27.Jun.41	Fairwood Common	W	24	10

21.Jul.41	Exeter	SW	253	10
1.Apr.42	Northolt	SE	90	11/84/2TAF
30.Jun.42	Croydon (Surrey)	SE	7	11
7.Jul.42	Northolt	SE	60	11/84/2TAF
5.Sep.42	Woodvale	NW	161	9/12
13.Feb.43	Kirton-in-Lindsey	E	75	12/9
29.Apr.43	Martlesham Heath	SE	33	11
1.Jun.43	Heston	SE	20	11
21.Jun.43	Perranporth	SW	61	10
21.Aug.43	Fairlop	SE	31	11
21.Sep.43	Northolt	SE	72	11/84/2TAF
2.Dec.43	Rochford	SE	16	11
18.Dec.43	Northolt	SE	104	11/84/2TAF
1.Apr.44	Deanland	SE	25	84/2TAF
26.Apr.44	Chailey	SE	41 (to D-Day)	11/84/2TAF
6.June.44	Chailey	SE	22	11/84/2TAF
28.Jun.44	Appledram	S	18	11
16.Jul.44	Ford	SE	19	11/84/2TAF
4.Aug.44	<i>B.10 Plumetot</i>		33	
6.Sep.44	<i>Fresnoy-Folny</i>		4	
10.Sep.44	<i>B.51 Lille-Vendeville</i>		23	
3.Oct.44	<i>B.70 Deurne</i>		8	
11.Oct.44	<i>B.61 St.Denis-Westrem</i>		42	
22.Nov.44	Fairwood Common	W	19	10
11.Dec.44	<i>B.61 St.Denis-Westrem</i>		33	
13.Jan.45	<i>B.60 Grimbergen</i>		55	
9.Mar.45	<i>B.77 Gilze-Rijen</i>		24	
2.Apr.45	<i>Grave</i>		2	
4.Apr.45	<i>B.77 Gilze-Rijen</i>		9	
13.Apr.45	<i>B.101 Nordhorn</i>		17	
30.Apr.45	<i>B.113 Varrelbusch</i>		8 (to VE-Day)	
15.Sep.45	<i>B.111 Ahlhorn</i>		-	

July 1946 to December 18th (disbandment) at various European stations.

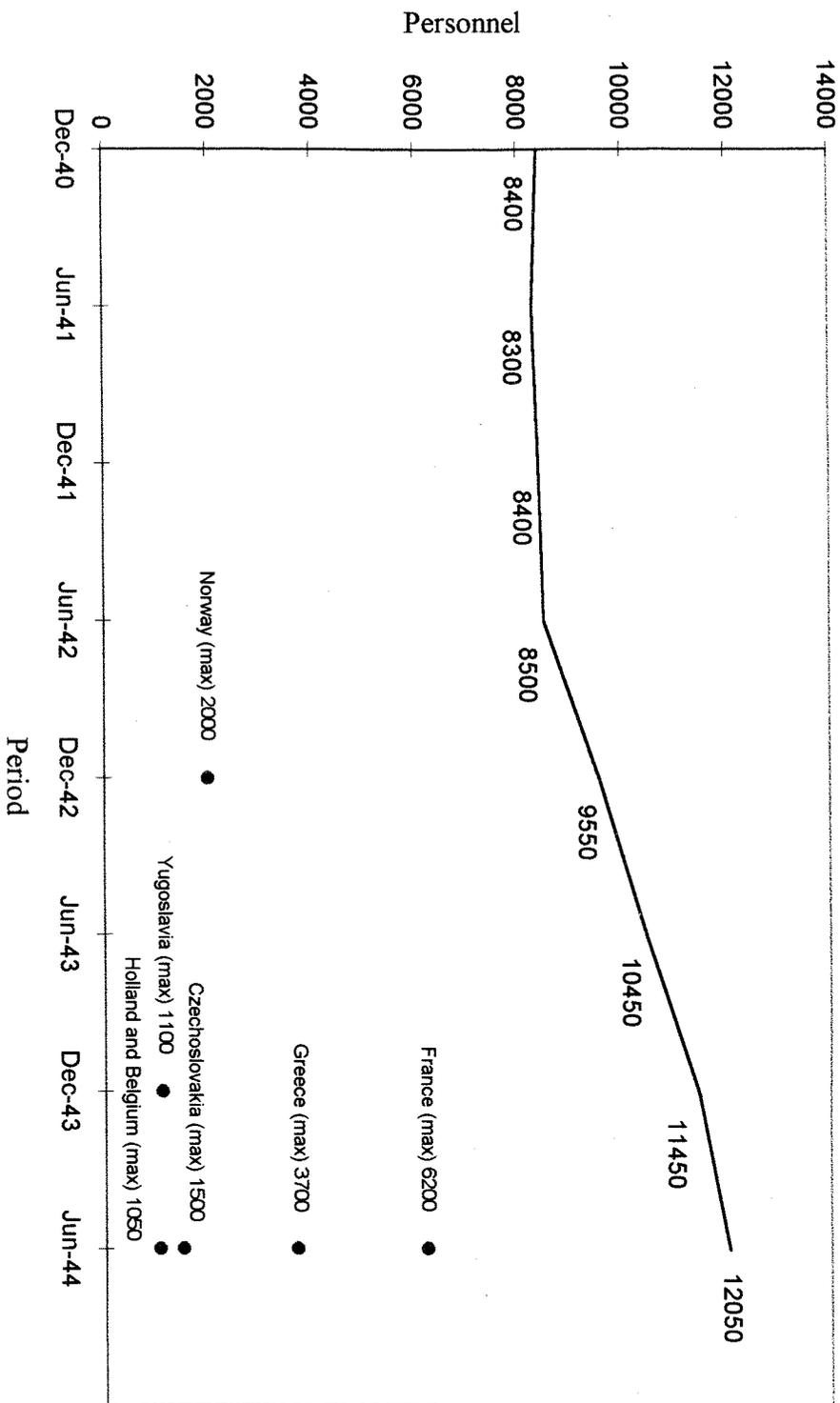
APPENDIX B

Allied Air Strengths (excluding Poland) 1940-1944



APPENDIX C

Polish Air Strength 1940-1944



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- AIR 2 The registered files of the Air Ministry which covers the whole range of Air Ministry correspondence, administration and related subjects.
- AIR 8 The records of the Chief of the Air Staff.
- AIR 16 The files and correspondence relating to the organisation etc. of Fighter Command
- AIR 19 Private office papers, including the memoranda and minutes of the Chief of the Air Staff.
- AIR 20 Air Ministry unregistered papers, including the records of the DAAC and the DAFL.
- AIR 27 Operational record books - squadrons.
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- CAB 85 War Cabinet: Anglo-French Committees and the minutes and papers of the Allied Forces (Official) Sub-Committee.
- CAB 111 Files and correspondence of the Allied Supplies Executive.
- CAB 120 Minister of Defence: Secretariat Files.
- CAB 121 Cabinet Office: Special Secret Information Centre; files and papers.
- FO 371 Foreign Office: Correspondence, political.
- FO 404 Foreign Office: Confidential Print (Czechoslovakia)
- FO 417 Foreign Office: Confidential Print (Czechoslovakia)
- WO 32 War Office: Allied contingents.

In the Czech Republic, no such classification system obtains, but material was drawn from the archives of the VKPR, the MNO, the ČsL VB and various smaller archives and collections. Please refer to the Introduction for further details.

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Jaromír Foretník. Foretník escaped from the Protectorate in 1939 and trained with the French Foreign Legion. Most of his war was spent as a navigator in 311 Bomber Squadron, and he resumed his career at the war's end with the Czechoslovak Air Force in Czechoslovakia until the 1948 coup.

Miroslav A. Liškutín. Liškutín escaped from the Protectorate in 1939 and also trained with the French Foreign Legion until the collapse of France. He saw service in Britain with 145, 312 and 313 fighter squadrons. He is the author of several works of memoirs and other aviation topics.

Marcel Ludikar. Ludikar served with both the Army and Air contingents of the Czechoslovak Forces in Britain. He continues to take an active interest in the history of their time in exile and has amassed considerable documentary material relating to the combat data of the air units. He has written several papers of memoirs, as yet unpublished.

Dr Vilem Munk. Dr Munk left the Protectorate in July 1939 on a *Reichprotektorat* passport supplied by courtesy of the Gestapo who wished to give Jews all possible assistance in their re-location plans. A fully-trained radiographer, he spent the war attached to 311 Bomber Squadron as a medical officer.

Zdeněk Škarvada. Škarvada was a Czech Army pilot from 1935-1939 and was one of the few who saw active service with the Polish Air Force upon the outbreak of war. He flew with 310 squadron in Britain until 4.2.42 when he was shot down over the English Channel. He spent the rest of the war in various German prisoner-of-war camps.

Major-General Gustav Svoboda. Svoboda served with the Independent Czechoslovak Brigade through its period in Britain during the war. He became attached to the MNO through his experiences with Ingr during the inter-war period. After the Communist coup in 1948, he was "re-assigned" to fourteen years in a State coal-mine.

(The late) **Ladislav Valoušek.** Valoušek was also an Army pilot and served with the Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain until 1944 when he was detailed for transfer to the Soviet Union as part of the 'Independent Czech Fighter Squadron.' The squadron assisted the Slovak Uprising and saw further action until the very end of the war.

All interviews were conducted in Britain and the Czech Republic, 1993-1997.