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## Time to Waste

Notes on the Culture of the Enlisted in the  
Professionalizing Czech Military.

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## Time to Waste

Notes on the Culture of the Enlisted in the Professionalizing Czech Military.

### 1 - Introduction

- 1 This essay draws on interviews with fifty enlisted men with whom I worked during two months in the spring of 2001 on an Air Force Base in the Czech Republic. At the time, I was beginning my sixteen-month employment as a military researcher in the Czech Armed Forces (CAF), attempting to gain official access to Air Force officers whom I wanted interview about the changing concepts of the military profession in the new political and military system. Gaining access to the military professionals proved to be a formidable task not only because of the aura of secrecy surrounding this professional cast and all things in the post-Soviet military, but also because of the difficulty of explaining the reasons for such an undertaking by a practitioner of cultural anthropology – a field of social science largely unknown in the Czech Republic, let alone in the Czech military. Until my arrival, most Czech military research in the social sciences had been limited to quantitative opinion and satisfaction surveys whose administration was tightly controlled by two other, mutually competing research units within CAF that employed mostly psychologists and sociologists. In order to convince the military leadership of the value of qualitative cultural analysis as I was proposing it, I suggested conducting a pilot study among the enlisted.
- 2 Contrary to the case of professional officers, getting the permission for my study among the enlisted was not very difficult. About six weeks after I had submitted my proposal and request, I received the order to carry out my research. Several mornings per week for the duration of two months, the Commander of the Air Base, based on the order of the Chief of the General Staff, sent me two to four enlisted men to be interviewed. In the Czech military institution, the roles of the anthropologist and her subject were defined by the chain of command – my research was an execution of an order from the Chief of the General Staff, who ordered the Commander of the Air Base to order the Captain in charge of the enlisted to order them to come to me for an interview. I could forget about what I had learned in my training about modern anthropological theory and its urge to deconstruct the power relations between the anthropologists and their cultural others<sup>1</sup>. In the relationship between the enlisted as the anthropological subjects and me as the anthropologist, the power was clearly distributed – I was the one ordered to ask questions and they were the ones who were ordered to answer.
- 3 My one to two hour interviews followed the same script based on a questionnaire which has been approved by the Chief of the General Staff. The explicitly stated goal of the research for which I had gained the permission was to learn about the views of the enlisted of the military service, their motivation for serving in the military, the comparison between their expectations and the reality of the service, their opinion regarding the contribution of the year in service to their life and career and more general questions targeted at learning about the connection between the motivation of the men to serve in the military and their relationship to the nation state. The findings of this research, which I duly presented to the military leadership as a readable report that included citations and Excel pies based on statistical data and content analysis<sup>2</sup> showed a grim portrait. Except for one interviewee who reported that he had established a nice friendship with another enlisted man, the conscripts felt that military service did not bring them anything. In the words of many interviewees, their service in the CAF was a “waste of time.”

4 The image of time as something being wasted during the military service reappeared throughout the interviews – both in the discourse and the material cultural practices demonstrated to me by my interviewees. In this article, I return to the material that I collected during my study among the conscripts. I will argue that “time” serves as a crucial trope for the Czech enlisted men. Through a particular definition of “time,” different from that shared by the majority society, the enlisted form a bond as a separate cultural group. The specialized knowledge of “time” of the enlisted is a source of their self-definition as a group – their intimate cultural knowledge. This cultural know-how allows them to assume social agency in a situation when they are turned into liminal personae, placed outside of society by others, temporarily deprived of the individual rights for self-direction, their work alienated. The conscripts’ agency, which draws on a unique concept of time, is especially important in the context of the process of military professionalization. This is because professionalization, based as it is on the elimination of general conscription, depreciates the value of the conscripts’ work for the military and the nation state. Because of the central role of the soldier in the Czech national imagination, this change in the role and character of the soldier’s work and position challenges traditional concepts of national identity. One of the most manifest aspects of this process centers on the symbolic role of the Good Soldier Švejk as the model symbolizing the ideal Czech soldier in the past times, which is currently being deemed unfit for the tasks of the future professionalized military.

## 2 - Professionalization as the Decorroding Treatment

5 Military professionalization has been the topic of discussion in the Czech political arena since the end of the socialist times. On the one hand, professionalization was seen as the most efficient way of the depoliticizing and restructuring of the Czech and Slovak military from totalitarian to democratic forces<sup>3</sup>. In addition, professionalization promised to abolish the very unpopular law of general conscription, which has been in existence in the Czech lands since the mid-1900.<sup>4</sup> Despite much political talk, however, it took twelve years for professionalization to become the official program for the military sector of the state<sup>5</sup>.

6 This slow pace can be explained by the problematic position of the military sector in Czech politics and society. Highly discredited because of its subservience to the Soviet occupying forces since 1968, the Czech military was not perceived by most Czechs as an honorable institution dedicated to the defense of a national territory and Czech citizens, but on the contrary – an ally of the enemy<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, the Czechoslovak People’s Army, the pawn of the Soviet colonial empire, has never fought a war in its history – first demobilized under the German and later under the Soviet occupation. Burdened by the history of acquiescence and passivity, the Czech Armed Forces presented a dilemma for the new leaders of the post-socialist state. This situation began to change when the Czech Republic prepared for its accession to NATO. In 1999, by gaining the NATO membership, ostensibly a political organization which nevertheless relies for its power and influence on military prowess, the Czech state (and the international community) placed an enormous weight of responsibility and importance on the Czech military. After a period of disinterest in military matters following the end of socialism, the military was now endowed with the task of bringing the Czech Republic into the fold of Western democratic states.

7 In 2001, the new charismatic leader of the military sector, Minister Jaroslav Tvrdik was the first one to realize the upcoming opportunity and to harness the ‘war machine’ for his party’s political agenda. In 2001, replacing his discredited Social Democratic Party colleague, Tvrdik introduced an intensive campaign at military reform. Professionalization appeared as the main reorganizing principle, setting the year 2006 as the last year of general conscription<sup>7</sup>. In Tvrdik’s campaign, professionalization is portrayed as the general remedy for the ills of the post-socialist military. One of the most visible forms of the campaign was a series of leaflets

distributed with the main Czech daily, *Mlada Fronta Dnes*. The first leaflet, for example, was a large-size photo showing a detail of the Czech insignia on a rusting green metal background of military machinery. The rust was advancing into the center of the ensign and a warning note at the bottom of the page read, “Time to do something“ (“*Čas něco udělat*”). On the other side of the flyer there were several captions set to the same background of a rusting metal. The first piece of text asked: “What do we feel when hear the name of the Czech Armed Forces ? Self-confidence ? Strength ? Or even pride ?” Clearly the questions were rhetorical, because without providing an answer first, the next note said: “But that is how it should be. But that would mean to have a military always able to protect and to help where help is needed. Professional armed forces – less of a people’s military, but a military more humane (*Profesionalni armadu – mene lidovou a vice lidskou*).” The concluding caption provided an explanation and information regarding the authorship of the surprising addition to the daily: “What are we doing to make this happen ? Everything. No facials, but a strict diet. A change in thinking, modernization. No ordering around (*Zádná buzerace*), but a lot of work. And the deadline ? The year 2006. The Reform of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic.” Signed – “The Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, [www.army.cz](http://www.army.cz)”

8 In the next flyer that appeared in the paper a few days later, the message was the same, but the photo was different. It showed a military sapper in high-tech protective gear searching for mines on a desolate soccer field located in some remote war-torn place. A large caption at the bottom of the page read: “We are not playing at being soldiers (*Nehrajem si na vojaky*).” The other side contained a “short guide to coping with the military reform,” whose goals were: “A healthy, professional military. A military of full readiness, a military able to be in the right place at the right time. A military that is slim, modern and thinking. A military without rust. A military full of good and competent soldiers.” Signed “Jaroslav Tvrdik, the Minister of Defense of the Czech Republic.”

9 These newspaper inserts were accompanied by other propaganda materials such as the small recruitment brochure targeted at youth, *Tomorrow Belongs to the Professionals*<sup>8</sup>. The campaign, which coincided with the period of my fieldwork on the air force bases of the Czech Armed Forces (February 2001 – June 2002), initiated great upheavals in military matters, which were further intensified by international consequences of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in the United States and the ensuing war on terrorism. Through it, the Czech state made a serious attempt, for the first time in its post-socialist history, to consolidate its own authority with that of its military institution. It was a peculiar moment in post-socialist modernity, when the strange space of power, which always exists between the state and its institution of legitimate violence, was being filled and organized according to the rules of a new rationality<sup>9</sup>. Professionalization appeared as the technology of this process, through which not only the military, but the larger apparatus of power that Deleuze and Guattari call *the war machine* began changing its position vis-à-vis the state and society<sup>10</sup>.

10 Allegorically expressed as the decorruding treatment (the warning slogan “Time to Do Something” on a rusting background of military technology or the expressive call “new military without rust”), or as the end of the period of play with respect to things military (“We’re Not Playing at Being Soldiers”) and summarized eloquently in the prediction “Tomorrow Belongs to the Professionals,” the professionalization campaign makes a clear break with the past. The history belongs to the conscription military, to the culture of the enlisted. Professionalization aims at placing the enlisted in the former times, while showing the future as that of the military professionals. As I will try to show and as I argued elsewhere<sup>11</sup>, the process of professionalization, based as it is on the elimination of general conscription and technological and organizational modernization, however, involves deep changes both in the culture of the enlisted and the larger field of national cultural imagination and identity politics.

### 3 - Rambos vs. Švejk

- 11 In the Czech context, one of the largest tasks for professionalization has been to bring seriousness and importance to the discredited military institution, which has been a target of popular jokes rather than a source of pride and serious respect for the Czechs and Slovaks. The most pervasive symbol of the popular laughter at power has been the Good Soldier Švejk, the internationally famous hero of an antiwar novel by Jaroslav Hasek<sup>12</sup>. Švejk, the literary anti-hero, spends much time professing his patriotism and devotion to the monarchy and its war campaign. Through his behavior, which his superiors name “idiotic” (and Švejk cheerfully endorses this classification), the Good Soldier Švejk literally and perfectly executes orders assigned to him. Nevertheless, he manages to never complete what his superiors want him to do and his actions are unfailingly disastrous for the war effort. Through his actions and stories of quotidian life, grotesque in their mixture of hilarity, cruelty and violence, Švejk disarms his superiors and by never as much as mentioning the war, let alone engaging in it, we are certain in our laughter that he is fully and at every moment victorious over the war machine. Since the inter-war period, the Good Soldier Švejk has been a symbol of the common soldier’s resistance to war, and by extension – the common citizen’s resistance to the absurdities of state bureaucratic power.
- 12 For many years, Švejk has functioned as a model for self-identification not only for the involuntary draftees – the enlisted in the Czech military - but was frequently extended to include the Czech nation as such: living under foreign military occupation and domestic totalitarianism, the Czechs identified with Švejk’s passive resistance to oppression. Most often, Švejk has been evoked through discursive contraptions - “*Švejkárna*”, “*Švejkovat*” or “*Švejkoviny*”. “*Švejkovat*” (to do things like Švejk), “*Švejkoviny*” (activities reminiscent of those of Švejk) and “*Švejkárna*” (situation evocative of the grotesqueness of Švejk’s legendary escapades) are usually spoken to mark situations of absurdity and contradiction. Most obviously, these are situations, in which the common sense of a smaller and less powerful entity confronts the irrational rationality of a larger and more powerful body. But in the resulting effect, the former wins over the latter against all odds by virtue of the comic principle - laughter is what defeats the adversary and brings victory to the powerless. The apparently self-critical identification of the Czechs with Švejk as the anti-hero, has thus always contained a subversive element: through the Good Soldier Švejk who ultimately wins over the war machine by subverting its seriousness through the comic principle, the Czechs have laughed and often won over oppressive power. Consistent with the logic of cultural intimacy<sup>13</sup> Švejk has functioned as the Czechs’ self-deprecating label for the outside world, while at the same time performing the role of a social bond among people on the home front.
- 13 The professionalization campaign directly challenges this national fantasy. The Czech government officials and the press, concerned with the poor reputation of the Czech military inside and outside of the country have repeatedly evoked the name of the Good Soldier to criticize the institution for its low preparedness and the slow pace of post-Soviet reforms. “Let’s Put an End to Švejkism!,” screamed a title of a newspaper article published shortly before the Czech Republic joined NATO<sup>14</sup>. The author who subtitled his article, “NATO: We need to convince the public,” pleaded with the Czech public, at the time still lukewarm about the upcoming accession to the Alliance, to become serious about military and security affairs and consider all the advantages of NATO membership. According to the author, a major obstacle to changing people’s attitude toward the role of the military was of course nobody else but Švejk:
- “[Š]vejkism, might have helped us survive through the bad times, which we have lived through in this century. But let us face the fact that Švejk is not a hero that should be followed, but a dog thief with the innocent face of a baby, who always took good care – of himself. Today, this kind of thinking will not bring us security.”

- 14 In a feature article published by a leading Czech weekly shortly after September 11th events in the United States, entitled, “Rambos versus Švejks: Why Do People Laugh at Our Military?”, the author describes the Czech military as composed of “handful of elite gunman and thousands of useless men to fill the ranks” - few elite Rambos among many Švejks<sup>15</sup>. In his reckoning, the Rambos are “professionals” in the use of military violence and “to them the future belongs.” Their chief attributes are their superior technical and physical skills, which combined with the knowledge of English and personal qualities emphasizing self-confidence and professional detachment make them deployable in international operations, outside of the country borders. The participation of these professionals in international operations brings a good name to the Czech military – a reputation that the country’s leaders desperately desire. This is because through the good results of the elite soldiers, not only the Czech military, but the Czech state gain points on the precarious scale measuring the degree of redirected loyalty and Westernization of the Cold War adversary who has only so very recently become an ally. The Švejks are the bored and incapable conscripts who are bringing shame to the military with their negative attitude to service and the military institution in general (Illustration 1).
- 15 It is understandable that for the achievement of the desired goal – a military full of NATO-compatible Rambos - the Švejks must be eliminated. The current efforts at bringing seriousness to the military through its professionalization, therefore, rely simultaneously on the elimination of the enlisted from the military ranks and on the removal of Švejk from his place of prominence in the national imagination. Not surprisingly, therefore, the conscripts’ identification with Švejk has been and continues to be strong. During my interviews with them, the conscripts would often interrupt their narrative during interviews with the expression, “That was *Švejkárna*, man!,” to comment on a situation when they found themselves on the intersection of two mutually contradictory orders from their superiors. The conscript, by executing these conflicting commands literally, but with disastrous effects for the military institution would then be said to “*Švejkovat*” or to have been engaged in activities summarized under the term of “*Švejkoviny*”.
- 16 A 22-year-old enlisted man, who had to leave his job as a mason when he was drafted, answered my standard question regarding his opinion of the readiness of the Czech military to engage in combat in the following way:

“This military? This military is that of Švejks and to send us to war would be a sure murder. Look at the equipment and the training we get! I have been here for three months and fired six shots at a training range using a thirty-year old rifle. Instead of teaching us how to fight, they use us to guard the hangars at the airport. But there is nothing inside the buildings that we are supposed to protect! They have no planes there or ammunition, and so we spend the whole draft-year guarding nothing. That’s simply a *Švejkárna* !” (“*To je normální Švejkárna !*”)

- 17 By commenting on their experience from serving in the Czech military as a situation of absurdity reminiscent of Švejk’s adventures, the conscripts were reaffirming their connections to the figure of Švejk and his lasting power as an appropriate symbol for describing the Czech military. In stressing the emptiness of the military discipline and lack of the CAF’s combat readiness, they were contradicting official efforts at bringing seriousness to the Czech military institution. By reaffirming Švejk’s lasting relevance to describing things military and by stressing their connection to the symbol, they were resisting the official efforts at turning the institution into a professional force and making the conscripts irrelevant to the new national military system.

## 4 - Time to Waste

- 18 In the turning of a negative image into a source of cultural identity and social agency, the Czech enlisted men resemble other disadvantaged cultural groups around the world<sup>16</sup>. The enlisted men in militaries across the globe share the experience of what Erving Goffman has

called a “total institution” – a place which imposes a different set of rules, quite separate from those of society. But contrary to the generally assumed image of inmates as passive recipients of orders, inhabitants of total institutions develop various strategies that help them survive the institution in which they have been involuntarily placed<sup>17</sup>. Joris Van Bladel, for example, suggests that Russian *dedovshchina*, “the informal hierarchical structure installed among the group of soldiers that is primarily based on seniority,” is such a response of soldiers as active agents to the perverse effects created by total institutions<sup>18</sup>. The application of an anthropological framework, I suggest, can help us further explain the potential of the enlisted to become agents in the conditions of an oppressive total institution that imposes discipline directed at the suppression of their individual and social identity. The enlisted seem to fit particularly well into the anthropological category of liminal beings, a term customarily applied to mark a person or a group in the middle period of the rites-of-passage, such as a neophyte during the puberty initiation rituals that bring him or her into adulthood<sup>19</sup>. Liminal entities are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law”<sup>20</sup>. The enlisted men as liminal entities experience the transitory stage from becoming men from boys, from half to full citizens of their nation states. As Turner reminds us, liminal entities, suspended as they are in a stage of a “post” and a “pre” and excluded from social life, are ambiguous and potentially disruptive, escaping classification and possessing of an openness that challenges harmony, hierarchy and structure. It is in this context that I propose to view the hierarchical system of authority among the Czech enlisted men and its disruptive potential on the formal system of discipline in the Czech military.

19 Time is a precious commodity in capitalism, which, unlike time in task-oriented societies that follow a nature-bound life rhythm, is strictly measured and can be sold, bought, used well or wasted<sup>21</sup>. As an instrument that measures labor, time in capitalism is also an instrument of control and discipline<sup>22</sup>. In the context of the professionalizing Czech military, which is a part of Czech society experiencing transition into the capitalist system, the liminal period of military service becomes strongly defined by the enlisted as time out of time, as time being lost from their lives. In their interviews with me, the men complained heavily about this aspect of the military service:

“Military service is a total waste of time and money. I think that it is fundamentally useless. Everybody just wants to finish the service and get to the end.” (22 years old, high-school graduate)

“I thought I would learn something here, but I am just wasting my time.” (20-year old, completed vocational training)

“While I am here, my colleagues from the university are getting their work experience. They are making money and I am just losing my time.” (23-year old, technical university graduate)

“Today, military service is a waste of time. I did not expect it. I thought it would be better. Here, the officers call you during your duty to come and clean their office. That is such a waste of time. I thought I would learn something about combat and things military. But all they do is that they use us as cheap labor – we are the cheapest cooks and cleaners of trash.” (25-year old, completed three years of technical university)

20 Because of the process of reform, many units in the military had to save money and the most obvious place to do so was the training of the enlisted. Instead of providing military training, the Czech military mostly turned the enlisted into what in their popular jargon the interviewees called *UBS*, when asked about their function in the unit. *UBS* stands for *univerzalni bouchac sluzeb* (universal duty doer) and consists in standing on guard at the assigned places of the base. Not surprisingly, in their complaints about time wasting, most men were expressing their disappointment when they compared the reality of service with their expectations prior to it. To my surprise, 64 percent of the men responded that they wanted to complete the military service and did not try to avoid it. Importantly, a majority (78%) of this number

explained their attitude as: “military service is a part of life and without it, you are not a man.” The disenchantment of the enlisted was a result of the discrepancy between their traditional expectations of the military service as a rites-of-passage into manhood. The imagined military service was filled with physical training and hardship as a preparation for defending the nation. The real military service consisted in the passive duty system in an institution that clearly considered the conscripts unfit for any real military tasks. The frustration of the enlisted was further aggravated by the other most frequent activity assigned to them – cleaning and cooking. The traditional “femininity” of these tasks further contributed to the conscripts’ feeling of emasculation.

21 The system of *mazactvi*, I suggest, the hierarchical system of authority among the Czech conscripts based as it is on the length time spent in service, is their response to these totalizing effects of the military institution. The year of service is taken out of regular life of the individual and his social time. Life in the system of *mazactvi* starts with the beginning of service and is divided into four principle stages disrespectful of the actual physical age and/or social standing (based on class, profession or education) of the individual outside of the military. The person’s place in the hierarchy is fully determined by the time that he has spent in the military. Each transition to the next stage is marked by the rites-of-passage, which involves psychological and physical violence perpetrated by the senior on the junior conscripts. Importantly, most violence is based on the humiliation of the neophyte by making him do activities traditionally associated with women, such as cleaning or by calling him by derogative names destined for female victims (pussy, whore, etc.).

22 Because of the dressing code associated with the system of *mazactvi*, the enlisted are easily able to identify the individual’s position in the hierarchy. This cultural code works efficiently to determine seniority in social interactions. Because officially forbidden, the breaking of the dress code is also a typical example of “messing up” – a way of showing the senior’s conscripts’ lack of respect for officers and the military institution<sup>23</sup>. For example, after each stage, the conscript was able to change the system of tying his boots to include more of the so called “bridges.” He could also tie his belt lower and loosen the tie on his barrette. A particularly interesting set of hierachical markings included the custom of weaving a special lash, called *mazacenka* preferably from the boot laces, which the senior enlisted would hang on their key chains. The custom of weaving *mazacenka*, closely resembles another Czech tradition of weaving *pomlazka* - a lash from willow branches made and used by men to lash women on Easter Monday. *Mazacenka* like *pomlazka* are material symbols of men’s prowess and dominance over women; in the hierarchical system of *mazactvi*, they can only be woven and worn by *mazaci*, the senior conscripts in the system of *mazactvi*, the only real men among the emasculated and dominated enlisted.

23 The cultural custom most explicitly connected to time as the basis for the hierarchical system of *mazactvi* and by extension the clearest expression of the reversal of the official military’s concept of time, is a system of measurement of days left to the end of service. Once the conscript has 150 days left to the end, he starts counting the dead days, symbolized by a section of the taylor’s measuring tape. The measuring tape is placed in an empty plastic container of the Kinder Egg, which is hung on a key chain. Each cut off section of the measuring tape symbolizes a day and is termed “the dead” and placed in another Kinder Egg container on the key chain. The connection between two Kinder Eggs on the key chain and men’s genitalia (both called *vejce* in Czech) is more than a matter of linguistics. The two “eggs” hanging on the key chain, containing the *dead* days of completed service are the embodiments of the conscripts’ manhood. Moreover, like the Easter eggs that the Czech men get for lashing the women on Easter Monday, the Kinder Eggs on the key chain are **earned** trophies. Contrary to the passive reality the enlisted’s tasks in the professionalizing military, the customs related

to the measurement of time which are a part of the hierarchival system of *mazactvi*, mark the time as filled with manhood-building activity.

24 In a situation which defined them as passive neophytes doomed to wasting one year of their life, the enlisted in the professionalizing Czech military assumed agency in a way typical for their hero – the Good Soldier Svejk. Taken out of society and subjected to the rules of the total institution, they took discipline to the extreme and made time, the military’s tool for their oppression, into an instrument of their own, albeit imagined, agency.

## 5 - Postscript

25 Everyday, as I arrived at work at the Air Force Base, I was welcome at the gate by heavily smoking conscripts. Dressed in green camouflage with blue berets, young and bored beyond belief, their eyes spilling apathy, the involuntary conscripts appeared to me as heralds of earlier times, a dying species in the era of military professionalization. The physical youth of the men contrasted sharply with their occupational obsolescence as soldiers. They were unwilling laymen in the age that was to belong to enthusiastic professional practitioners of the art of military violence, which made the former appear irrevocably stuck in the past. When I was later traveling through many Czech bases during my research, the enlisted men’s boredom, which channeled the general misery of the post-socialist Czech military establishment, projected a distinct aura of intimacy. Because of the initial research, which I was conducting among them, I was able to tell, by the details of their uniforms, the ways that they tied their shoelaces and straps of their beret how many days they had left till the end of his service. This cultural know-how as well as the soldier’s distinct unprofessionalism gave me a certain level of self-assurance. As I watched them, filling out my pass, unhurriedly dropping cigarette ashes on my ID, I felt the anthropologist’s honor to have been able to witness and record a culture threatened with immediate disappearance.

### **Illustration 1: “Rambové versus Švejci” (“Rambos versus Švejks”).**

Source: Karel Vrána, *Týden*, 8 October, 2001, pp. 16-17.

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### **Endnotes**

1 T. Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press. 1988 ; Clifford, James. “On Ethnographic Authority.” *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1988 ; G. Marcus and M. Fischer, *Anthropology as a Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1986 ; E. Said, *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

2 H. Cervinkova, Hana. *Průzkumná sonda nazoru vojaku základni služby na působení v ACR (HF Monitor 80)*. Prague: July 2001.

3 M. Vlachova, “Professionalization of the Army of the Czech Republic.” Conference Paper, *Transforming Post-Communist Militaries: Professionalisation of the Armed Forces in Central and Eastern Europe*. Joint Services Command Staff College, Watchfield, April 2001.

4 In 1990, the government shortened the two-year period of conscription service to eighteen months and introduced optional civilian service for men who refused to serve in the army for religious or other reasons. Since 1993, the conscription period has been only one year long, but the number of men entering military service continued to decrease considerably. While in 1993, there were 68 630 enlisted in CAF, their number in 2001 was only 24 955 (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, *The Reform of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic*. Prague: AVIS. 2001, p.43). This was both due to the unpopularity of military service and the falling number of male population. The number of 18-year old men in the Czech Republic in 1993 was 94 000, in 2001 only 70 500, with a further decreasing projection for the year 2018 at 46 000 individuals (*Ibid*).

5 Vlachova , 2001, *Op. Cit.*

- 6 C. Rice, *The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak Army, 1948 - 1983: Uncertain Allegiance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1984 ; J. Simon, *Warsaw Pact Forces: Problems of Command and Control*. Boulder and London: Westview Press. 1985 ; M.P. Ulrich, *Democratizing Communist Militaries: The Cases of the Czech and Russian Armed Forces*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. 1999.
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### ***Abstract***

This essay draws on the author's fieldwork research in the Czech Armed Forces (2002-2002) and focuses on the culture of the enlisted - the young Czech men who are drafted into the military for one year of compulsory service. The article argues that the culture of the enlisted is based on the opposition to the military and by extension the Czech state, which define the enlisted as neophytes - mutually equal and indistinguishable entities in transition to being full male citizens of the Czech state as well as transitory entities before the military is professionalized in 2006. The article analyses the various material and ritual elements of the conscripts' culture through which they resist the official efforts at their equalization.

***Keywords*** : Czech Republic, Professionalization, Military Service, Military Culture, Mazactvi, Draft, Dedovshchina, Czech Military Reforms, Czech Armed Forces

***Research Fields*** : Anthropology

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