Military Reenactment, Military Heritage, and Historical Conflicts and Traumas in Czech Lands

An international academic conference, held in Prague (CZ)
at Charles University, Faculty of Humanities (FHS UK), 29–30 August 2024.

CO-ORGANISED BY:
Charles University, Faculty of Humanities (FHS UK)
Czech Society for Military Historical Research (SVDV)

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:
Day 1: **Prof. Dr. Juliane Tomann** (Universität Regensburg)
Day 2: **Dr hab. Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska** (Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk)

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FAKULTA HUMANITNÍCH STUDIÍ
Univerzita Karlova

SVDV SPOLEČNOST PRO VÝZKUM DĚJIN VOJENSTVÍ

PRELIMINARY PROGRAMME

29 AUGUST 2024

9:00 Registration

9:30 Petr Wohlmuth
Opening remarks
The situation of re-enactment studies in Czech lands

SESSION 1
CHALLENGES OF MILITARY REENACTMENT RESEARCH

9:45 Juliane Tomann
Keynote lecture 1:
Doing Gender in Historical Reenactments

10:30 Discussion
11:00 Coffee break

11:15 Petr Wohlmuth
Actor strategies to "normalize" Axis Germany re-enactment in Czech lands

11:40 Jiří Hlaváček
Culture of weapons in military re-enactment: between actor's reflection and the actorship of material objects

12:05 Lenka Hadarová [online]
Women-only WWII military re-enactment associations in Czechia: between authenticity and emancipation

12:30 Přemysl Vacek
Resurrecting the millennial warrior: the possibilities and limits of early medieval military re-enactment practice

12:55 Discussion
13:15 Lunch break

SESSION 2
REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE PLANS

14:45 Tomáš Kykal
"Not so bad with me yet if I make it to the finish after all..." Minuteman – a winter survival competition made by reenactors for themselves

15:10 Ondřej Král
Reenactment – an auxiliary science of history?

15:35 Tomáš Konečný
Is it just a hobby?

16:00 Tereza Šubrtová
Reenactment of Soviet armed forces in Czech lands since 1989

16:25 Discussion

30 AUGUST 2024

SESSION 3
CONSTRUCTING, CONTESTING, AND REENACTING

10:00 Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska
Keynote lecture 2:
WWII historical re-enactment in Poland: the practice of authenticity

10:45 Discussion
11:15 Coffee break

11:30 Vítězslav Prchal
Memory displaced: the history of the Habsburg army in Czech historiography, military traditions and public space after 1990.

11:55 Lukáš Lexa
The path to reconciliation through "converted uniforms"?

12:20 Pavol Šteiner
Transition of the front-line from Slovakia to Moravia in April 1945. Evidences from archaeological excavations at the site Holíč-Šibenica

12:45 Jozef Konya
Research and protection of fortifications from the Second World War in southwestern Slovakia

13:10 Discussion

13:30 Petr Wohlmuth
Closing remarks

Juliane Tomann
University of Regensburg
KEYNOTE LECTURE 1: Doing Gender in Historical Reenactments

Petr Wohlmuth
Charles University, Faculty of Humanities
Actor strategies to "normalize" Axis Germany re-enactment in Czech lands
"Nothing is more on the edge than the re-enactment of Germany in World War II," said Jörg, one of the key narrators of the current large-scale oral history project focused on the contemporary history and culture of military re-enactment in the Czech lands. He was referring to a whole complex of problems, at the centre of which is the characterisation of such re-enactors as implicit followers of Nazi ideology. Over the last twenty years, however, the re-enactment of Axis Germany forces in the Czech environment has undergone a complicated development, at the end of which a significant majority of actors practice complex culturally constructed strategies aimed at "normalising" such re-enactor activities and making them generally acceptable. In my paper, I will analyse three such strategies. Firstly the strategy of "commercial pressure", then the strategy of "national indifference" (using the example of groups emphasizing the fate of former Czechoslovak citizens who were involuntarily incorporated into the German armed forces after 1938) and the "third position" strategy (exemplified by a group re-enacting the soldiers of the 20th Estonian Waffen SS Division). In all three cases, their strategies seem to be successful regarding the public discourse on reenactment.

Jiří Hlaváček
Charles University, Faculty of Humanities
Culture of weapons in military re-enactment: between actor's reflection and the actorship of material objects
The paper focuses on the issue of weapons and their possible material-historical, emotional, practical, and symbolic meanings in the context of military re-enactment based on a narrative analysis of oral-historical interviews. Selected actor reflections are examined in the broader contexts of gun culture, the culture of war, and combat culture. The basic ideas of these theories and concepts can also be applied metaphorically to the military re-enactment environment in three intertwining levels. On the material level, weapons are primarily reflected as material objects, which in many cases have the nature of historical artefacts endowed with material authenticity. On the affective level, weapons represent a source of diverse affects and emotions, especially at the level of mass battles in connection with the interactional authenticity. Finally, on the actor level, weapons are considered essential (inanimate) actors and determinants, from which the possibilities and limits of combat imitation are derived, which - in contrast to the affective level - manifest instead on the individual level of the subjective experience of physicality (i.e., introspective authenticity). The synergy of these three levels forms the resulting historical authenticity, an unattainable ideal that re-enactors strive for with their activity.

Lenka Hadarová
Charles University, Faculty of Humanities
Women-only WWII military re-enactment associations in Czechia: between authenticity and emancipation
The participation of women in Czech WWII military reenactment reflects a complex interplay between historically authentic performance, gender dynamics, and individual motivations. The historical emphasis on masculinity in martial narratives has long overlooked female roles, contributing to the underrepresentation of women in historical military reenactment in Czechia. Through oral history interviews, the study explores the narratives of three women in military reenactment, tracing their historical subjectivity by analysing its components in terms of different cultural forms and content. The paper retraces their first steps and reveals why they joined the women-only associations. It argues that formation of women-only associations creates a safe space for transformative and empowering development, offering autonomy and a platform for women to shape their historical subjectivities. These associations in turn contribute to broader understanding of women's roles in military history and represent a significant step within the contemporary Czech reenactment community.

Přemysl Vacek
Charles University, Faculty of Humanities
Resurrecting the millennial warrior: the possibilities and limits of early medieval military re-enactment practice
Military re-enactment of the early Middle Ages is an activity in which participants (re)construct and re-enact material artefacts, techniques and events related to the military culture of the period. In recent years, the interest of some local re-enactors has become more focused on crafts, construction and agricultural activities, trade or rituals related to early medieval culture, and thus has taken on more of a broadly defined living history character. For actors whose historical subjectivity has been immersively based, re-enactor identity forms a kind of parallel stream of their civic life and becomes an intrinsic part of their lifestyle. This paper focuses primarily on analytical schemes for negotiating historical authenticity and Reihart Koselleck's concept of “multiple temporalities,” which I use here to bring into focus the re-enactors' experiential “mental travel” between the present and the past, as well as their efforts to revive the medieval warrior, artisan, and man in the present. Oral history in its post-positivist paradigm has become the dominant method for uncovering the subjective experience of re-enactors. The representations contained in the interviews are a source of modulated personal experiences expressing the actors' perceived role within the re-enactment movement, as well as articulating their self-concept in history.

Tomáš Kykal
Military history institute Prague
„Not so bad with me yet if I make it to the finish after all...“ Minuteman – a winter survival competition made by re-enactors for themselves
The presented annual winter survival competition is a unique phenomenon, not only for the 29-year-long unbroken tradition. The event, named after the New England militia of the American War of Independence, grew out of a winter encampment first organized by Czech re-enactors in February 1994. Organizers then devised a variation in the form of an

orientation march, which included tasks that tested the participants on their military and bushcraft skills or knowledge. Since 2005, the competition has been open to re-enactors of all historical periods, which enabled teams and individuals to measure their skills almost side by side. I will present not only the historical development of this event but I will also reflect on the motivations of its participants. What does this event, which places high demands on the physical and mental stamina of all participants, bring to them? I base my observations on my long experience as a contestant.

Ondřej Král
Palacký University of Olomouc

Reenactment – an auxiliary science of history?

Reenactment is an inherently complex phenomenon that requires a great deal of very detailed information on minor topics. Each re-enactor not only needs accurate materials for sewing the uniform (replicas of buttons, emblems, tassels etc.), but also details of equipments and other period furnishings. In order to make the re-enactor's further work meaningful, an accurate knowledge of the period training regulations is required both at the individual and unit level, and in the context of reenacting actions, also at the level of wider cooperation between other units ("enemy" units included). Some re-enactors are engaged in other activities at the level of experimental reconstruction: shooting with historical weapons, war games according to period manuals etc. There are many experts in the reenactment environment on sub-topics and the current level of Czech reenactment is the result of their combined efforts. This paper will discuss reenactment as a specific amateur scientific activity with overlaps into the history of clothing, the history of everyday life and military history in a broader context.

Tomáš Konečný
Military history institute Prague.

Is it just a hobby?

The authenticity of military-historical reconstructions is a key value for the re-enactors. Therefore, their desire for the most authentic experience leads them not only to undergo challenging conditions (sleeping in the cold, long marches, etc.), but also motivates them to research. Enthusiastic re-enactors conduct research comparable to that of experts. They deal with material culture (composition and texture of fabrics, the shape and cut of uniforms), study army regulations (whether military command techniques or surviving records from army stores) and also learn about the soldiers' mental world. Unlike historians, however, they apply their knowledge as much as possible in practice. This paper explores how authentically conducted military-historical reconstruction allows the historian to view his knowledge from a different, "practical" perspective. Using the example of the reconstruction of a military skirmish from the Napoleonic Wars. It raises the question of the limits of authenticity and discusses what lived experience enables the historian to do and how it can expand his knowledge.

Tereza Šubrtová
Charles University, Faculty of Humanities

Reenactment of Soviet armed forces in Czech lands since 1989

This paper will introduce the topic of a dissertation project, which I intend to work on in the coming years. So far, my thesis has focused on the presence of the Soviet army on the territory of Czechoslovakia between 1968–1991, and especially on how it is symbolically represented in the narrators' memories. This has led me to consider how the Soviet armed forces are generally represented in Czech society and memory, and through which commemorative actions they are made present. Thus, I will be interested in the culture and consequently the history of re-enactment in the Czech lands after 1989 with a specific focus on the re-enactment of the Soviet armed forces. I will approach such a topic from an interdisciplinary position, primarily from the perspectives of historical anthropology, memory studies, oral history with overlap into other disciplines. Concepts such as authenticity, production of historical meaning, gender, corporeality, materiality and non-human agency, affectivity and emotion, and memory practices will be at the centre of my interest. My main task will be to thematise the relationship between the past and the present, with which different actorial readings and interpretations of history, also as contemporary politics of memory, are connected.

Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska
Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences
KEYNOTE LECTURE 2: WWII historical re-enactment in Poland: the practice of authenticity
The process of the democratisation of history turns the past into a hot topic, persistently present in the public sphere and often evoking strong emotions. Ethnographic research conducted in 2012-2020 in Poland allowed me to investigate how World War II re-enactors experience the past. These data served me as the basis to analyse the ways in which this group uses the widespread, often institutionalised interest in history to – on the one hand – become involved in debates on World War II and the remembrance thereof, and – on the other – to authentically touch this past. I therefore focus on the bodily process of creating and experiencing grassroots visions of history and how these visions interact with the public discourse about the past. The urge to touch the past, to represent it as accurately as the contemporary world allows and the constant necessity to negotiate this representations with surrounding limitations I call the practice of authenticity.

Vítězslav Prchal
University of Pardubice
Memory displaced: the History of the Habsburg Army in Czech Historiography, Military Traditions and Public Space after 1990.
The past, including the military past, of the inhabitants of a specific area is an integral part of their shared heritage. The official form of constructed historical memory is one of the essential pillars on which the collective identity is based. It is precisely what the relevant authorities, memory or other public institutions emphasise, i.e. how and what is remembered and what is not remembered, that significantly co-determines the perception of 'who we are' and what we are (or should be) proud of. The paper will attempt to outline how the history of the army of the Habsburg monarchy resonates in the public space after 1990. Firstly, the research approaches to the imperial army of the early modern period will be discussed within the domestic historiography, perceived (Burke), as the bearer of "social memory". Subsequently, I will attempt to identify how the military of this historical period

is treated in the canon of the official tradition of the Army of the Czech Republic: whether the imperial army, its troops and the leaders from the Bohemian lands (Wallenstein, Jiří Kristián Lobkowitz, Karel Schwarzenberg or Josef Václav Radecký) have a place "between Žižka and the legions" at all. This is followed by how the "Habsburg victories" are commemorated in public space by streets, squares, monuments, memorial plaques, etc. The fundamental problem is, therefore, whether many military reenactors dealing with the Habsburg early modern military have a worthy partner in the official state institutions in commemorating this aspect of the collective memory and what is the place of the Habsburg military in the prevailing narrative of Czech history?

Lukáš Lexa
Moravian National Museum, Brno

The Path to Reconciliation through "Converted Uniforms"?

The celebration of the 100th anniversary of Czechoslovakia has stirred debate not only in the re-enactor community about how we as a society can cope with our past and what identity we claim. Alongside the implacable admirers of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Czechoslovak Republic, for the first time the middle stream of opinion seeking elements of historical continuity received greater attention. The way to reconciliation and joint commemorative actions was the presentation of soldiers who remained in the service of the Habsburg monarch until the end of the First World War and who had passed into the service of the successor states. The re-enactment of these soldiers is known as "converted uniforms" (*kolkované uniformy*). These uniforms began to be acquired or altered by the supporters of the monarchy as well as the republic. Thanks to the common goal of commemorating men who historically had always stood outside the mainstream of historical memory, even previously, irreconcilable groups of re-enactors were brought together and, after a hundred years, an imaginary bridge was built across the murky waters of Central Europe's contradictory history. This paper will chart the history of the phenomenon of the "converted uniforms" re-enactment.

Pavol Šteiner
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Faculty of Arts

Transition of the front-line from Slovakia to Moravia in April 1945. Evidences from archaeological excavations at the site Holíč-Šibenica

Between 10 and 12 April 1945 clashes between the Red Army and German Wehrmacht approached the border on the Morava river. Our excavations at the site Holíč-Šibenica has brought many evidences of combat activity in this sector according to crossing the river towards Hodonín. Several militaria finds throw a light on many details of these events. By comparing results of primary written sources and archaeological artifacts we have the possibility of precising the exact identification of battlefields and units involved.

Jozef Konya
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Faculty of Arts

Research and protection of fortifications from the Second World War in southwestern Slovakia

The territory of south-western Slovakia became the scene of intense clashes between the Allied armies and Axis forces between December 1944 and April 1945. These battles left significant traces in country, including field fortifications (trenches, artillery positions, shelters). Within the legislation in the Slovak Republic, these objects are considered archaeological sites and the objects found there are considered archaeological finds. It is therefore necessary that they are given proper attention in the framework of archaeological research. The present paper focuses on the research and documentation of the preserved section of the field fortification - the trench line on the lower flow of Hron River. The first part of the paper is devoted to the documentation of the object in the field and its immediate surroundings, including photographic documentation, then the evaluation of the condition of the object, the level of its preservation and a proposal for its presentation as cultural heritage. The second part of the paper contains research of historical events related to the object. In this part, the course of combat operations from the beginning of 1945 on the lower flow of Hron River is described and the object under study is placed in its historical context.