

British Military Officers in Teschen 1919

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Beach, Jim: British Military Officers in Teschen 1919

This article examines the experiences of Britain's military representatives in the former Habsburg Duchy of Teschen during the sometimes violent turbulence of 1919. It explores the background and selection of these men, their interactions with local politics and society, and the perceptions they formed. Evidence is drawn primarily from their official reports, family letters, and a book written soon afterwards. As external witnesses, their testimony offers a fresh perspective on ethnic conflict in the duchy and Allied attempts to broker a settlement.

Key Words *British Army; Silesia; Teschen; InterAllied Commission*

doi.org/10.15452/Historica.2020.11.0006

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After returning to his native Scotland, James Roy recorded the evening atmosphere he had observed in a bar near the town centre of Teschen in the spring and summer of 1919: *Schultz's [wine bar] stands in the main street opposite the church, and is frequented by Germans of the better class, by occasional parties of Polish officers, by odds and ends of travellers [...] Schultz himself is a stout, close-cropped, middle-aged German, with a comfortable looking, pleasant faced wife; he sits smoking and drinking [...] with his particular cronies, till closing time. Angelica, the waitress, a black-haired, black-eyed, handsome Silesian girl, with strong pro-Czech sympathies, has offended several of her Polish patrons by her outspoken views.*¹

James had been a member of the InterAllied Commission sent to what had been the Austro-Hungarian Duchy of Teschen to resolve a conflict that had exploded into a week-long war between Poland and Czechoslovakia at the end of January.² His vignette of

¹ ROY, James: *Pole and Czech in Silesia*. London 1921, p. 168. From the location description, the bar was in today's Cieszyn (Poland) rather than Český Těšín (Czech Republic). The article has used 'Teschen' and 'Duchy of Teschen' for brevity and because that was the contemporaneous style used by British officials.

² For English-language explanations of the duchy's post-war problems, see: WAMBAUGH, Sarah: *Plebiscites since the World War*, 1. Washington DC 1933, pp. 142–149; PERMAN, D.: *The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State: Diplomatic History of the Boundaries of Czechoslovakia, 1914–1920*. Leiden 1962, pp. 97–119, 228–243; WANDY CZ, Piotr: *France and Her Eastern Allies, 1919–1925: French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from the Paris Peace Conference to Locarno*. Minneapolis 1962, pp. 15, 22–23, 32–33, 50, 75, 78–96; LUNDGREEN-NIELSEN, Kay: *The Polish Problem at the Paris Peace Conference: A Study of the Policies of the Great Powers and the Poles, 1918–1919*. Odense 1979, pp. 167–168, 181–182, 247–251, 401; HANNAN Kevin: *Borders of Language and Identity in Teschen Silesia*. New York 1996, pp. 14, 39–49; MACMILLAN, Margaret: *Peacemakers: Six months that changed the World*. London 2001, pp. 250–251; BUTTIN, Félix: *The Polish-Czechoslovak Conflict over Teschen Silesia (1918–1920): A Case Study. Perspectives: The Central European Review of International Affairs* 25, 2005, pp. 63–78; SMITH, Leonard: *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919*. Oxford 2018, pp. 139–140, 149–152.

Silesian nightlife illustrated three of the many reasons for tension: German-speakers in positions of authority and ownership; the presence of Polish armed forces in the town; and the social position and political attitudes of those who spoke the Silesian dialect. However, this article does not seek to explain the duchy's intractable ethnic problems at that time, nor can it unpack the Allies' lengthy machinations in trying to fix them. Instead, it sets itself the more modest task of exploring the contemporaneous accounts recorded by British military officers whose duties took them to Teschen in 1919.³ As external witnesses to the conflict, their testimony is potentially useful for scholars of this period and place, although, as will be shown, they were certainly not free from bias. First, the article explores the officers' backgrounds and how they came to be in the duchy. Second, it explains the nature of their interactions with local politics and society. Third, it looks at their perceptions of the complex situation that surrounded them. The article draws upon a mixture of official and unofficial writings. These include lengthy and formal reports to the British delegation at the peace conference in Paris, the routine back and forth of telegrams, one officer's personal letters to his wife, and, in the case of Roy, a book-length travelogue which was augmented several decades later by fragmentary memoir writings.⁴

Six British officers can be confirmed as having served in Teschen in this period. Four were army officers, while two came from Royal Navy (RN) and Royal Air Force (RAF). As Table 1 shows, their reasons for being in the duchy were varied, as were the lengths of their stay.⁵ The two commissioners and their assistant were also attended by two soldier-servants, known as "batmen" in British military parlance.⁶ It is also possible that military intelligence officers and/or uniformed operatives from the British secret service, then known as MI1(c), made brief visits to Teschen. Contemporaneous documents confirm their presence and activities in the wider region and there are credible indications that

³ For post-war British policy towards the region, see: HOFFMAN, Robert: *The British Military Representative in Vienna, 1919*. *Slavonic & East European Review* 52, 1974, No. 127, pp. 252–271; DOCKRILL, Michael – GOOLD, Douglas: *Peace without Promise : Britain and the Peace Conferences, 1919–23*. London 1981, pp. 87, 91–92, 113–115, 118; GOLDSTEIN, Erik: *Winning the Peace: British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning, and the Paris Peace Conference*. Oxford 1991, pp. 257–260; SHARP, Alan: *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris, 1919*. Basingstoke 1991, p. 150; LATAWSKI, Paul: Roman Dmowski, the Polish Question, and Western Opinion, 1915–18 : The Case of Britain. In: Idem: *The Reconstruction of Poland, 1914–23*. Basingstoke 1992, pp. 1–12; STEINER, Zara: *The Lights that Failed : European International History, 1919–1933*. Oxford 2005, p. 30; LOJKÓ, Miklós: *Meddling in Middle Europe : Britain and the 'Lands Between', 1919–1925*. Budapest 2006, pp.157–162, 245–262.

⁴ Although these men were army officers, for official correspondence we must rely on the records of the British delegation to the Peace Conference, as preserved in the Foreign Office (FO) files. War Office files related to their work in Central Europe in 1919 may have once existed, but an incendiary bomb in 1940 destroyed much of the army's archive: SELIGMANN, Matthew: *Hors de Combat? The Management, Mismanagement and Mutilation of the War Office Archive*. *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 84, 2006, No. 337, pp. 52–58.

⁵ It is possible that another army officer visited Teschen. Roy's accounts tell us that in February a man called Picton was Rawlings' interpreter. He apparently spoke six European languages, including Czech, and had lived abroad for many years. The most likely military candidate is Lieutenant Archibald Picton, who was then in his early thirties. Like Fordham, he was serving in the Balkans in January 1919 and there is a gap in his known movements from mid-January to the beginning of March. Also, his transfer from Mesopotamia to Salonika in December 1918 and later appointment as a base commandant in Bulgaria is unusual and suggestive of uncommon linguistic ability. However, it is also possible that Picton was a civilian and so would fall beyond the remit of this article: UK National Archives (hereinafter TNA), WO374/54071, Commission application, 1 June 1915, casualty form; ROY, J.: *Pole and Czech*, p. 23; Queen's University Archives (hereinafter QUA), 1035 Fonds James Roy, 'Boughs of the Yew', p. 19.

⁶ One batman can be identified as 4216 Private Thomas Packer of the Wiltshire Regiment: TNA, WO364/2805, pension record; ROY, J.: *Pole and Czech*, p. 15.

Roy was involved in trying to recruit an agent to collect intelligence about neighbouring Upper Silesia.⁷

Table 1: British officers in the Duchy of Teschen 1919

Name	Arrived	Departed	Role
Major George Crosfield RAF	January	February	Representative with Czechoslovak forces
Lieutenant-Commander Bernard Rawlings RN	January	February	Liaison officer to InterAllied missions
Major William Fordham	February	March	Officer diverted from mission in Galicia
Lieutenant-Colonel Basil Coulson	February	May	InterAllied commissioner, Teschen
Captain James Roy	February	June	Cipher officer & assistant to commissioner
Lieutenant-Colonel Ridley Pakenham-Walsh	April	January	InterAllied commissioner, Teschen

Furthermore, in 1919 there were another two British Empire men wearing uniforms in Teschen, but neither man was a soldier, sailor, or airman. This anomaly requires an explanation. The first, William Rose, was a Canadian member of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) who was visiting the duchy in the summer of 1914 and had been detained there throughout the war. After the armistice he travelled to Paris and then London as a representative of the Polish National Council, before returning to Teschen in February in an American YMCA uniform.⁸ The second had the surname Harris and was a British Foreign Office clerk. Sent to Teschen in March to provide secretarial support, it was decided that he should adopt an army uniform to ease his journey across Central Europe. It appears that he then continued to wear it for some time after reaching his destination.⁹

Harris' use of a military disguise is interesting. It perhaps says something important about the status of those wearing officers' uniforms of the recently victorious Allies? Within societies further militarised by four years of war, his officer's costume would have given Harris an automatic air of authority, especially when dealing with civilians.

⁷ TNA, FO608/8, ff. 49–50, 393–394, Gosling to Foreign Office, 2 April 1919, Coulson to Twiss, 14 July 1919, FO608/58, f. 27, Foreign Office to Howard, 22 February 1919; ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 22; National Records Scotland, CS253/3123/5, Roy v Talbot Fair, Examination of James Roy, 28 June 1921; QUA, 1035 Fonds James Roy, 'Edwardian Lady', p. 104. For the context of MI1(c) in Central Europe in this period, see: JEFFERY, Keith: *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service, 1909–1949*. London 2010, pp. 142–157, 193–196.

⁸ STONE, Daniel (ed.): *The Polish Memoirs of William John Rose*. Toronto 1975, pp. xi, 89–95, 106. For Rose's lobbying of the British delegation in Paris, see: TNA, FO608/7, ff. 555–69, 'Memorandum on the present situation, social and international, in Central Europe: as observed during a visit made from [15 February to 15 March 1919]', 26 March. Pakenham-Walsh, who met him in Paris shortly after he submitted the report, suggested Rose was *absurdly Polophil[e]*: Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (hereinafter LHCMA), Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 29–30 March 1919.

⁹ TNA, FO608/7, ff. 55, 100, Coulson to Foreign Office, 28 March 1919; London to Astoria, Paris, 18 March 1919, FO608/58, f. 57, Foreign Office to Coulson, 21 March 1919. A fortnight after his arrival, he was described as [Second Lieutenant] *Harris, Typist, (a clerk from Foreign Office)*: LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 15 April 1919. A young man in British uniform appears in an undated photo with Pakenham-Walsh and Roy. Given the overlap of their time in Teschen, it was taken in May or June and the man is presumably Harris: Muzeum Śląska Cieszyńskiego, MC F 1413(2), Członkowie Komisji Alianckiej w Cieszynie, 1919. Harris remained in Teschen into 1920: TNA, FO608/26, ff. 227–229, Pakenham-Walsh to Foreign Office, 13 November 1919, Foreign Office to Pakenham-Walsh, 15 November 1919; LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 3 January 1920.

Similarly, it would have granted him peer-status with those still engaged in the ongoing conflicts in Central Europe. Pan-European military protocol would have also provided an important framework for his interactions with Polish and Czechoslovak forces within Teschen. These British officers also had diplomatic status which would have further enhanced their authority, as well as their freedom of movement across newly-enforced frontiers. More prosaically, because of economic dislocation in the region, their possession of hard currency gave them a purchasing-power equivalent to that of the wealthy local elites.¹⁰ As witnesses to events, this highly privileged status was analogous to that of foreign press correspondents. That said, as the article will demonstrate, living within an elite military-social milieu also influenced their judgements and perhaps made it harder for them to cross some of the duchy's other cultural, social, and linguistic barriers. Connected to their military status is the question of whether these men were armed. It seems they were. Roy tells us that he took a revolver to Teschen, while his batman carried an army rifle. However, it would appear their ammunition was limited and, in Roy's case, the rounds were later stolen.¹¹ We must therefore assume that these weapons were mainly a symbolic addition to their uniforms, although they could have been used for personal protection as a last resort.

Officers

Who were these officers and why were they sent to Teschen? Three of them (Crosfield, Rawlings, and Fordham) made only short visits to the duchy, so their backgrounds are examined briefly.¹² Because they were the senior British representatives on the InterAllied commission, Coulson and Pakenham-Walsh demand much greater attention, and so their personal and military hinterlands are unpacked more thoroughly. Although Roy was of lower military status, the need to contextualise his rich testimony means he also requires closer examination.

George Crosfield was born into a family of wealthy industrialists in north-west England. When in his early twenties, he had served in the Second South African War and was afterwards very active in Britain's auxiliary armed forces. He was an infantry battalion commander during the First World War before losing a leg in 1916. Fitted with an artificial limb, he transferred to the RAF and when the Western Front armistice came in November 1918, he was serving with the British bomber force based in eastern France.¹³ Crosfield was then sent to the newly-formed state of Czechoslovakia, where he was attached to their army. The reasons for him undertaking this role are unclear. Before the war his family's chemical firm had been taken over by a German company, so it is

¹⁰ During his time in Teschen, Roy received 4,200 francs for 'personal use': QUA, 1035 Fonds James Roy, Box 1, accounts folder, 'Statement of Advances to and Payments by Captain JA Roy RGA, British Delegation, Interallied Commission to Teschen'.

¹¹ QUA, 1035 Fonds James Roy, 'Insubstantial Pageant', pp. 125–126.

¹² Brigadier-General Adrian Carton de Wiart of the British Mission to Poland also transited through Teschen in mid-August: LHOMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 17 August 1919.

¹³ TNA, WO339/59140, Arrival report, 17 June 1916, Ministry of Pensions letter, 24 November 1916; AIR76/115/115, details of service. MUSSON A. E.: *Enterprise in Soap and Chemicals: Joseph Crosfield & Sons Limited, 1815–1965*. Manchester 1965, pp. 139, 143, 166, 244, 259; Who Was Who entry, accessed 31 October 2018.

possible that he had acquired relevant language skills in this commercial context.¹⁴ On 23 January 1919, at the start of the Seven-Day War between Czechoslovakia and Poland, Crosfield was one of the five Allied officers who issued a withdrawal ultimatum to the Polish commander in Teschen. When they learned of his involvement, his British superiors in Paris and London were greatly displeased and one even suggested a disciplinary inquiry into his conduct.¹⁵ Within a month he had left the RAF, and later became chairman of the British Legion, the country's main veterans' organisation. Crosfield's time in Teschen was probably no more than a couple of weeks and he appears to have left no record of it.

Bernard Rawlings had joined the RN at fourteen and, during the First World War, he commanded a torpedo boat and later served on cruisers. In 1919, Rawlings celebrated his thirtieth birthday and spent most of that year as a military and diplomatic liaison officer roving across Central Europe, although he was later assigned officially to the British Mission in Poland.¹⁶ As Roy explained, *one can go nowhere in Austria or Hungary or Poland or Bohemia without either meeting [Rawlings] or hearing about him. He is either in the town or is just coming, or has just gone.*¹⁷ Although he spoke neither German nor Polish, Rawlings' personality appears to have been well-suited to this role. Roy described him as *a typical naval man with a merry face, a jovial laugh, endless conversation, and an attractive and fascinating air of devil-may-care, which conceals a fund of sound common sense, and a thoroughly practical and well-ordered intelligence.*¹⁸ He made at least two short visits to Teschen, both of which occurred at moments of crisis. On 23 January, when Czechoslovak forces attacked the Polish troops then occupying much of Teschen, Rawlings was despatched immediately by the senior British officer in Warsaw. Arriving on the scene the following day, he consulted with the Polish commander before arranging a temporary ceasefire so that he could cross the firing line. After speaking to the Czechoslovak commander and Crosfield, he proceeded to Prague where he had an audience with President Masaryk.¹⁹ The second occasion came a month later, when he hurried from Prague to Teschen after learning of the unexpected arrival and intervention of a French general from the InterAllied Mission to Poland.²⁰ Rawlings went on to have a distinguished career, culminating in command of British naval forces in the Pacific during the Second World War and subsequent promotion to full admiral. He left no papers.

William Fordham was another temporary visitor to Teschen. When the First World War broke out, he was a petroleum engineer in his mid-thirties who had worked in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Commissioned into the artillery, he served in logistic roles on the Salonika front. In December 1918 he was in command of a Serbian unit, which is unusual and suggestive of uncommon language skills. At the beginning of January 1919 he was despatched from the Balkans to Eastern Galicia *to enquire into pogroms*. In February, before the arrival of the InterAllied commission to Teschen, Fordham was sent from

¹⁴ MUSSON A. E.: *Enterprise in Soap and Chemicals*, p. 243.

¹⁵ TNA, FO608/6, ff. 132–134, 'Summary of Events in Teschen' [undated], Howard to Harding, 4 February 1919, Minute by Director of Military Intelligence, 7 February 1919.

¹⁶ Anon.: Sir Bernard Rawlings. *Times*, 2 October 1962, p. 15; Who Was Who entry, accessed 29 August 2019.

¹⁷ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 110.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 22–23.

¹⁹ TNA, FO608/6, ff. 135–141, Rawlings, 'Report of Proceedings in Eastern Silesia [23–25 January 1919]', 27 January 1919.

²⁰ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, pp. 29–33.

Warsaw *to keep the peace* in the duchy.²¹ Coulson objected to his presence and, given his absence from Roy's account, his departure must have been immediate.²² He seems to have left no account of his time in Teschen.

Basil Coulson came from an upper-class family in the north-east of England. His grandfather owned a small castle and married a peer's daughter, while his uncle, after an army career, was a local magistrate and prominent member of the community.²³ Coulson followed his uncle's footsteps by joining the King's Own Scottish Borderers. Like Crosfield, when in his early twenties, he served in the South African War, where he was seriously wounded by artillery fire and also *mentioned in despatches*.²⁴ The first phase of his military career came to an abrupt end in 1912 when he was declared bankrupt due to unpaid loans.²⁵ He was obliged to resign, but at the beginning of the First World War was allowed to rejoin his regiment on a temporary commission. Coulson was then given a senior appointment in one of its new battalions and, after their deployment to the Western Front in summer 1915, he stood in temporarily as its commanding officer.²⁶ In the autumn, and again in the spring of 1916, his health broke down and he was sent back home to recuperate. Worse was to come. In January 1917, while attached to another regiment his knee was injured in a mine explosion, resulting in a further period of convalescence.²⁷ At the end of that year, Coulson assumed command of a Welsh infantry battalion but, within a few weeks, further illnesses led to yet another return to England. He was then subjected to closer medical examination and, in the autumn, a serious underlying condition was diagnosed and treated.²⁸ But by February 1919 Coulson's health must have improved sufficiently for him to become the British representative on the Inter-Allied Commission to Teschen.²⁹ On 3 February, the British prime minister indicated that his country's representative on the Teschen Commission would be a colonel, and the following day Coulson embarked from England. He then spent a few days in Paris before travelling to the duchy.³⁰ He therefore seems to have been selected very hastily on the grounds of being an *excellent* German-speaker with some command experience.³¹ At this point Britain's armies were demobilising rapidly and most temporary officers were seeking a return to their families; so why did Coulson take up this role? There are no personal papers available to offer definite insight but, given the stop-start pattern of his First

²¹ Royston Crow, January 1913 cited by <www.ashwellmuseum.org.uk> accessed 3 March 2019; TNA, WO339/22414, Casualty form; FO608/8, f. 568, Carr to Coulson, 13 March 1919.

²² TNA, FO608/58, f. 281, Kisch minute, 16 May 1919.

²³ Colwell & Swinburn, Northumberland in 1851 Census; Anon.: Colonel W.L.B. Coulson. Times, 3 June 1911, p. 11; Who Was Who entry, accessed 30 August 2019.

²⁴ TNA, WO374/15760, Medical Board, 14 July 1903, Record of Services, 6 February 1912.

²⁵ Ibidem, AG3 minutes, 17 November 1911, 9 February 1912.

²⁶ Ibidem, 15th Division to IV Corps, 15 September 1915.

²⁷ Ibidem, Medical board reports, 16 October 1915, 4 March 1916, 18 January 1917.

²⁸ Ibidem, 18/Welsh Regiment casualty form, medical board report, 24 September 1918.

²⁹ Ibidem, FO608/6, ff. 177–178, Copy of declaration signed by Beneš, Dmowski, Wilson, Lloyd George, Orlando & Clemenceau, 4 February 1919.

³⁰ National Archives & Records Administration (hereinafter NARA), M820 Roll 164, 'Appointment of Delegates to the Commission for Teschen', 3 February 1919; TNA, FO608/6, f. 176, Kisch minute, 7 February 1919; WO374/15760, MI1 to F2, 9 July 1920; Army List, November 1919.

³¹ For Roy's assessment of Coulson's linguistic talent, see: QUA, 1035 Fonds James Roy, 'Boughs of the Yew', pp. 19–20.

World War service, it seems reasonable to infer that he seized upon it as a last chance to revive his military career. Perhaps he thought that performing well in such a high-profile diplomatic appointment would provide a route back into the regular army? With regard to Coulson's character, Roy painted a colourful picture of his superior officer.³² Apparently, he was an intuitive thinker with *a quick brain*, who enjoyed shooting and fishing, and was a humorous and highly-cultured individual. But also one who was out-of-step with the modern world: *One associates him with [...] candles and rapiers, and powdered wigs and affairs of gallantry; one thinks of him as having wandered by mistake out of the eighteenth into the twentieth century. He is impartial, impersonal, amused, with a touch of cynicism in his attitude, and in the coming Revolution, despite his cosmopolitanism, he will certainly be among the first of the aristocrats to be [executed].*³³ Roy's later writings are much harsher on Coulson; his unpublished memoirs tell us that he was a "snob" and also stated that he was a heavy drinker.³⁴ Coulson served as Britain's representative in Teschen until mid-May, when he became the military attaché in Czechoslovakia.³⁵ His time in Prague did not end well. Eighteen months later he was removed from his post for embezzling funds from a British government bank account.³⁶

Ridley Pakenham-Walsh was very different to Coulson. The son of a Protestant Irish bishop, he was a decade younger and had won numerous awards at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, before commissioning into the Royal Engineers. When the First World War broke out, he was a captain instructing Australian officers at the Duntroon military college. He went on to serve at Gallipoli and on the Western Front, becoming a lieutenant-colonel early in 1918.³⁷ Towards the end of March 1919, he was asked whether he would like to join an *Allied Mission to Poland*. He accepted and within a week was in Paris, where learned that he was destined for Teschen.³⁸ Pakenham-Walsh's arrival coincided with some disquiet over Coulson's political judgement and it therefore probable that the original plan had been to send him to Warsaw but, because he was known personally by one of the senior officers in Paris, a decision was taken to divert him to Teschen.³⁹ Also unusual was him being sent as an understudy for a month before he took over from Coulson as Britain's representative. This theory of the army diverting a safe pair of hands is supported by the fact that Pakenham-Walsh was described as *a very capable officer* but,

³² ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, pp. 58, 88; QUA, 1035 Fonds James Roy, 'Boughs of the Yew', p. 24, 'Insubstantial Pageant', pp. 84–85.

³³ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 59.

³⁴ QUA, 1035 Fonds James Roy, 'Insubstantial Pageant', pp. 84–85, 'Boughs of the Yew', pp. 19–20, 24. When writing in the 1950s and 1960s, Roy seems to have been aware of Coulson's dismissal from Prague and this may have influenced his later judgements.

³⁵ TNA, FO608/7, f. 113, f. 124, Director of Military Intelligence to Foreign Office, 12 May 1919, Pakenham-Walsh to FO, 16 May 1919, f. 124; HOFFMAN, R.: 'British Military Representative', p. 261.

³⁶ TNA, WO374/15760, Cunninghame to British Minister for Czecho-Slovakia, 24 January 1921.

³⁷ Anon.: Irish Clergy Roll of Honour. Church of Ireland Gazette, 10 December 1915, p. 957; Quarterly Army List, April 1920.

³⁸ LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 29–30 March 1919.

³⁹ TNA, FO608/85, ff. 76, 85, Kisch to Coulson, 28 March 1919, Cornwall minute, 29 March 1919. Pakenham-Walsh had been at Woolwich with Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Kisch, Britain's representative on the Paris committees addressing the Teschen question: LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 29–30 March 1919; BENTWICH Norman & KISCH Michael: *Brigadier Frederick Kisch : Soldier and Zionist*. London 1966, pp. 48, 50.

oddly for a role in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, he did not speak German.⁴⁰ Roy tells us there was *obviously a strong antipathy* between Coulson and Pakenham-Walsh and that the latter was a *quietly spoken Irishman* who he also remembered as having an *amiable placidity* [and] *quaint, puzzled airs*.⁴¹ Pakenham-Walsh served in Teschen until January 1920, when he was replaced by Ernest Wilton, a diplomat in his early fifties who had served previously as a consul in China.⁴² He then continued his military career, later becoming a general and corps commander during the Second World War.⁴³ Historians of the duchy in 1919 are fortunate that Pakenham-Walsh wrote regularly to his wife. He described these communications as *diary letters [...] in which I propose to narrate events and impressions of his time in Central Europe*.⁴⁴ She was instructed to copy and circulate them, presumably amongst their friends and family. This of course skewed the content away from sensitive political matters, but the testimony is still insightful and, very importantly, it was recorded contemporaneously.

James Roy was a Scotsman, an academic, and a specialist in English literature. Thirty-five-years-old in 1919, he had been educated in Edinburgh, and spent two years teaching English at the University of Giessen before becoming a lecturer at St Andrews. At the beginning of 1915 he joined the army, serving first with the Royal Garrison Artillery before joining the Intelligence Corps because of his fluency in German. Roy deployed to France in the summer of 1916 and spent the rest of the war undertaking in a variety of intelligence duties, but primarily prisoner interrogation.⁴⁵ In November 1918 he took up army educational work, which he continued until mid-February when he was sent to Paris and trained as a cipher officer.⁴⁶ The need to send an officer to assist Coulson had been established a week earlier, so it seems likely that the army was trawled for suitable candidates.⁴⁷ As a junior officer with both intelligence experience and recently-practised German language skills, Roy was an ideal candidate. He arrived in Teschen at the end of February and stayed four months before seeking a return to academic life.⁴⁸ Roy's book on Teschen, *Pole and Czech in Silesia*, appears to have been written within a few months of his departure from the duchy in June 1919.⁴⁹ By then a fairly experienced prose writer,

⁴⁰ TNA, FO608/59, ff. 73, 161, Cornwall to Nicolson, 28 March 1919, Thwaites to Hardinge, 22 April 1919; LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 3 May 1919; QUA, 1035 Fonds James Roy, 'Insubstantial Pageant', p. 84.

⁴¹ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 202; QUA, 1035 Fonds James Roy, 'Insubstantial Pageant', pp. 84–85.

⁴² TNA, FO608/26, ff. 150, 223, Crowe to Curzon, 21 October 1919, f150, Carr to Curzon, 11 December 1919; LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 23 October 1919, 3 January 1920; Anon.: Sir Ernest Wilton: Service in China and Europe. Times, 30 December 1952, p. 8; Who Was Who entry, accessed 26 August 2019.

⁴³ Who Was Who entry, accessed 1 September 2019. Unlike Coulson, because his military service continued after 1922, Pakenham-Walsh's service record has not yet been released to the National Archives.

⁴⁴ LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 29–30 March 1919.

⁴⁵ QUA, Locator 2400 Box 7, James Roy personnel file, 'Letter of Application for and Testimonials in favour of James Alexander Roy MA. Candidate for the Berry Chair of Literature', [1920].

⁴⁶ QUA, Fonds James Roy, 'The Central European Scene', p. 89, 'Chapter III. St Andrews', pp. 132–133.

⁴⁷ TNA, FO608/58, f. 23, Thwaites to Coulson, 8 February 1919.

⁴⁸ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, pp. 29, 191.

⁴⁹ QUA, Locator 2400 Box 7, James Roy personnel file, Citation of letter to John Buchan, 14 January 1920, in 'Letter of Application for and Testimonials in favour of James Alexander Roy MA. Candidate for the Berry Chair of Literature', [1920]. Textual similarity between public lecture and book: Anon.: The Next German Big Push. St Andrews Citizen, 15 November 1919, p. 2; ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, pp. 211–212.

his style is colourful and the book is more travelogue than journalism or political analysis. It is therefore a rich and sometimes amusing account that complements both the dry, official correspondence and Pakenham-Walsh's more mundane record of events. Roy's later academic career took him across the Atlantic, where he became a professor at Queen's University in Ontario. In his retirement he wrote a number of unpublished memoir pieces that re-told and expanded upon his earlier writings about Teschen.

Interactions

The InterAllied Commission arrived in Teschen on 12 February, a fortnight after the ending of the Seven-Day War.⁵⁰ Basing themselves in the *Brauner Hirsch* hotel in the town square, their subsequent duties can be segmented into three categories: military, civil, and social. They had been given multiple tasks by the Peace Conference but executing them depended on maintaining the ceasefire between the Czechoslovaks and Poles.⁵¹ Unsurprisingly, the military members of the commission took the lead in this work. In addition to the British lieutenant-colonel and captain, the Italians provided a lieutenant-colonel and a lieutenant, the French a major, and the Americans a lieutenant.⁵² These Allied officers seem to have been well-attuned to the underlying threat of resurgent violence. In March, Coulson reported back to Paris that *collisions [were] only avoided by our presence*.⁵³ While Roy's later characterisation was that *one feels that we are sitting on a powder magazine which any chance spark may ignite*. He substantiated this by pointing to *patrol encounters, throwing of hand grenades, [and] brawls in the neutral zone* between the opposing sides.⁵⁴ He went on to explain that this low-level skirmishing occurred mainly at night: *Were our watch to cease for a moment these glowering warriors would be at each other's throats immediately. Sometimes they walk between the lines with the country girls and exchange friendly cigarettes, but presently, when evening closes in and the stillness grates on jagged nerves, there are bursts of machine-gun fire, and the citizens turn in their beds uneasily with visions of burnings and shootings and plunderings before their eyes*.⁵⁵

The Allied officers liaised regularly with the Czechoslovak and Polish armies and sometimes made interventions to reduce the sporadic fighting. For example, Coulson cited an instance whereby he and the French major travelled to the scene of a military dispute and made a minor adjustment to the demarcation line. By allowing a company of Poles to be billeted in a particular village, they reduced overcrowding and refuted a Czechoslovak allegation that the troops were concentrating for an attack.⁵⁶ In early June, Pakenham-Walsh took similar action. As he explained to his superiors in Paris: *In order to avoid the frequent minor actions which were constantly taking place between the respective forces, we have almost completed a mutual revision of the outpost lines so as to leave a neutral zone of at least a kilometre between the advanced sentries of the Czech[oslovak] and Polish forces respectively*.

⁵⁰ TNA, FO608/7, ff. 45–50, Coulson, Dispatch No.1, 22 February 1919.

⁵¹ NARA, M820 Roll 164, 'Secretary's Notes of a Conversation held in M Pichon's Room at the Quai d'Orsay', 31 January 1919.

⁵² ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, pp. 53–57.

⁵³ TNA, FO608/7, f. 453, Coulson to FO, 17 March 1919.

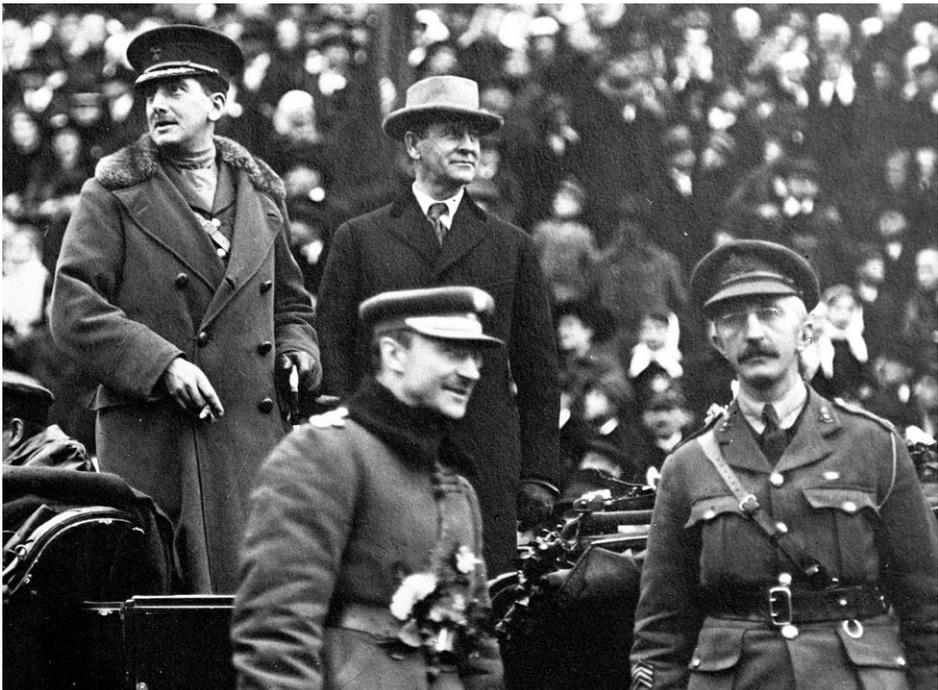
⁵⁴ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 59.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 85.

⁵⁶ TNA, FO608/58, ff. 336–339, Coulson to Crowe, 3 June 1919.



Obr. 1: Muzeum Śląska Cieszyńskiego, MC F 05614N, Członkowie Komisji Alianckiej w Cieszynie, 1919. Lieutenant-Colonel Ridley Pakenham-Walsh (seated, left), Harris, Foreign Office clerk (standing, second from left), Captain James Roy (standing, second from right).



Obr. 2: Muzeum Śląska Cieszyńskiego, MC F 05633N, února 1919, mezispojenecká komise – britští členové. Lieutenant-Colonel Basil Coulson (left) & Major William Fordham (right).

However, this intervention was unsuccessful. Ten days later he reported that, for political reasons, tension had increased, leading to the death of five soldiers and a civilian along the *de facto* frontier.⁵⁷

The officers' work necessitated frequent travel beyond the reach of the railway lines. The commission therefore maintained two cars for this purpose. The better one was a magnificent Benz limousine that had previously belonged to the Habsburg emperor. The British and Italians adorned it with their national flags but, for reasons unknown, the French and Americans did not.⁵⁸ This impressive symbol of the commission's status was driven by either a Czechoslovak or Polish chauffeur depending on which half of the duchy was to be visited.⁵⁹ In addition to the normal travails of breakdowns and difficult roads, Roy noted that: *Travelling by night exposes one to certain excitements; a band of [soldiers] may suddenly leap on your car from the dark, point their rifles at your breast, interrogate your chauffeur, and, when they have satisfied themselves as to your identity, withdraw and huddle round their camp fire in the woods.*⁶⁰ He also recalled, while driving in the commission's less imposing Ford vehicle, being *held up by a noisy, bottle-brandishing gang of picturesque cut-throats who were obviously [drunk] and for the moment seemed bent on mischief.* Initially concerned that they were going to have their throats cut, they were actually escorted from the vehicle to participate in a Gypsy wedding.⁶¹ Less pleasantly, Roy also remembered an occasion whereby *the quick action of the Polish chauffeur* saved them from an ambush by *bandits.* Given that the car, at that moment, apparently contained a very large sum of cash and two cases of Scotch whisky, they appear to have had a lucky escape.⁶²

Putting aside such moments of danger and excitement, most of the British officers' work was focused on civil matters. As Roy explained, *normally our daily lives were dull enough. Routine business concerning the working of the coal pits, the examination of accounts and checking reports of alleged sabotage, or vandalism by hooligans in the public parks [such as the] disfiguring of the Schiller marble statue.*⁶³ Similarly, Pakenham-Walsh recorded how, on one day in April, he attended a civic lunch and then met a *deputation of watermen,* before supervising a bilateral evening meeting between the local Czechoslovak leader and his Polish opposite number.⁶⁴ Although these activities were mundane, the sourness of the relationship between Prague and Warsaw meant they were always time-consuming and often rancorous. Roy summarised the geopolitical context as follows: *Both countries are weak and surrounded by a veritable sea of enemies whose common object is their ultimate destruction; both are ambitious, able, mutually mistrustful and suspicious of the policy of the [Allies].*⁶⁵ Therefore, as Coulson told Paris early in his time in Teschen,

⁵⁷ Ibidem, ff. 344–345, Pakenham-Walsh to Foreign Office, 8, 18 June 1919.

⁵⁸ LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 11 April 1919.

⁵⁹ QUA, 1035 Fonds James Roy, 'Insubstantial Pageant', p. 43.

⁶⁰ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 60.

⁶¹ QUA, 1035 Fonds James Roy, 'Insubstantial Pageant', p. 64, 'Boughs of the Yew', p. 44.

⁶² Ibidem, 'Boughs of the Yew', p. 45. Roy says that he was in possession of 50,000 francs destined for British agents in Hungary. It has not been possible to verify his statement but, given the duchy's location, it is plausible for him to have been one link in a chain of British couriers.

⁶³ Ibidem, p. 44.

⁶⁴ LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 18 April 1919.

⁶⁵ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, pp. 84–85.

both Poles and Czech[oslovak]s appear to be determined to take advantage of the most trivial incidents to make difficulties and hinder any rapprochement between the two parties.⁶⁶ For example, Roy noted how the commission was required to arbitrate on the conscription of a Pole into the Czechoslovak forces which was, in a probable tit-for-tat, reflected by a Czech man being summoned for medical inspection ahead of him unwillingly joining the Polish army.⁶⁷ Another instance, in July, was the commission's involvement in resolving the arrest of seven railway workers of known Bolshevik tendencies travelling east to Teschen, which had been countered by the arrest of seven Czechs in the Polish-held part of the duchy.⁶⁸ As an external body charged with peacekeeping, the commission was meant to be neutral in dealing with these problems. But their task was made more challenging by linguistic barriers and, initially at least, a lack of deep knowledge about local politics. Roy, however, felt this may have been a virtue: *Our very ignorance of local conditions compels us to rely very largely on our own common sense. Our reliance on common sense is in itself a guarantee that we are unbiased; and to be unbiased goes a long way towards being trusted. The truth is that [...] the commission is [...] essential to the welfare of Teschen.*⁶⁹ That may have been correct but, as this article will show, in the British example at least, some personal biases did exist or develop.

In addition to their day-to-day professional interactions, the commission also attended social events hosted by either the Czechoslovak or Polish authorities.⁷⁰ Pakenham-Walsh was taken aback at the lavishness of one of the first events he attended; telling his wife of *an excellent supper of about 5 courses [with] wine, and finished off with the Polish national liqueur Slimovitch [sic]*. He went on to explain that *both sides fête the Commission continuously. They are very Slavonic in their drinking ideas and get disgustingly drunk on the slightest provocation.*⁷¹ A week later, he noted another *big lunch with the whole Polish army & local civilian element being there [...]* *It was an awful stuffing, and Coulson leant across & said 'And one sees headlines in papers even from England [about] Starvation & Anarchy in Silesia'.*⁷² Many of these meals were, of course, connected with national celebrations or political visits.⁷³ For example, in March, Roy noted a feast day in honour of Poland's leader, Józef Piłsudski, which consisted of a military parade *followed by the inevitable banquet, without which no public function would be complete in Poland.*⁷⁴ A month later the British officers watched a religious festival, accompanied by a military parade and then, as Pakenham-Walsh put it, participated in *a bout of schnapps.*⁷⁵ Unsurprisingly, given the tensions within the duchy, the commission's social calendar became a political issue. In May, the Czechoslovak government complained to Paris that the commission had *been more friendly with the Poles than with the Czechs as regards*

⁶⁶ TNA, FO608/60, ff. 354–359, Coulson to Foreign Office, 14–16 March 1919.

⁶⁷ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 165.

⁶⁸ TNA, FO608/58, ff. 411–412, Pakenham-Walsh to Foreign Office, 7 July 1919; LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 7 July 1919.

⁶⁹ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 100.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, pp. 52–53, 65, 89.

⁷¹ LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 11 April 1919.

⁷² Ibidem, 18 April 1919.

⁷³ For example, the visit of General Haller in June: ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, pp. 184–186.

⁷⁴ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 65.

⁷⁵ LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 18 April 1919; ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, pp. 98–99.

[their] *social relations*.⁷⁶ Having been asked to give an account of their wining and dining, Pakenham-Walsh told his superiors that they had *accepted all invitations to public and military functions from both nations*.⁷⁷ Coulson, however, pointed out: *Teschen is occupied by Poles, that the hotel where we lived is also the headquarters of the Polish officials and that the garrison is Polish; we are therefore obliged to see more of the Poles socially [...] It is evident that the commission must reside in Polish or Czech[oslovak] territory unless it builds a house astride the line of demarcation*.⁷⁸

As Coulson implied, by residing in Teschen, it became the one place in the duchy most frequented by the commission. They spent their off-duty hours in the town and Roy provides an amusing snapshot of *everyday life* at the *Brauner Hirsch: Stale trout, sauerkraut, horse-sausage, sour wine, bad coffee [...] squabbling chauffeurs and slouching orderlies and sleepy sentries [a] garish hotel with its glaring pillars, its noisy restaurant, its slatternly maids, its fat porter, its slipshod waiters, its pock-marked proprietor*.⁷⁹

He also tells us of *Helena, the little Silesian maid who sweeps out my room and makes my bed*.⁸⁰ His highlighting of her perceived ethnicity is interesting in that his overall judgement was that the town was *thoroughly German*; noting that entertainment, policing, transport, religion, and commerce all reflected the legacy of Habsburg rule and its German-Austrian dominance. He also suggested there was *nothing Czech about [Teschen] except an inscription above a bank, or Polish except the lace caps of the married women of the poorer classes*.⁸¹ With regard to nightlife, in April Pakenham-Walsh observed that the German theatre – in which the commission had a private box – was *run by the Austrians* and did not perform anything in Polish.⁸² Similarly, Schultz's wine bar (highlighted at the beginning of this article) proved popular with the British officers. Roy tells us that Coulson *cut himself off from the other members of the commission and went drinking by himself* at Schultz's. This apparently led to rumours that Coulson was biased towards the duchy's German-speakers, so Roy suggested he should stop going. He did; but Roy also intimates that Coulson eventually departed from Teschen without ever paying the large drinks tab that he had run up with Schultz.⁸³

Perceptions

In their letters and recollections, the British officers made many observations about the duchy. Although somewhat fragmentary, these snippets can be assembled and their perceptions delineated. Of course, this tells us something about how Teschen was perceived by these outsiders, but it also indicates where the officers' may have held prejudices or developed biases. Because their duties caused them to travel beyond the duchy's borders, these perceptions may have also been influenced by their experiences further afield. But space does not permit analysis of their time in Kraków, Prague, or Warsaw. Instead, this

⁷⁶ TNA, FO608/58, ff. 336–339, Coulson to Crowe, 3 June 1919.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, FO608/7, ff. 128–132, Pakenham-Walsh to FO, 8 June 1919.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, FO608/58, ff. 336–339, Coulson to Crowe, 3 June 1919.

⁷⁹ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, pp. 183–184.

⁸⁰ Ibidem, p. 46.

⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 43.

⁸² LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 15 April 1919.

⁸³ QUA, 1035 Fonds James Roy, 'Boughs of the Yew', p. 20, 'page 24' fragment.

section will confine itself to examining the officers' attitudes towards the core ethnographic dispute within the duchy; the German-speaking, "Silesian" and mining communities; plus the Polish and Czechoslovak armies.

With regard to the causes and opening stages of the Seven-Day War, after questioning Crosfield and the meeting with President Masaryk, Rawlings was forthright in his interpretation of events. In his report to Paris he acknowledged the imminent Polish elections as a contextual factor, but believed that by attacking the Czechoslovaks had chosen to act arbitrarily and had: *Selected the Allied officers to carry the ultimatum [to the Polish commander] in the hope that their presence would stamp the whole enterprise with the apparent approval of the [Allies...] One is forced to the conclusion therefore that it was the intention of the [Czechoslovak] government both to obtain initial advantage and to continue to utilise the advantage gained by the pretence that they were acting with the approval and authorisation of the [Allied] Powers.*⁸⁴

There is an interesting contrast between this condemnation of Czechoslovak action and Coulson's perspective three weeks later. With regard to the commission's instructions to implement the demarcation line determined in Paris, he argued that the duchy's population *look[ed] forward with dread to the retirement of the [Czechoslovak] troops and the occupation of [the town of] Teschen and the southern portion of the railway line by Polish troops, fearing reprisals, pillaging and general disorder.*⁸⁵ For his part, Pakenham-Walsh seems to have arrived in the duchy with a more even-handed perspective. In Paris, while waiting to depart, he studied the British delegation's files and had also spoken to the American and Italian commissioners, who had returned there briefly for consultations. He felt that this process had given him *a fair idea about Teschen* and he seems to have settled upon disapproval of both sides' behaviour. As he explained to his wife: *There is a lot of difficulty in that part of the world getting the Poles and [Czechoslovaks] to agree to a boundary. Both are new states and naturally grasping and the district of Teschen is a rich coal and iron country.*⁸⁶

Although his testimony was retrospective by a few months, Roy's characterisation of the core dispute is also interesting. He opened his book by explaining the commission's task as one of facilitating: *Co-operation between the two newly-reconstituted Slavonic states, whose interests are ultimately identical. It is obvious, however, in view of the importance of the [...] coal-fields, and of the multifarious conflicting interests involved, that no solution hitherto proposed will give complete satisfaction to either claimant.*⁸⁷ Given what followed in 1920, he was fairly prescient. In noting *absolute deadlock*, Roy characterised Czechoslovakia and Poland as *children learning to walk. They stumble and stagger; they are without strength or directive force; they have no clear idea of their final goal.*⁸⁸ Coming from a representative of a victorious empire, these statements now come across as rather patronising and insensitive. However, Roy's book also reveals a deep sympathy towards the duchy's people and their culture. Commenting upon a community celebration, he

⁸⁴ TNA, FO608/6, ff. 135–141, Rawlings, 'Report of Proceedings in Eastern Silesia [23–25 January 1919]', 27 January 1919.

⁸⁵ Ibidem, FO608/7, ff. 45–50, Coulson, Dispatch No. 1, 22 February 1919. See also: ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 34.

⁸⁶ LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 29–30 March 1919.

⁸⁷ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Ibidem, pp. 8–10, 25.

observed that: *The majority of these young men are, through the hazard of war, without occupation, without prospects, without even nationality. So they dance recklessly under their new masters and sing their national songs [...] One may deny to a people a future, but one cannot take away its past.*⁸⁹ As this rather melancholy point suggests, at least by the time he departed, Roy was fairly well-attuned to the interconnection of the duchy's ethnic, political, and economic problems.

Probably the most significant perception of the duchy politically was the initial one formed by Coulson. His early reports show him privileging the political and economic arguments advanced by the former German-speaking elite and leaders of the community that spoke the Silesian dialect.⁹⁰ Both Coulson and Roy were fluent in German, so it is unsurprising they connected easily with this group both on and off-duty. It could be argued that this absence of a language barrier gave the Germans an early advantage in the wrangling that followed the commission's arrival in Teschen. For example, in his first report Coulson argued for delayed implementation of a new demarcation line, telling his superiors that *I have had conversations with mine owners, notably Count [Larisch], who do not think that the situation would be ameliorated by Polish occupation at present.*⁹¹ Roy remembered Larisch as *a middle-aged, keen-faced, courteous gentleman, immaculate in dress, who speaks perfect English and French.*⁹² Roy offered an interesting summation of how the German community conducted itself: *The attitude of the Germans towards the commission is correct, polite, and dignified, if not cordial; when asked to supply particular information they do so promptly and with the usual painstaking German accuracy; while, as regards common sense and logicity, their case is as convincing as any yet presented.*⁹³ He also noted the *punctilious politeness of demobilized Austrian officers* towards their former Allied foes.⁹⁴ Furthermore, an ongoing social relationship between the British officers and Count Larisch is confirmed by Pakenham-Walsh's testimony. In April he recorded a visit to the count's *most glorious schloss, very English inside [...] The Countess has Irish blood and both talk English perfectly.*⁹⁵

In a similar way, Coulson's first report also records contact with unnamed Silesian political leaders. Controversially, he characterised that community as an *indigenous Polish population opposed to Polish rule* and told the British delegation in Paris that *the problem of the [Silesians] is an important one. Their representatives claim that this people, numbering 80,000 are unanimously opposed to Polish rule and, though preferring autonomy, would ally itself to [Czechoslovakia] rather than to Poland.*⁹⁶ We can also detect, in both Coulson and Roy, a fairly paternalistic attitude towards this section of the duchy's population. As Roy explained: *The attitude of the native Silesians towards the Teschen question*

⁸⁹ Ibidem, p. 46.

⁹⁰ Coulson referred to the latter as 'Slonzaki'. Nomenclature used to describe this community is varied and controversial: HANNAN, K.: *Borders of Language*, p. 47. Therefore this article has used 'Silesian' as a relatively neutral label, and one that should be accessible to English-speaking readers unfamiliar with the ethnographic complexities of the duchy.

⁹¹ TNA, FO608/7, ff. 45–50, Coulson, Dispatch No. 1, 22 February 1919.

⁹² ROY, J.: *Pole and Czech*, p. 48.

⁹³ Ibidem, p. 41.

⁹⁴ Ibidem, p. 45.

⁹⁵ LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 15 April 1919.

⁹⁶ TNA, FO608/7, ff. 45–50, Coulson, Dispatch No.1, 22 February 1919.

*is one of ignorance and indifference. They lived their lives in peace and prosperity until the war destroyed the old ordered regularity of things and gave in its place anarchy, unrest, and dissatisfaction. The Silesians are primitive and populous.*⁹⁷

Coulson also argued in March that he did *not believe that the inhabitants are really political but mainly industrial. Unfortunately, since the dismemberment of the Austrian Empire, they have been the prey of a host of agitators and have become inflamed.*⁹⁸ Given what we know of Coulson's rather reactionary world-view, it seems likely that he saw the previous Habsburg regime as essentially benign and wished to recreate its basic conditions, with a small but dominant German elite supported by pliant Silesian politicians.⁹⁹ If this assumption is correct, it would go some way to explaining the commission's initial proposal that the duchy should become an independent entity under Allied control.¹⁰⁰ However, the Peace Conference was unimpressed by this suggestion and the commission was instructed to find a solution that included a partition of the duchy between Czechoslovakia and Poland.¹⁰¹ In submitting further analysis, the commission would concede that, during the early weeks of their time in Teschen, they had given insufficient attention to the wishes of the Poles. They also recanted their earlier assessment of the attitude of the Silesian community by stating that *the great majority [...] feel themselves today to be Polish.*¹⁰²

The miners of the duchy were predominantly Polish and an additional complication, from the commission's perspective, was their left-wing politics. This was, of course, situated within a broader fear that Bolshevism might gain traction in Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁰³ On the ground in Teschen, the mining district also became a focus for the ethnic conflict because the line of demarcation obliged many Polish miners to commute into the Czechoslovak zone for work. At the beginning of March, Coulson explained to Paris that *although in theory there may not seem to be much difficulty, in practice these are serious inconveniences for the miners and it causes a feeling of unrest and general dissatisfaction.*¹⁰⁴ In mid-March, Coulson reported that he had visited the pits *and talked to a mass meeting of miners*, trying to persuade them to continue working in order to supply Poland with coal. After investigation, he also felt that the miners' complaints of harassment by Czechoslovak soldiers were *unfounded.*¹⁰⁵ In this regard, Roy's later assessment

⁹⁷ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, pp. 41–42.

⁹⁸ TNA, FO608/58, f. 86, 'Extract from letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Coulson, Teschen', 22 March 1919.

⁹⁹ For the political stance adopted by the Silesian People's Party's in the previous decades, see: HANNAN, K.: *Borders of Language*, p. 47. Some of the sentiments expressed in Coulson's early reports are also reflected in the correspondence of the American commissioners: NARA, M820 Roll 164, Coolidge to American Commission to Negotiate Peace, 22 February 1919, Du Bois to Lord, 12 March 1919, Du Bois, 'Outline with Suggestions for Project Solution of Teschen Question', 21 March 1919. Coulson's position is similar to that adopted by the British military attaché in Vienna: HOFFMAN, R.: *British Military Representative*, p. 256.

¹⁰⁰ TNA, FO608/58, f. 86, 'Extract from letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Coulson, Teschen', 22 March 1919; NARA, M820 Roll 164, Coulson, Du Bois & Tissi, 'Report on the Solution of the Teschen Question', 26 March 1919.

¹⁰¹ WAMBAUGH, S.: *Plebiscites*, p. 149; WANDYCYZ, P.: *France and Her Eastern Allies*, pp. 94–95; LUNDGREEN-NIELSEN, K.: *Polish Problem*, p. 248.

¹⁰² NARA, M820 Roll 164, Coulson, Marchal, Tissi, Howe, 'Additional Report of the Commission of Teschen', 28 April 1919.

¹⁰³ GERWARTH, Robert: *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917–1923*. London 2016, p. 129.

¹⁰⁴ TNA, FO608/7, ff. 54–57, Coulson, Dispatch No. 2, 3 March 1919.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, FO608/60, ff. 354–349, Coulson to Foreign Office, 14–16 March 1919.

was that the Polish authorities had *fomented* unrest amongst the mining community for political advantage. The net result being that *the miners are sullen and mistrustful; they are suspicious of any attempts at conciliation; jingoist speeches have inflamed their sensitive and fiery tempers*.¹⁰⁶ Having visited the pits himself, Roy was greatly impressed at their modernity and thought that the miners' living conditions compared very favourably with those of his homeland. He therefore believed that before the *political upheaval*, the mining district had been a *contented community*.¹⁰⁷ Roy also provides a colourful account of a *deputation of Polish miners* presenting their grievances to the commission: *One was unconsciously impressed by their sincerity and earnestness, and the vast elemental dissatisfaction in their souls [...] Looking into the depths for a moment, one understood the unrest which was goading them into rebellion against the established order of things*.¹⁰⁸ According to Roy, amid *fierce shouts* from his comrades, their leader threatened destruction of mines and *Bolshevism and chaos* if the final partition of the duchy put them under Czechoslovak control.

Reflecting upon this account, it seems unlikely that the miners would have explicitly threatened to import Russian-style Bolshevism. But Roy's labelling of it in that way is an indication of the commission's underlying concerns. Indeed, fear of revolutionary activity is a consistent theme in Coulson's early reports. His initial assessment was that the mining community had *been entirely free from Bolshevism*, but that the political situation could give birth to it.¹⁰⁹ He therefore argued that the deployment of Allied troops was *absolutely essential if Bolshevik outbreaks are to be avoided*.¹¹⁰ This was very alarmist and was presumably a combination of his own political prejudices and a reflection of concerns expressed by aristocratic mine owners? Later, the commission became worried that May Day celebrations might become a flash-point. As Pakenham-Walsh explained to his wife: *We were a bit nervous of how events might turn out especially in the [mining area] and we feared a collision between the military & the crowd, which might lead to reprisals by the Polish military [...] Also there was a big demonstration in Teschen and the temper of the populace with the Commission is uncertain so we decided not to appear [in public] unnecessarily[rily], though we had 2 cars with Union Jacks standing by in case trouble broke out & our help was needed. Actually all was very peaceful. There was a great procession here with Red Flags etc. and about 2 hours of speechifying in the Square [...] We were relieved, but very bored as the day went on*.¹¹¹ James' recollection was that despite the *wildest rumours* of trouble, and a Polish politician being shouted down by German-speakers, overall, the demonstrations were *dull and uninteresting*.¹¹²

Across 1919 the British officers made many observations about the Czechoslovak and Polish forces they encountered within the duchy. There were aspects that impressed them but, more often, they offered up criticisms in instances where they felt that soldiers did not meet British standards of dress, discipline, or military competence. As with other aspects of their testimony, much of it is rather patronising. But they do offer an

¹⁰⁶ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 49.

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem, pp. 74–75.

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem, pp. 96–97.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, FO608/7, ff. 54–57, Coulson, Dispatch No. 2, 3 March 1919.

¹¹⁰ Ibidem, f. 261, Coulson to Foreign Office, 15 March 1919.

¹¹¹ LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 3 May 1919.

¹¹² ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, pp. 125–126.

external perspective made by men whose previous experiences on the Western Front made them competent to offer up judgements. With regard to the Polish army, Coulson's initial assessment, when arguing for a delay to their re-occupation of Teschen, was that *the Polish troops are not so well disciplined or capable of maintaining order as those of the [Czechoslovak] government*.¹¹³ When they did re-enter the town, Roy was an observer and later provided a vivid depiction of this event: *The Polish troops, infantry and cavalry alike, were poorly equipped, and the infantry, in particular, had a miserable appearance. Many of the latter were mere boys, clad in nondescript uniforms of various patterns, carrying a diversity of packs, and wearing rain-stained overcoats of many colours. They were wearied after their long march, and fatigued with the weight of their equipment, but, as befitted the occasion, they put their best foot forward with the determination to make a brave show [...] The transport was also poorly equipped, machineguns, field kitchens, and commissariat being trundled along in small, roughly-constructed carts, which were dragged by ill-kempt, bedraggled ponies [...] Few of them had a serviceable pair of boots on their feet; their socks were in rags, many were without overcoats*.¹¹⁴

Pakenham-Walsh's first recorded impression of the Polish army was based on the demeanour of the sentries guarding the *Brauner Hirsch*. He told his wife they were *rather floppy though we have had some quite smart ones occasionally*.¹¹⁵ Military appearance was also significant in Pakenham-Walsh's opinion of their superiors; a week after his arrival in the duchy he described the visiting Polish minister of war as *a dirty old Lithuanian General who had not shaved for several days*.¹¹⁶ As discussed earlier, the British officers attended a number of Polish military parades marking political or religious occasions. Looking back on Piłsudski's feast day, Roy suggested that: *Since their entry into the town the appearance, discipline, and drill of the Polish troops has improved beyond belief, and this morning they created a very favourable impression. The junior officers, especially, strike one as keen and intelligent, with a firm command over their men, who marched past the saluting base with a splendid swing, keeping excellent alignment, and breaking into the familiar "goosestep" in regular Prussian style. Their uniforms are still varied in hue and style, puttees alternating with top boots and baggy trousers, but there is no doubt as to the increased efficiency of officers and men alike*.¹¹⁷

Six weeks later, Pakenham-Walsh also noted a mixture of uniforms on parade and thought the marching was *rather spoilt by the band playing much too slowly*.¹¹⁸ In June he attended a mounted sports day hosted by one of the Polish cavalry regiments. Again, his review was mixed; he was impressed with the quality of their horses and the men's riding standards but was appalled at seeing officers holding on to their saddles while clearing small jumps.¹¹⁹

General critiques of the Czechoslovak troops are less prominent within the British officers' testimony. In part, this probably reflects the fact that by residing in the town of Teschen they had less day-to-day contact with them; the main exception being the

¹¹³ TNA, FO608/7, ff. 45–50, Coulson, Dispatch No. 1, 22 February 1919.

¹¹⁴ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, pp. 38–39.

¹¹⁵ LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 11 April 1919.

¹¹⁶ Ibidem, 18 April 1919.

¹¹⁷ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 65.

¹¹⁸ LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 3 May 1919.

¹¹⁹ Ibidem, 20–23 June 1919.

Czechoslovak liaison officers who also lived in the *Brauner Hirsch*.¹²⁰ Coulson's initial impression was that the Czechoslovak army was *extremely well-disciplined*, while Roy's later reflection was that *the Czech[oslovak] impresses one as the keener soldier. The ordinary private is ignorant and provincial, but conscientious in the discharge of his duty, to the point of officiousness. His thoroughness and naïve bucolicism are attractive*.¹²¹ Roy also established a good relationship with one of the Czechoslovak officers attending to the commission. The two of them would frequent Schultz's wine bar in the evenings, and Roy also had fond memories of the Czechoslovak social functions to which Backovský escorted him.¹²² His observation was that *entire atmosphere was different from that of a similar function in Poland; it is a matter of temperament and natural disposition. The Czech[oslovak] is deliberately [...] bourgeois*.¹²³ Roy stressed a similar contrast between Czechoslovak and Polish officers, describing the latter as fundamentally aristocratic.¹²⁴ Being middle-class himself, it seems that Roy's sympathies lay with Backovský and his peers. Another factor may have been his problematic relationship with one of the Polish officers assigned as an *aide de camp* to the British commissioner. Puslowski was described by Pakenham-Walsh as *belong[ing] to the second oldest family in Poland*, while Roy remembered a man who was *diplomatic, suave, and old-fashioned in some of his ideas [...] a Royalist, a devout Catholic, and an intense patriot*.¹²⁵ Late one evening in April, Puslowski and Roy got into an argument over Britain's contribution to Allied victory in the war. Roy called him *a damn fool* and Puslowski challenged him to a duel. Over the following hours, Coulson intervened, de-escalated the situation, and a reconciliation was enacted. However, this incident helps to explain the mildly pro-Czechoslovak perspective that comes through in much of Roy's writing.¹²⁶

More significantly, Roy's immediate superiors encountered frequent difficulties with Colonel Josef Šnejdárěk, the Czechoslovak military commander. Initially, Šnejdárěk made a very positive impression upon Coulson, who described him as *trustworthy, capable and resolute*.¹²⁷ Pakenham-Walsh was also impressed, describing him as *a very fine soldier who has served a long time in the [French Foreign Legion], chiefly in Africa, & with the Czech Legion in France during the war*.¹²⁸ Roy's recollection was of a *capable organizer [...] a good soldier, a man of decision, intelligence, and great force of character*. He also highlighted Šnejdárěk's colonial warfare experience, suggesting that *through long dealing with Arabs [...] has acquired a subtlety and resource in argument which is difficult to counter*. Furthermore, Roy suggested that *the hardships of Arab warfare and the desert [had] accustomed [Šnejdárěk] to administer justice and maintain order with an iron hand*.¹²⁹ As the Teschen dispute dragged on, the British officers felt that the Czechoslovaks were

¹²⁰ TNA, FO608/58, ff. 336–339, Coulson to Crowe, 3 June 1919.

¹²¹ Ibidem, FO608/7, ff. 45–50, Coulson, Dispatch No.1, 22 February 1919; ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 85.

¹²² ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, pp. 89, 167.

¹²³ Ibidem, pp. 94–95.

¹²⁴ Ibidem, pp. 87–88.

¹²⁵ LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 11 April 1919; ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 40.

¹²⁶ Ibidem, 15 April 1919; QUA, 1035 Fonds James Roy, 'Boughs of the Yew', p. 46, 'Insubstantial Pageant', pp. 71–72.

¹²⁷ TNA, FO608/7, ff. 45–50, Coulson, Dispatch No. 1, 22 February 1919.

¹²⁸ LHCMA, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, Ridley to Mabel, 18 April 1919.

¹²⁹ ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, pp. 101, 103.

noticeably more obstructive than the Poles. As Coulson explained in mid-March: *They appear much more reasonable and make many promises, which unfortunately they do not always fulfil. They are much better organised & far stronger from a military point of view, and should we make no concessions to them and insist on all the demands of the Poles being carried out, things would probably come to a deadlock.*¹³⁰

By early May, he lodged a complaint about the Czechoslovak *attitude* on behalf of the commission, noting that, on arrival, they had been *favourably impressed by the Czech[oslovak]s* but they were now taking *liberties*.¹³¹ Even Roy, who was generally well-disposed toward the Czechoslovaks, recalled that *both sides are mutually recriminatory, but difficulties are, for the most part, raised by the Czech[oslovak]s, who are not merely obstinate, but too frequently obstructionist.*¹³² The British officers also felt that Šnejdárěk's behaviour was aggravating the situation. Coulson reiterated his personal liking of the Czechoslovak commander but suggested that he was not *suited to the administrative post he now fills and that also he has too many powers centred in him*. He also noted that Šnejdárěk would absent himself *for long periods and, even when he was at his post [...] it was most difficult to see him.*¹³³ Pakenham-Walsh reported that in April, after a week in which *no member of the Commission [had] been able to see him or speak to him on the telephone*, they had asked the Czechoslovak government to relieve Šnejdárěk of his civil administrative duties.¹³⁴ In early June he was redeployed to fight in Slovakia against the Hungarians.¹³⁵

Reflections

The British officers who served in the Duchy of Teschen have left some interesting evidence. Their testimony does not transform our understanding of Allied efforts to broker a settlement between Czechoslovakia and Poland, but it does offer a fresh, external perspective upon the process as it played out on the ground. However, we cannot say that Coulson, Roy, and Pakenham-Walsh were unbiased witnesses. The article has shown that their backgrounds definitely influenced how they interpreted events and people within the duchy. Limited space has prevented an unpacking of the additional complexities of their interactions with their French, Italian, and American colleagues, but it is quite clear that peacekeeping in Teschen was greatly influenced by the British officers' personalities and the relationships they established with Czechoslovaks, Germans, Poles, and Silesians. Similarly, there is much that we do not know about these men. For example, did Pakenham-Walsh's Irish background influence the way he perceived intercommunal conflict? Or, in Coulson's case, had he visited the Habsburg Empire before the war, and did that shape his championing of an independent statelet of Teschen? That said, some key points shine through. Perhaps most significantly, although Coulson's fluency in German was of great practical use, when combined with his social snobbery, it arguably made him a conduit for channelling the interests of the duchy's established elite. For Roy, social class was also an influence; in his case it drew him towards what he perceived as

¹³⁰ TNA, FO608/60, ff. 354–359, Coulson to Foreign Office, 14–16 March 1919.

¹³¹ Ibidem, FO608/58, ff. 272–274, Coulson to Foreign Office, 7 May 1919.

¹³² ROY, J.: Pole and Czech, p. 100.

¹³³ TNA, FO608/58, ff. 336–339, Coulson to Crowe, 3 June 1919.

¹³⁴ Ibidem, ff. 331–334, Pakenham-Walsh to Foreign Office, 4 June 1919.

¹³⁵ Ibidem, ff. 344–345, Pakenham-Walsh to Foreign Office, 8 June 1919.

bourgeois Czechoslovaks rather than aristocratic Poles. Another important issue, which might benefit from further analysis, is the significance of wearing a military uniform in this post-conflict situation. Did pan-European military protocol and mutual respect make the military commissioners more effective than the civilian ones? But, in contrast, did their high regard for Šnejdárek's prior military service mean the British officers only belatedly realised he was deliberately obstructing them? Finally, this article signposts the potential for exploring other missions carried out by the British military in Central and Eastern Europe in the messy aftermath of the First World War. Systematic digging in the Foreign Office files may reveal a better-resourced and more effective effort than has hitherto been realised.

Summary

British Military Officers in Teschen 1919

Six British officers can be confirmed as having served in the troubled Duchy of Teschen, during and after the Seven-Day War of January 1919. They were George Crosfield, Basil Coulson, William Fordham, Bernard Rawlings, Ridley Pakenham-Walsh, and James Roy. Two were successive British representatives on the InterAllied Commission, one was their assistant. The other three only visited the duchy briefly. Their Allied military uniforms, diplomatic mission, and possession of hard currency gave them elite social status that was analogous to that of foreign correspondents. Before 1919, Coulson had a chequered military career but fluent German probably caused him to be selected as the British commissioner in Teschen. Pakenham-Walsh was a high-flying army officer with limited language skills, but was chosen to replace Coulson because he was a safe pair of hands. Roy was a literature academic who acted as cipher officer and assistant to the two colonels. The officers' duties in Teschen can be categorised as military, civil, and social. Their military work sought to maintain the ceasefire between Czechoslovak and Polish forces along the line of demarcation. Civil work was more mundane but equally demanding, and their social obligations were numerous and sometimes very alcoholic. They perceived the town of Teschen to be very German in character. With regard to the core ethnographic dispute, in the early weeks Coulson was strongly influenced by German and Silesian-speaking leaders. This underpinned the commission's rejected suggestion that Teschen should be a politically-independent entity. The officers' perceptions of the mining community were coloured by unfounded concerns about Bolshevism. They held generally negative opinions about the military demeanour of the Polish army, but this may have been skewed by greater day-to-day exposure to that force. They were more positive about Czechoslovak troops but, although having great respect for his previous military career, they were greatly irritated by the conduct of their commander. Taken collectively, their testimony offers a fresh perspective on events in Teschen during this period.