

# The Hailar Incident: The Nadir of Troubled Relations between the Czechoslovak Legionnaires and the Japanese Army, April 1920

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## INTRODUCTION

The Czechoslovak Legion in Russia were employed in the Allied intervention from 1918 to 1920 on the side of the anti-Bolshevik regime of Admiral Kolchak, who in turn was supported by the Allies. This military service was very unpopular among the legionnaires who were impatient to return home. Nevertheless, they accepted the necessity of their engagement as a powerful argument for the victorious world powers to recognize Czechoslovakia as an independent state after the First World War. By the end of 1919, the Kolchak regime had fallen under the Red Army offensive and suffered the outbreak of many uprisings in the hinterland. This marked the end of Allied intervention, and all surviving forces, including the Czechoslovak Legion, started evacuating from Siberia. However, to make it to the ships at Vladivostok, the legionnaires were now ready to fight anybody, friend or foe, who stood in their way.

In April 1920, although most Czechoslovak regiments had reached Vladivostok, the last echelons of their rearguard had just entered the Chinese Eastern Railway (C. E. R.), which connected the Trans-Baikal region with the Russian Far East via the territory of northeast China. Despite many difficulties, the Czechoslovak leadership was confident that the evacuation would be completed successfully. However, this last phase did not go smoothly because of worsening relations between the legionnaires and the Japanese Imperial Army. Another reason was the generally tense situation along the C. E. R. where the interests of many nations and world powers clashed. This complexity is well illustrated by an international incident at Hailar Railway Station that took place on April 11, 1920, the scene of armed conflict among Russian railway workers, Japanese and Chinese soldiers, and the Czechoslovak legionnaires riding their armored train the *Orlík*, the alleged source of troubles in the melee.

Due to these conflicting aims, the Hailar incident is interpreted in different ways, which has created much speculation. According to Japanese accounts, this incident was primarily a Sino-Japanese dispute, during which the legionnaires allegedly sided with the Chinese.<sup>1</sup> Yet conflict between the Japanese garrison and the legionnaires is not a legitimate conclusion judging by the

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1 "Hairaru de nichu shoutotsu, Chekkogun mo Chugoku gawa ni [Japan and China conflicted in Hailar. The Czech Army took sides with China]," *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, 15 April 1920.

Czech version, which indicates that it appeared to be an impromptu free-for-all in which the Russians, Japanese, and Chinese all took part and in which the Czechs remained absolutely neutral in spite of their losses.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this article is therefore twofold: first, to compare the Czech position with other interpretations, namely the Japanese and Chinese, and secondly, to reconstruct the events during the Hailar incident in detail in chronological order. With this approach, the historian can hope to explain some of the seeming contradictions and the level of responsibility of each party, which none of them was ready to admit at the time for the sake of protecting their own vital interests.

### MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

It is difficult to draw an unambiguous conclusion about the Hailar incident despite the use of multinational archival resources and articles from the contemporary press. In Japan, the main sources of information consist of telegrams exchanged between the Army General Staff Headquarters and the Foreign Ministry at home and among military and diplomatic officials in Siberia, Manchuria, and the Russian Far East relating to the Czechoslovak Army in Siberia and her relations with the Japanese Army. These manuscripts are handwritten or typewritten copies of confidential correspondence, reports, etc. received in Tokyo. Most of these files are arranged chronologically, covering the period from 1918 to 1920, and are part of a large series entitled *Russian Revolution*.<sup>3</sup> The Army General Staff Headquarters and the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo were the most important pillars of Japan's expansionist policy in Siberia. However, because of the traditional rivalry between the military and civil governmental institutions, their viewpoints regarding the Hailar incident were different.<sup>4</sup> The Hailar incident was also depicted in the Japanese newspapers in order to shape public opinion. For this article, a microfilmed version of the Foreign Ministry's files from the library of the Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University was used.

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2 For more details, see the article "Czechs Were Neutral at Hailar despite Their Losses in the Melee," *The Japanese Advertiser*, May 18, 1920. There is also a Japanese translation of this article, "Hairaru jiken ni kansuru Chekku gawa no setsumeii" in Gaimusho kiroku [Foreign Ministry Archives], Rokoku kakumei ikken [Russian Revolution], 1-6-3-24-13-39 (hereafter cited as GK-RKI).

3 "Chekosurovaku gundan kankei [Concerning the Czechoslovak Army]," GK-RKI, 1-6-3-24-13-42; "Chekogundan minzoku undo, Rengokoku gawa no enjo [The Czechoslovak national movement and the assistance from the Allies]," GK-RKI, 1-6-3-24-13-39.

4 "Dai 19 setsu Hairarujiken," chap. 19 in Sanbo Honbu [General Staff Office], *Shiberia Shuppei-shi, Taisho 7-nen naishi 11-nen* [A History of the Siberian Expedition: Taisho 7-11] (Tokyo: Shinjidaisha, 1972, reprint), vol. II, pp. 949-954; "Hairaru Jiken no Tenmatsu [Details on the Hailar incident]," GK-RKI, 1-6-3-24-13-42/ 1. (2)-2(1).

A counterbalance to the Japanese account is a collection of Czech sources recovered from Siberia, held in the Central Military Archives in Prague. The relevant files are in a series entitled *The Far Eastern Headquarters* of the Czechoslovak Detachment, and mainly consist of various telegrams and classified reports, circulated between military units and their superior headquarters, as well as public announcements made for the civil authorities or the press. The Czech files, unlike the Japanese materials, are not arranged in chronological order, but include the only available Chinese official statement regarding the Hailar incident, given to Czechoslovak representatives during the official meeting at Harbin.<sup>5</sup> Only a few references to the Hailar incident have been found in documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Beijing government, compiled after 1948 in Taiwan.<sup>6</sup> Because of a general lack of access to the archives in mainland China, the Chinese account of the Hailar incident is cited mainly from the Czech and Japanese sources mentioned above.

The most useful secondary source for the reconstruction of the Hailar incident is Jamie Bisher's book (2005).<sup>7</sup> In this book, there is also a chapter about the Hailar incident based on archival materials held in archives and libraries in the United States, particularly a report written by Colonel Loubignac<sup>8</sup> of France and Major Colby<sup>9</sup> of the United States, both travelling on the Czechoslovak train.

Many interesting details about the inner structure of the Czechoslovak Army, including the character of its military and political leadership, are depicted in Lieutenant Jindřich Skácel's memoirs (1923).<sup>10</sup> Lieutenant Skácel served as adjutant to General Jan Syrový, commander in chief of the Czechoslovak Army in Siberia, and in reference to the Hailar incident, cited important Czech documents based in Vladivostok as an addition to the archives holding the *Far Eastern Headquarters* of the Czechoslovak Detachment. Therefore, I used Skácel's documents in this article to highlight contradictions with the Japanese version.

In Japan, Czechoslovak-Japanese relations have been studied by Hayashi Tadayuki. He wrote an article in Czech, which briefly mentioned the Hailar in-

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5 "Shengming riben junren zai Hailaer daibu egong zhi shishi [Chinese statement regarding the arrest of Russian workers in Hailar by Japanese soldiers]," Česká republika, Ústřední vojenský archiv, Velitelství Dálného východu, Chajlarský incident [The Czech Republic, Central Military Archives, Far Eastern Headquarters of the Czechoslovak Detachment, Hailar incident] (hereafter cited as CRÚVA, VDV, CI).

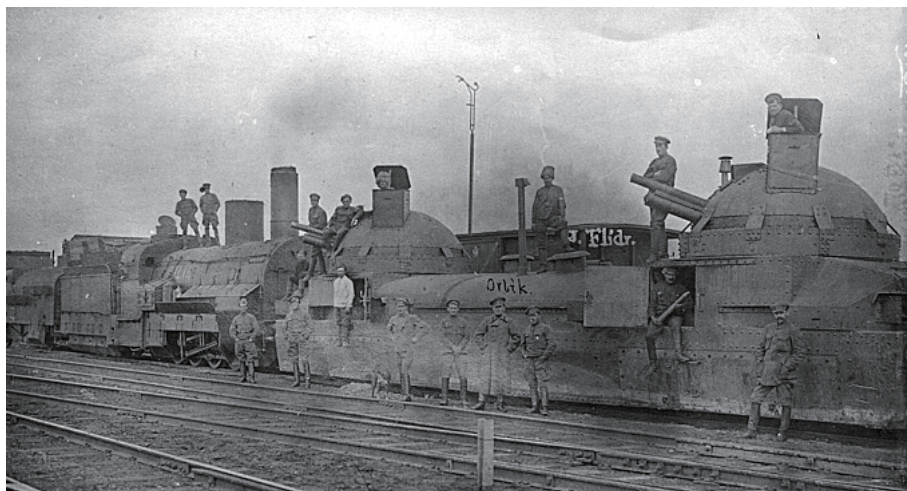
6 *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: zhongdong tielu yu dongbei bianfang* [History of Sino-Russian relations: The Chinese Eastern Railway and the defense of the northeast] (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1980).

7 Jamie Bisher, *White Terror: Cossack Warlords of the Trans-Siberian* (London: Routledge, 2005).

8 We failed to identify his first name.

9 We failed to identify his first name.

10 Jindřich Skácel, *S generálem Syrovým v Sibiři* [With General Syrový in Siberia] (Prague: Obrození: 1923).

Fig. 1. The Armored Train the *Orlík*

cident.<sup>11</sup> During research at the Slavic Research Center, I also discovered a publication written by a Japanese soldier who was in Hailar during the incident.<sup>12</sup> This book is an interesting counterpoint to the equally subjective experiences of the Czechoslovak legionnaires.

### BACKGROUND

During the Russian Revolution and the ensuing civil war, the existing railroads in Russia offered the only effective main route of transporting troops and supplies to the front for the armies of both sides. As a result, the battles were mainly fought along the railroads and armored trains became an important weapon. They provided their crews with reasonably good protection against rifle-caliber fire due to their steel plating while their artillery could move quickly into position and win local firepower superiority.

The Czechoslovak legionnaires captured their best armored train on the bridge across the Volga River near Simbirsk during their military campaign against the Bolsheviks in the summer of 1918.<sup>13</sup> Since then, this battle trophy re-

11 Tadayuki Hayashi, "T. G. Masaryk, československé legie a Japonsko [T. G. Masaryk, the Czechoslovak Legion and Japan]," in Jaroslav Opat, ed., *První světová válka, moderní demokracie a T. G. Masaryka* [World War I, Modern Democracy and T. G. Masaryk], (Prague: Ústav T. G. Masaryka, 1995), p. 94.

12 Teiji Hashimoto, *Hairaru Sonanki* [Written account regarding the incident in Hailar] (Tokushima, 1936).

13 This train with the Czechoslovak crew consisted of two closed artillery wagons, a steam locomotive covered with steel plating, and flatbed cars added to both ends to prevent the train from derailing. The first artillery wagon, attached to the front of the locomotive, had two cylindrical towers equipped with 76-mm anti-aircraft cannons and observatories. The artillery towers rotated with the help of electric motors. Both sides and ends of the wagon

ceived a new Czech name, *Orlík*, and was used mainly for guarding the Trans-Siberian Railroad against partisans in 1919 (fig. 1).<sup>14</sup> During the Czechoslovak evacuation from Siberia, the *Orlík* was assigned to protect its rearguard. At the beginning of January, the *Orlík* launched an attack on Ataman Grigory Semenov's forces east of Irkutsk who were obstructing Czechoslovak movement in this section of the railroad, and from there, the *Orlík* secured its passage to Verkhneudinsk where the Japanese garrison was taken by complete surprise. The massive construction and armament of the *Orlík* engendered respect and the Czechoslovak legionnaires felt very proud of this armored train as a part of their weaponry. On the other hand, approaching the east, it greatly alarmed the Japanese Army, whose commanders had been worried about the unpredictable behavior of the Czechoslovak legionnaires for several months, especially when the *Orlík* entered the C. E. R., where it was about to cause more problems for the Japanese in their military planning.

After the fall of the Kolchak's anti-Bolshevik regime, this railway zone became the scene of another power struggle between Ataman Semenov and General Dmitry Horvath, the remaining two White Russian leaders. Russian railway employees were prone to radical agitation and strikes because they often received their wages late and the rapid devaluation of the ruble made their money useless.<sup>15</sup> While Semenov relied on Japanese assistance, Russian railway employees were politically supported by the socialist revolutionary government in Vladivostok. On March 13, 1920, Russian railway employees proclaimed a general strike to oust both Semenov and Horvath and to take control of the C. E. R. administration.

At the same time, the Beijing government was determined to recover China's rights regarding the C. E. R., but the real power at Harbin was in the hands of a local warlord, Zhang Zuolin, who had controlled the Three Eastern Provinces since 1919.<sup>16</sup> On March 16, the Chinese Army, under General

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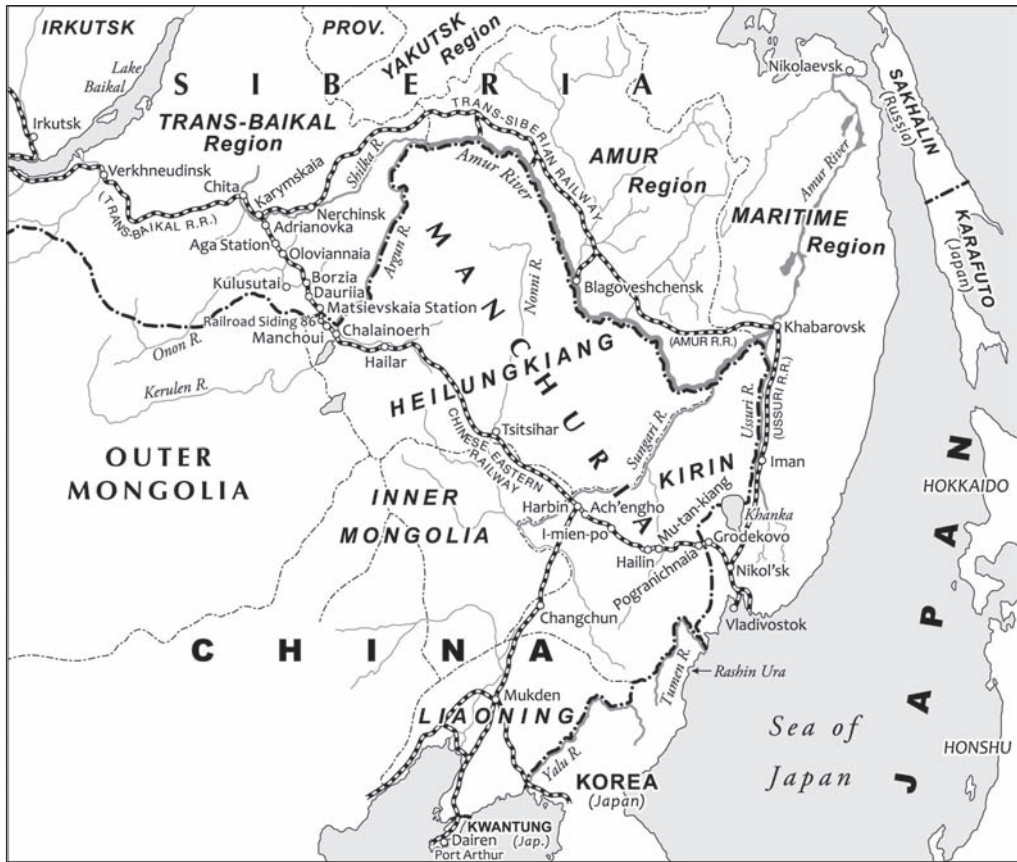
were equipped with portholes for small arms and machine guns and were protected by the armory. Inside the artillery wagon was a central ventilation system. The second artillery wagon had two conical towers and used the same weaponry as armament. The maximum speed of this armored train was 45 km per hour and it could bear a weight of approximately 130 tons. Until 1917, the Russian Army used this train on the southwest front under its original name, the *Zaamurets*. Until March 1918, it served in various Red Guard units, passing eventually to Commander Polipanov, who christened it anew as armored train No. 4, *Polipanovtsi*. For more details on the *Orlík's* history, see Maksim Kolomiets, *Bronia ruskoi armii. Broneavtomobili i bronepoezda v Pervoi mirovoi voine* (Moscow; Iauza; Eksmo, 2008), pp. 417–422.

14 Jindřich Skácel, *S Generálem Syrovým v Sibiři* [With General Syrový in Siberia] (Prague, 1923).

15 Sow-Theng Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1917–1926* (Cambera: Australian National University Press, 1976), p. 94.

16 Zhang Zuolin was named the Inspector General of the Three Eastern Provinces by Premier Duan Qirui in September 1918. For a more detailed discussion of Zhang's rise and administration, see Gavan McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin in Northeast China, 1911–1928: China, Japan, and the Manchurian Idea* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), pp. 112–115.

Map. The Russian Far East, the Chinese Eastern Railway, and Other Railroads  
 (reproduced from the map published in James W. Morley, *The Japanese Thrust into Siberia*, 1918  
 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), p. 5).



Bao Guiqing, occupied the offices of the C. E. R. Company in Harbin to drive out General Horvath and his staff. General Bao<sup>17</sup> ordered him to relinquish his political authority, disbanded Horvath's private army and police force, and began arresting the strikers who had made these moves against Horvath possible. Horvath resigned and two days later, the strike ended.<sup>18</sup> General Bao himself now became president of the C. E. R. Company and commander in chief of the Chinese railway guards.

The Chinese in Harbin emerged as the victors from the Russian power struggle; however, this development was further complicated by the Japanese spring offensive, which started on April 4. During the night, the Japanese Army took control of Vladivostok and disarmed local Russian revolutionary

17 General Bao Guiqing was an unusually able Chinese military commander loyal to Zhang Zuolin. China's far-reaching recovery of rights in north Manchuria may be attributed largely to him: Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations*, p. 94.

18 Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations*, pp. 97-98.

forces because the local socialist revolutionary administration had come under Bolshevik influence. However, the next day, advancing Japanese troops encountered severe resistance from partisans around Nikol'sk-Ussuriisk, a small Cossack town near the border with China. Consequently, on April 9, Japanese reinforcements entered the C. E. R. and began occupying stations north of Changchun.<sup>19</sup>

Officially, the Japanese Army justified their presence on the C. E. R. by the Sino-Japanese military pact<sup>20</sup> and by provision of assistance for the Czechoslovak evacuation. The Czechoslovak Legionnaires, however, sympathized with the Russian railway employees and also negotiated with the partisans in order to accomplish their eastward evacuation. After the March failure to take over the C. E. R. Company administration at Harbin, the Russian revolutionaries moved westwards along the track, arriving at Hailar, the last major station before the Russian border. During this military offensive, the Japanese were searching for partisans to exact revenge for the massacre of Japanese garrison troops and the Japanese civilian population in Nikolaevsk-na-Amur.<sup>21</sup>

## PRELUDE

On April 9 at 3 a.m., Yoshida Hikoharu, Japanese military commander of the Hailar garrison, arrested eight Russian railway employees<sup>22</sup> on the alleged grounds of Bolshevik agitation among the railway workmen in not permitting Japanese military trains to pass over their rails. Yoshida made the arrest in cooperation with Japanese military intelligence, but the Czechoslovaks speculated that the arrest was only another act of Japanese provocation initiated by Semenov's agents, also present at Hailar and always searching for opportunities to strike back against the Russian revolutionaries.<sup>23</sup> The Czechoslovaks at Hailar Station, however, thought that they should keep out of this conflict.

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19 Bisher, *White Terror*, p. 255.

20 A secret military document against the common enemy along the Russo-Chinese borders was signed in May 1918 by Tokyo and Beijing. The Japanese Army used this treaty for expansion on the continent in exchange for financial and military assistance to Duan Qirui and his faction, then in power in Beijing.

21 At the end of February 1920, a local partisan leader Yakov Triapitsyn with his troops massacred the whole Japanese military garrison of 350 soldiers and the minority Japanese population of 450 inhabitants. The town's population plummeted from 15,000 to 2,000. The massacre became fully known to the Japanese in the spring. For details of this incident, see Teruyuki Hara, *Siberia shuppei: kakumei to kansho: 1917-1922* [The Siberian Expedition: revolution and intervention] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1989), pp. 518-544.

22 Sanbo Honbu, *Shiberia Shuppei-shi*, p. 724. According to Bisher, eleven Russians were arrested: seven members of the Regional Railway Committee, the assistant stationmaster, and three telegraphers. See Bisher, *White Terror*, pp. 251-252.

23 This hypothesis is also mentioned in the report regarding the Hailar incident written by the Reconnoitring Office at the Czechoslovak Third Infantry Division Headquarters, CRÚVA, VDV, CI. Semenov and his men were ready to collaborate with the Japanese Army also to

The arrests in Hailar caused an unexpectedly fierce protest from the Russian railway workmen. They sent an anonymous letter to Yoshida demanding immediate release of their comrades and in the case of non-compliance, they threatened a strike on the whole line. Servicing the trains, they knew of the arrests and summary execution of two railway employees by the Japanese three days before at Yimianbo. A local Chinese commander was also asked to intervene. Finally, the Russian civil authorities in Hailar tried to raise the matter with the Japanese consul in Harbin, but were ignored.

Pressed by the resolute attitude of the Russian railway men in defending their comrades, Yoshida decided to transport the prisoners from Hailar to Manzhouli where he had superior military command. During the night of April 10, after a passenger train arrived at Hailar Station, Yoshida ordered that the prisoners be taken out from the Japanese barracks to the railroad yard.<sup>24</sup> A Japanese escort hurried the arrested men into a cattle car<sup>25</sup> that they connected to the end of this passenger train on the first track. A strong guard had been placed outside on the platform to keep everyone at a distance.<sup>26</sup>

The railway men removed the locomotive of the passenger train and derailed the decapods at the roundhouse. There was no chance for anyone to leave the Hailar railroad yard unless they owned their own locomotive. This affected the movement of the Czechoslovak trains because by that time, most of the tracks in the Hailar railroad yard had been occupied by them. In the morning of April 11, there was one echelon of the Twelfth Infantry Regiment's headquarters, an artillery train, a headquarters train of the Third Division, a commissariat echelon, the First Battalion train of the Twelfth Regiment, and the armored train *Orlík*, the strongest and best-equipped armored train in the whole Trans-Baikal region, together with its commissariat train.<sup>27</sup> All of these trains arrived from Chita, across the Russian border.

Major Colby, an American military supervisor of railway operations under the Inter-Allied Commission, travelling on the Czechoslovak train with the Legionnaires' civil and military leaders, anxiously telegraphed to his colleagues in Harbin requesting that their trains be extricated from the area by sending a new locomotive.<sup>28</sup> The legionnaires discussed the situation with the Russians at Hailar Station, and it became clear that the desperate railway men were not about to allow a trainload of Czechoslovak soldiers and their leaders to abandon them to face other Japanese punitive trains that might be coming to suppress their strike.

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take revenge against the Czechoslovak Legionnaires, who attacked the Semenovite forces in Trans-Baikal several times for obstructing the Czechoslovak evacuation.

24 In Hashimoto Teiji's account, it was a Japanese mail train. Hashimoto, *Hairaru Sonanki*, p. 251.

25 In Russian, "teplushka."

26 Bisher, *White Terror*, p. 252.

27 Hájek's report regarding the Hailar incident, 12 May 1920, CRÚVA, VDV, CI.

28 Bisher, *White Terror*, p. 252.



Early in the morning of April 11, a Chinese military echelon with Major Lian Bang,<sup>29</sup> member of the general staff, arrived in Hailar presumably to settle the incident.<sup>30</sup> His train stopped on the fifth track from the station next to the *Orlík* and the Twelfth Regiment's train. Being informed in advance that the Japanese wanted to take the only available locomotive in the railroad yard from his train to transport the prisoners to Manzhouli, Lian Bang ordered his men to guard his train on both sides. These Chinese guards did not belong to the local garrison in Hailar and became a very important element on that fatal day.

At the same time, the local Chinese military garrison commander was discussing the whole matter with Yoshida. Meanwhile, railway workmen formally protested against the Japanese action to JUDr. Josef Blahož, a senior Czechoslovak political leader passing through on the Third Division train. Blahož brought the arrests to the attention of Chinese authorities, who too were growing frustrated by the Japanese indignities, but preferred to deal with the Japanese alone. So, when Blahož called into consultation Major Colby and Colonel Loubignac and went with them to see the Japanese garrison commander, Major Yoshida refused to receive them and after two hours, sent a captain to inform them that the prisoners would not be released.

Around 6 p.m., Major Lian Bang, whose abrupt attitude was not representative of most of the Chinese officers in the area, paid a visit to the commander of the Czechoslovak Third Division, Major Lev Prchala, in his car where Blahož, Loubignac, and Colby were also present. Prchala urged Lian Bang to intervene with the Japanese commander to settle the incident. Lian Bang was very courteous and replied that he had already punished a Chinese major and his guard for being irresolute by sending them to another place<sup>31</sup> and he was now about to visit the Japanese commander in person.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, the military bands of the Chinese and the Czechoslovak Twelfth Regiment were playing on the platform together for the holiday crowd. It was a Sunday and the Easter holiday according to the Russian Orthodox calendar. The crowd was listening to music in the railroad yard, and several hundred Czechoslovak legionnaires were also there.<sup>33</sup> A typical scenario for a holiday crowd was that many Russians got drunk.<sup>34</sup> After dark at about 8 p.m., the military bands had completed their program and a number of people from the crowd began leaving. However, the railway men, along with the children

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29 No exact characters for the name of this Chinese military officer were available.

30 Report written by Major Loubignac, Hailar, 12 April 1920, CRÚVA, VDV, CI. The real intentions of Major Lian Bang are not known. According to another theory, he might have travelled with his men to Manzhouli to strengthen the local Chinese garrison against Semenov's forces.

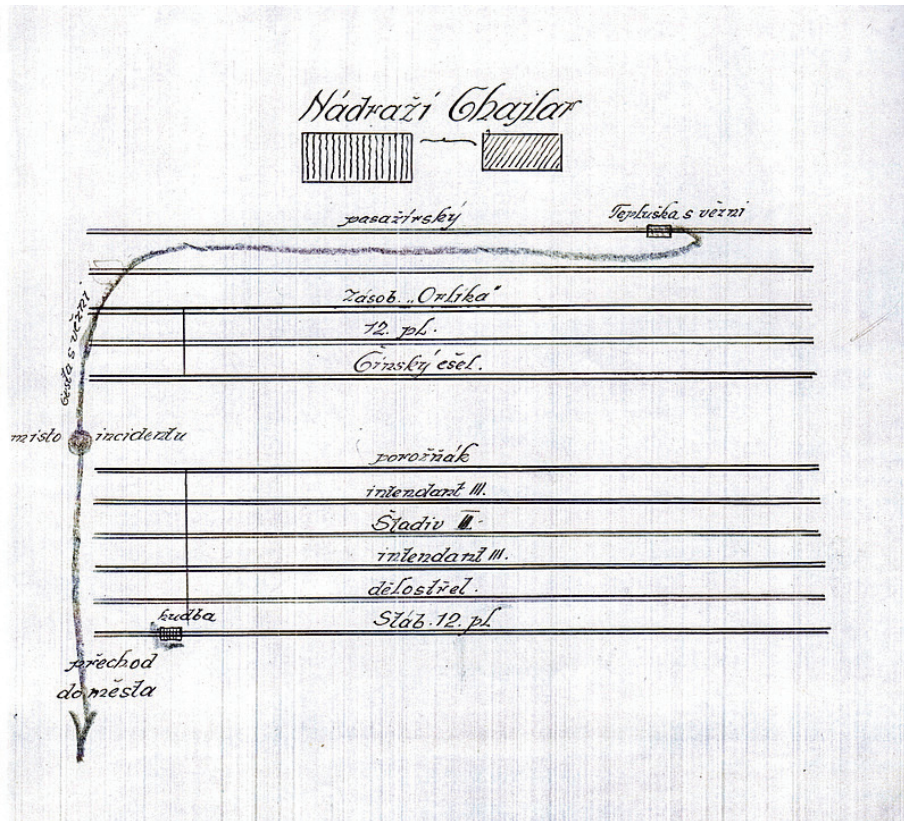
31 Unfortunately, it is not clear whether Lian Bang meant to punish a Chinese major for the problems with his locomotive.

32 Loubignac's report, Hailar, April 12, 1920, CRÚVA, VDV, CI.

33 Sanbo Honbu, *Shiberia Shuppei-shi*, p. 724.

34 Bisher, *White Terror*, p. 252.

Fig. 2. The Czechoslovak Scheme for Hailar Railroad Yard and Trains during the Incident on April 11, 1920 (CRÚVA)



and wives of the arrested, remained to be close to the prisoners whose car was standing on the other side of the railroad yard. They shouted from the little barred windows of the cattle car that they were quite prepared to be shot on the spot by the Japanese rather than be handed over to Semenov. It was believed that they would be transported from Manzhouli to Dauria and sentenced there. Dauria was under the command of the sadistic Baron Ungern-Sternberg, the local White leader ill-famed for his brutality and liquidation camp exterminating his opponents, all of them labeled Bolsheviks.<sup>35</sup>

35 Bisher, *White Terror*, pp. 266–267. Sergey Lazo, a commander of the Red Army and partisan units in the Far East, arrested by the Japanese at Vladivostok during the spring offensive in April 1920, was handed over to the Cossacks of the White movement who burned him alive in the firebox of a steam locomotive in Murav'ev-Amurskaia Station (today, Lazo Station). Lazo became a Soviet hero.

## CROSSFIRE

After the military bands played their last tune, the Japanese detachments of two companies appeared on the platform and formed a cordon around the cattle car, and began to escort the prisoners away on foot. Having realized that the workers would obstruct the way by rail, the Japanese intended to transport the detainees to Manzhouli by automobile before the coming night to prevent any incident. Being outside of the car, the prisoners once again pleaded with the mass for help, and the response was that they would not be left alone.<sup>36</sup> Finally, the crowd surrounded the prisoners' escort near the exit from the station to the town; it was at the west end of the Czechoslovak echelons that stood on the south side of the railway station (fig. 2).

Suddenly, someone in the crowd shouted, "Do it!" and immediately, a revolver shot rang out, hitting a Japanese officer. In a rapid response, a Japanese officer later identified as Lieutenant Komatsubara<sup>37</sup> tossed a grenade into the prisoners, killing one on the spot.<sup>38</sup> In the meantime, the Russians<sup>39</sup> had managed to toss two grenades at the escort, felling four or five. Then, following an order of Lieutenant Muraki,<sup>40</sup> his men fell back at a run, formed a line near the Chinese garrison, and began firing into the escaping crowd in front of the railway station.<sup>41</sup>

Chinese soldiers guarding Lian Bang's train dived behind the platform to take cover and opened fire, presumably at the Japanese. The majority of the legionnaires being outside or in their cars did not know what was happening and tried to find shelter against the sudden fire in the railroad yard. Because of their position, the Czechoslovak echelons became caught in the middle of the crossfire, even though it was not quite clear who exactly was firing against whom. Although it began to appear that there was no real fight going on, rifles and machine guns fired for an hour. The bullets came from the vicinity of the Chinese barracks where the Japanese had retreated as well as from the barracks themselves. It was also proved that Japanese machine guns opened fire to cover the escort's withdrawal and they continued firing to show their displeasure even after the Japanese had made their way back to their barracks.<sup>42</sup> According to another report, the Chinese operated this machine gun and other Chinese

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36 Bisher, *White Terror*, p. 252.

37 We failed to identify his first name.

38 Bičičtě to Čeček, Vladivostok, June 22, 1920, CRÚVA, VDV, CI, p. 10.

39 Unfortunately, no materials have clarified whether it was just someone from the crowd or the railway workers, or maybe revolutionaries.

40 We failed to identify his first name.

41 Bičičtě to Čeček, Vladivostok, June 22, 1920, CRÚVA, VDV, CI, p. 10.

42 Bisher, *White Terror*, p. 253.

soldiers had been firing aimlessly.<sup>43</sup> However, no proof has been found so far as to whether the local Chinese garrison also took part in the crossfire.

A short inquiry into who was shooting was made by the commander of the *Orlík*, Captain Ján Hájek. After the outbreak of gunfire in the railroad yard, he moved with his armored train from the eastern side to a position in front of the station building where he started to illuminate the scene using the *Orlík*'s searchlights. Unfortunately for him, during this spotting, he was shot in the left hand and was taken to have his wound dressed without learning anything. Most of the casualties including civilians were struck down during the first terrifying minutes.<sup>44</sup> As a result of the crossfire, one Czechoslovak officer and a soldier were killed and seven were wounded including a soldier's wife.<sup>45</sup>

Meanwhile, Major Ladislav Kvapil, the Third Division chief of staff, and Lieutenant Colonel Václav Kopal, chief of the Czechoslovak Military Mission from Prague, strode between their echelons and issued strict orders that nobody interfere with anything, no strangers be admitted into the trains, all guards be at their posts, and reinforcements ordered.<sup>46</sup> On the following day, April 12, Colonel Lev Prchala and Lieutenant Colonel Kopal called on the Chinese commander for an explanation and suggested forming a commission of Czechoslovak, Japanese, Chinese, Major Colby of that United States, and Colonel Loubignac of France. The Chinese refused and declared that they would ask the Japanese whether they sought to discuss the incident.<sup>47</sup> After that, the Czechoslovak staff met for an inquiry with the Japanese and Chinese military officers in the Chinese headquarters.<sup>48</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Kopal declared that the Czechoslovaks were not interested in the troubles between the Japanese and the Russians, but needed to record an explanation of their casualties. To his surprise, the Japanese began to talk about a drunken Czechoslovak soldier who had been detained near the Japanese headquarters. After that, the Japanese officers declared that they

43 "Report of the Czechoslovak-Japanese-Chinese Commission regarding the Hailar Incident," Bičičště to Čeček, Vladivostok, June 22, 1920, CRÚVA, VDV, CI, p. 9. Also see Bičičště to Čeček, CRÚVA, VDV, CI.

44 Hájek's report, May 12, 1920, CRÚVA, VDV, CI.

45 Kopal's report, CRÚVA, VDV, CI. According to the Japanese report, they had two casualties and twenty-seven wounded. Quoted in Sanbo Honbu, *Shiberia Shuppei-shi*, p. 724.

46 *The Japan Advertiser*, May 18, 1920.

47 Prchala's report, CRÚVA, VDV, CI.

48 At the meeting, the commander of the Hulunbuir district and the representative of the Foreign Affairs Bureau in Hailar, General Zhan Hui (also spelled Zhan Yui: the exact name with characters was not available), Major Zi Xiu, the military governor-general of Heilongjiang, and Lieutenant Colonel "Can Uide," the chief of staff of the military governor were present. On the Japanese side, there was Lieutenant Colonel "Cidheu," the commander of a battalion stationed in Hailar, Major Taido, a Japanese military attaché assigned to the Chinese military governor office in Qiqichaer, and Captain Uda. For more details, see Kopal's report on Harbin, April 1920, CRÚVA, VDV, CI.

had been attacked by the Russian railway men and that the legionnaires had also fired upon them, particularly the *Orlík* that fired artillery shells during the fight.<sup>49</sup> All of these accusations had been denied by the Czechoslovak delegates, especially regarding the *Orlík's* shooting because the damage caused by such a gun projectile could not have been kept secret in the railroad yard. As the tone of this meeting became more confrontational, the Chinese representatives sought to calm it down by insisting that it was only a small incident between Russians and Japanese and that it was already over. They suggested sending the Czechoslovak echelons in Hailar to the east as fast as possible and to submit the whole matter to the central authorities in Harbin for further explanation.<sup>50</sup> After that, the meeting dissolved peacefully and the Czechoslovak authorities thought that everything was settled. However, this was a fatal mistake.

With the communication lines cut off, Yoshida, commander of the Hailar garrison, at 6 a.m. sent a courier to report to his superior officer General HOSONO Tatsuo in Manzhouli about the incident that had happened on the previous day, stating that the Chinese and the Czechoslovaks were attacking the Japanese who were asking for help.<sup>51</sup> The Czechoslovak legionnaires in Hailar did not know of this fact. The night was tranquil and there were no military patrols posted at the station as the Japanese troops retreated.<sup>52</sup> The next morning, the Russian employees started to work again because their arrested colleagues had escaped during the melee except for one who had died.

The Chinese Army echelon with Lian Bang and the Czechoslovak Third Division staff train departed for the east late in the day. The *Orlík* remained in the station having had orders to proceed as the last train. Before the departure of Kopal and Prchala to Harbin, a report came that Captain Adolf Bičíšřtř, the political representative of the Czechoslovak government in Manzhouli, was coming to Hailar together with a Japanese and Chinese delegation to settle the incident. But the former Czechoslovak officers gave no importance to these alarming words because they considered the whole matter to be over. Apart from that, there were also rumors that more Japanese troops were approaching from Manzhouli; however, the Czechoslovak commanders did not wish to become involved with Japanese military maneuvers.<sup>53</sup>

Captain Bičíšřtř in Manzhouli was requested by the Japanese garrison commander on April 12 to join the Chinese and Japanese commission that had been established to investigate the incident that happened in Hailar the previous night as reported by the courier from Hailar. Bičíšřtř took his adjutant, Lieuten-

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49 Bisher, *White Terror*, p. 253.

50 The Reconnoitring Office of the Czechoslovak Third Infantry Division Headquarters to the chief of staff of the Far Eastern Headquarters, received on May 7, 1920, CRÚVA, VDV, CI.

51 Sanbo Honbu, *Shiberia Shuppei-shi*, p. 724.

52 Ibid.

53 The Reconnoitring Office of the Czechoslovak Third Infantry Division Headquarters to the chief of staff of the Far Eastern Headquarters, received on May 7, 1920, CRÚVA, VDV.

ant Zajíc, and travelled on the train with the military and civil personnel and the Japanese regimental commander from Manzhouli, and two hundred Japanese soldiers.<sup>54</sup> The train from Manzhouli arrived at the last stop before Hailar at forty minutes after midnight.<sup>55</sup> Presumably, the Russian railway workers did not want this train to enter Hailar Station. Japanese Major ISHIKAWA Chuji, assured Captain Bičičšťě that his soldiers were coming only to restore communication lines with Hailar and not to intervene against the Czechoslovaks. He then asked Bičičšťě to transfer this information to the Czechoslovak station master in Hailar. The Czechoslovak representative on this Japanese train then sent his adjutant, Lieutenant Zajíc, to the telephone but as he walked out of the station building, he was tied up and beaten by the Japanese soldiers who were waiting for him outside. The soldiers wanted him taken away and executed but upon Zajíc's despairing call for help, Major Ishikawa came out and after a brief investigation, gave an order to set him free. Lieutenant Zajíc<sup>56</sup> was wrongly suspected of being a "partisan" by Japanese soldiers who were searching for them everywhere. The next morning at 7 a.m., the Sino-Japanese and Czechoslovak commission including Captain Bičičšťě left for Hailar on a passenger train passing by.<sup>57</sup>

#### AN ULTIMATUM

On April 13, the tripartite committee met in Hailar, strengthened by local representatives from each side. Major Ishikawa declared that his intention was to restore peace and order and asked to let his train standing outside Hailar to be allowed to proceed to the station. Captain Bičičšťě stated that according to information gathered on the spot, the legionnaires had not participated in the incident two days before despite the loss of two men. He also blamed Semenov's agent for giving the Japanese false information. During the discussion, Major Ishikawa received a telegram, immediately broke up the meeting, and drove away by car to his train still standing at the nearest station to Hailar.<sup>58</sup>

At about 2 p.m., the Japanese military trains standing west of Hailar prepared an offensive position. Japanese troops derailed and secretly occupied all high points around the town, digging trenches around the station and near the barracks where they placed machine guns. A battery of light artillery in the vicinity and the rails of the railway bridge east of the town were also torn up and telegraph lines severed, so for Hailar, there was no connection with the outside world. Unfortunately, the legionnaires and their leaders misinterpreted

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54 Ibid.

55 Sanbo Honbu, *Siberia Shuppei-shi*, p. 724.

56 We failed to identify his first name.

57 Report written by the Czechoslovak Third Infantry Division Headquarters, Reconnoitring Office to the chief of staff of the Far Eastern Headquarters, CRÚVA, VDV, CI.

58 Ibid.

these maneuvers as being for the purpose of capturing the prisoners who had escaped.<sup>59</sup>

At around 3 p.m., two Chinese Army officers came to see Major Palacký, the commander of the Czechoslovak garrison, with anxious looks on their faces. They stated the Japanese demand to surrender the *Orlík* and all hand grenades; otherwise, an attack would follow. They apologized that although the whole matter was happening on Chinese soil, they were too weak to intervene, and therefore pleaded with the Czechoslovaks present to comply with the Japanese demands otherwise the Chinese would suffer, too.<sup>60</sup> Major Palacký stated that he was not competent to make such a hasty decision without prior consultation with his general headquarters. The Chinese replied that time was running out and insisted on a decision that they could take back to the Japanese. The Czechoslovak representatives therefore asked them to mediate a meeting with the Japanese.<sup>61</sup>

In the meantime, Major Palacký gathered all echelon commanders in the railroad yard and asked them what should be done in this situation. During the discussion, it had been found that the Czechoslovak forces matched the Japanese troops in number although on April 13 in the morning, two more Japanese trains arrived in the vicinity of Hailar accompanied by an armored train. The legionnaires had a chance to fight themselves out of this encirclement only with many casualties. Moreover, the fighting would have a direct impact on the Czechoslovak evacuation. So, it was decided not to spill more blood in a pointless fight because their men had already made it from the Volga River to Hailar and were but a few days away from the ships at Vladivostok. Therefore, they would rather give in to Japanese demands.<sup>62</sup>

After that, the car arrived with two Chinese who asked Major Palacký and Captain Bičičtě to join them at the Chinese headquarters to see the Japanese. En route, they also called upon Major Colby with a request that he participate in the forthcoming meeting. Colby came to the Chinese headquarters but the Chinese in the entrance hall did not allow him to join. Inside, Major Ishikawa again presented the Czechoslovak representatives with the ultimatum because, according to the evidence he had, their soldiers actively took part in the incident on April 11. On orders received from Chita, he demanded the immediate surrender of the *Orlík* because this armored train had fired upon the Japanese, and that all hand grenades be handed over because they had been given to the Bolsheviks who used them against the Japanese. Finally, Major Ishikawa demanded from Major Palacký a written apology for the occurrence.

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59 Majors Palacký and Colby's report, CRÚVA, VDV, CI.

60 Reconnoitring Office of the Czechoslovak Third Infantry Division Headquarters to the chief of staff of the Far Eastern Headquarters, received on May 7, 1920, CRÚVA, VDV, CI.

61 Ibid.

62 Report written by the Czechoslovak Third Infantry Division Headquarters, Reconnoitring Office to the chief of staff of the Far Eastern Headquarters, CRÚVA, VDV, CI.

Then, the Japanese Army would guarantee the further progress of the Czechoslovak evacuation.<sup>63</sup>

Palacký stated that he was not qualified to conduct such negotiations and suggested that the Japanese contact the Czechoslovak general headquarters' General Maurice Janin and the political leader MUDr. Václav Girska at Vladivostok. But the Japanese Army officers present in Hailar did not wish to prolong the matter any longer and threatened to attack if their demands were not fulfilled. As is known, Palacký was not tempted to fight and declared that if attacked, the legionnaires would not fight back. Also, a written apology could not be given because during the previous meeting, it had been found that the legionnaires had not taken part in the incident, and the whole matter was considered over.<sup>64</sup>

The Japanese, however, refused to discuss matters with him and further negotiation was denied. After Major Palacký realized that the Japanese would not accept his assertion that the legionnaires had not been involved in the melee, he presented the ultimatum in written form. First, the Japanese hesitated, but finally Palacký wrote a draft in which it was stated that he was overwhelmed by Japanese force and the ultimatum to hand over the *Orlík* and all hand grenades. Orally, the Japanese officers claimed that they would take over the *Orlík* only provisionally and that it would be given back to the Czechoslovaks. After the representative of the Japanese and the Czechoslovaks signed this document, Palacký ordered that the *Orlík* and all hand grenades be surrendered by all the Czechoslovak echelons staying in Hailar.<sup>65</sup> Peace prevailed, but the legionnaires felt the disgrace deeply.<sup>66</sup> Major Palacký then left for Harbin to report to the general headquarters about the whole matter and named Major Rudolf Wiest from the Twelfth Regiment as commander of the Czechoslovak garrison.

On April 14 at 2 p.m., as a postlude to this incident, Japanese military and civil representatives in Hailar came to see Major Wiest with an order from the Japanese headquarters to sign the document that they had brought with them stating that the Czechoslovaks should refrain from instigating similar incidents again and that they should apologize for the damage to the authority of the Japanese Imperial Army. This was refused. However, threatened with force in the case of non-fulfillment, Wiest and Bičičště suggested furnishing their own written explanation of the occurrence, which they signed and gave to the Japanese by 6 p.m. In this document, they apologized for the occurrence but without admission of guilt because all the legionnaires maintained perfect order and neutrality, as they had been ordered to do.<sup>67</sup>

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63 Ibid.

64 Reconnoitring Office of the Czechoslovak Third Infantry Division Headquarters to the chief of staff of the Far Eastern Headquarters, received on May 7, 1920, CRÚVA, VDV, CI.

65 Ibid.

66 Major Colby's report, quoted in Bisher, *Whiter Terror*, p. 252.

67 Report written by the Reconnoitring Office of the Czechoslovak Third Infantry Division Headquarters for the chief of staff of the Far Eastern Headquarters, received on May 7, 1920, CRÚVA, VDV, CI.



THE RETURN OF THE *ORLÍK*

After the Japanese ultimatum, the first unverified information regarding the *Orlík's* surrender to the Japanese had been received at the Czechoslovak Army General Staff Headquarters in Vladivostok only after April 17, based on the report of the chief of staff of the Third Division and the commander of its Reconnaissance Department, Lieutenant Rudolf Hejný. Initially, there was a problem in decoding these ciphered telegraphs so that General Srový became acquainted with the details of the Hailar incident only after the direct telegraph transmission made between the commander of the operational department, Major Štafl,<sup>68</sup> and Lieutenant Colonel Kvapil.<sup>69</sup>

On April 19, Srový at Vladivostok sent his adjutant Skácel to General Oi Shigemoto, the commander of the Japanese Expeditionary Forces in Siberia, with a written note requesting an immediate reply as to whether the *Orlík* would be given back or not. During this short meeting, General Oi orally promised to Skácel to send an order to return the armored train to the original owners.<sup>70</sup> However, this took another three weeks because Skácel did not obtain from Oi any written document. The restlessness among the legionnaires was on the rise. General Oi sent his order to Trans-Baikal but local military officers insisted that the *Orlík* must not be given back.

The reaction of the Japanese Army officers in Trans-Baikal and of those in Vladivostok was very different. The Japanese Army officers in the west were absolutely against returning the *Orlík* to the legionnaires because it would mean admitting that a mistake had been made and this would worsen relations with China, too. The authority of the Japanese Empire would be damaged as well as the credibility of their officers in the eyes of the Czechoslovak soldiers.<sup>71</sup> General Oi, who received many reports about hostile acts committed by the legionnaires towards the Japanese Army but was not a direct witness of them, eventually ordered the return of the *Orlík* to the railway section between Manzhouli and Harbin.

Major TOKINORI Hisashi, an officer from the general headquarters who was present at those places in which the Czechoslovak rearguard and the *Orlík* were moving, strongly disapproved. According to his plan, the whole incident should first have been made clear by the formation of an investigation commission. Then, with sufficient evidence that the legionnaires had taken part in the Hailar incident, he wanted to persuade General Oi to change his mind and finally return the *Orlík* to Vladivostok. Otherwise, the credibility of Japan would have been hampered in its relations with the other powers.<sup>72</sup> Oi insisted

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68 We failed to identify his first name.

69 Skácel, *S Generálem*, p. 232.

70 Ibid., p. 245.

71 Sanbo Honbu, *Shiberia Shuppei-shi*, p. 952.

72 Ibid.

Fig. 3. Final Page of the Protocol regarding the Investigation into the Hailar Incident by the Tripartite Committee in Harbin. This page shows signatures and seals of the Czechoslovak, Japanese, and Chinese delegates. Most of the signatures are written in Russian, which was chosen as the working language during the tripartite negotiations (CRÚVA).

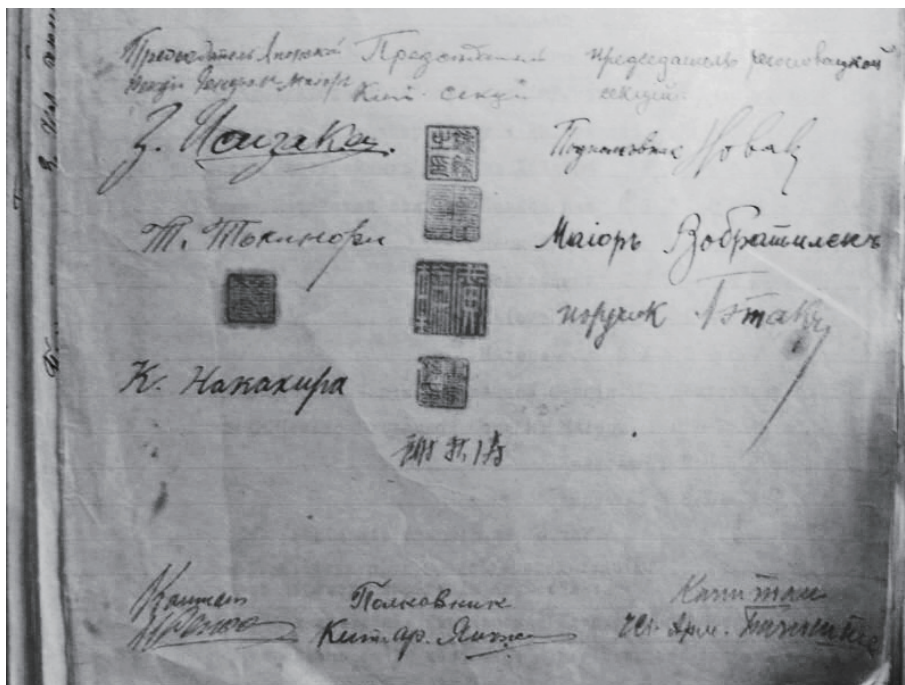
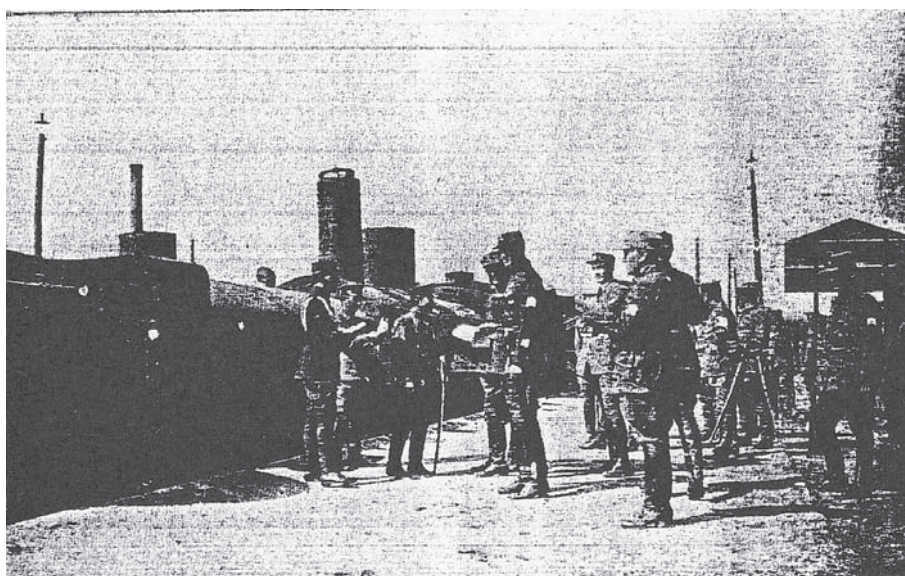


Fig. 4. Japanese Army Representatives Returning the *Orlík* to the Legionnaires at Harbin Railway Station, May 13, 1920 (CRÚVA).



that the *Orlík* had to be given back without any conditions imposed to maintain good relations with the Czechoslovak Army. Indeed, on May 13, the *Orlík* arrived at Harbin with a Japanese crew and two days later, it was handed over to the Czechoslovak commission (fig. 4).<sup>73</sup>

## EPILOGUE

The final stage of the Hailar incident took place in Harbin where on General Oi's initiative,<sup>74</sup> a meeting of the tripartite committee was held from May 30 to June 12, comprising the Czechoslovak, Japanese, and Chinese representatives in order to investigate the incident and find the guilty party. For the Japanese, the purpose of this meeting lay in proving the active involvement of the legionnaires in the incident and justifying their harsh measures against the legionnaires the following day. The Chinese section, whose members were mostly from Hailar, followed the Japanese aim by admitting the Legionnaire's participation in the melee and refused to admit their own involvement, thus defending China's sovereignty rights in the C. E. R. zone.<sup>75</sup> The Czechoslovak representatives claimed that their soldiers did not take part in the incident or distribute any rifles or hand grenades to the Russians. Eventually, the tripartite committee solved nothing (fig. 3). On June 20, the *Orlík* attached to the third echelon of the Twelfth Regiment left Harbin for Vladivostok.

While the official talks held in Beijing between the Chinese government and the Russian representatives regarding the future status of the C. E. R. were still underway, the Chinese attitude was a great disappointment to the legionnaires who had so far sympathized with the Chinese national movement but did not understand the regional power structure in Manchuria, which was in the hands of Zhang Zuolin. This crafty local warlord in the first place wanted to get rid of the "old" Russian management from the leadership of the railway company in order to improve its commercial basis. Zhang officially did this in the name of recovery of Chinese rights, but in fact he took the profits from C. E. R.'s operations himself to finance his political ambitions to control the central government in Beijing. Therefore, Zhang was walking a line between seeming to cooperate with the Japanese, or at least not antagonizing them, while at the same time working to reinforce his own power in Manchuria. This local power structure modified the Chinese approach during the final investigation of the Hailar incident in Harbin.<sup>76</sup>

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73 Dějiny československé posádky v Charbinu [The history of the

74 Personal notes of General Čeček, May 6, 1920, CRÚVA, VDV, CI.

75 General Bao declared that China was taking under its protection the lives and property of all the inhabitants in the appropriated C. E. R. zone. Bičičště to Čeček, June 22, 1920, CRÚVA, VDV, CI. Also see Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations*, p. 697.

76 John W. Young "The Hara Cabinet and Chang Tso-lin, 1920-1" in *Monumenta Nipponica, Studies in Japanese Culture* 27:2 (Summer 1972).

In June 1920, almost all the legionnaires were gone. The *Orlík* was not sold or taken home, and the whole area from Vladivostok to Chita was occupied by Japanese troops. Even the Russians who opposed the Japanese aggressive action refused to pay for the *Orlík* because they still considered it to be their national property originally taken by the Legionnaires.

The hope that the Hailar incident would be investigated in a just manner for the Czechoslovaks and that the final result would prove their innocence proved false. Neither the Japanese nor the Chinese were interested in such an investigation to justify the Legionnaires. The aim of the Japanese Army was to stay in the C. E. R. zone and use it as a buffer to protect their interests in Manchuria, while the Chinese tried to regain national sovereignty here and the local warlord wanted to make use of the Japanese presence to strengthen his power and take control of the Beijing government. Losing local economic and political ambition, Czechoslovak foreign policy had long ago resigned itself to disengaging from this territory. Therefore, during the investigation of the Hailar incident, we could expect that neither the Japanese nor the Chinese had any interest in seeking the truth or future trust, since the legionnaires were leaving, never to return.

Although General Oi at Vladivostok finally gave instructions for the *Orlík* to be returned to the Czechoslovaks after Syrový's intervention, the travels of the *Orlík* were not yet over. After the Czechoslovak departure, according to Russian sources, the *Orlík* remained in Vladivostok until 1922, still closely watched by the Japanese. After the withdrawal of all Japanese forces from the Maritime Province and completion of the Sovietization process in the Russian Far East, the *Orlík* left Vladivostok for Harbin together with other trains evacuating White Russian refugees. Consequently, the *Orlík* was used on the C. E. R. by Zhang Zuolin, who employed White Russian émigrés to man it. In 1924, General Konstantin Petrovich Nechaev, a former officer of the Semenovite forces in Trans-Baikal, formed a new division from the White Russians living in northeast China, and the *Orlík*, together with other armored trains, was allocated to this military unit under Colonel Vladimir Alekseevich Chekhov, with its Czech name still forged on the steel plating. Finally, in 1931, the *Orlík* was "captured" by the Japanese Army for a second time during the invasion of Manchuria.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Kolomicz, *Bronia russkoi armii*, p. 422.