



PTP memorial in Žilina

Political trainings were twice a week... Sometimes we used to march for two hours and sang socialist songs instead. The aim of the trainings was a re-education, especially those "politically unreliable". The exact quotation of the lecture topics: Bourgeois nationalism in Slovakia; Clerical Fascism; The Wealth of Vatican; Slovak Bishops at the National Court; The Danger of kulaks, petite and major bourgeoisie... We celebrated the accession of the peasants to the Joint Agricultural Cooperatives and forever friendship with the Soviet Union. The American capitalism was condemned as a worse form of a military machinery, lurking for our mistakes... Who didn't attend training or marching, go to the prison, had limited food and just one blanket - and must mangle at the morning."

Jozef Macko, former PTP conscript



## WAGES

Of the salary PTP conscripts received, 30% was withheld by the military and 70% by military administration, of which 70 – 90% was used for food, clothing, accommodation, sickness insurance, etc. The remaining money was split – with one half paid directly to soldiers, and the second half saved on passbooks for use only after military service. After the May 1953 currency reform, these savings were then converted into new currency at the very poor exchange rate of 50:1.

## PTP ENDS

As a result of political changes following the deaths of Josef Stalin and Klement Gottwald in March 1953, international protests, as well as criticism from conscripts' families, the notorious PTP units were gradually phased out. After the re-organization of military labour units on 1 November 1953, men were released back into civilian life and only recalled for extraordinary military exercises or served after the end of two-year military service. PTPs finally ended on 1 May 1954. Soldiers from the last 1952 intake were transferred to combat-unit status technical battalions, having to serve for a further seven months for extraordinary military exercises. Former „black barons“ nevertheless retained the stigma of

being political loose cannons: the majority were prevented from university studies or pursuing professions for which they were qualified. Some even continued to be monitored by the Secret Police until the communist regime collapsed in 1989.

## WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

Recommended websites:  
[www.upn.gov.sk](http://www.upn.gov.sk); [www.enrs.eu](http://www.enrs.eu)



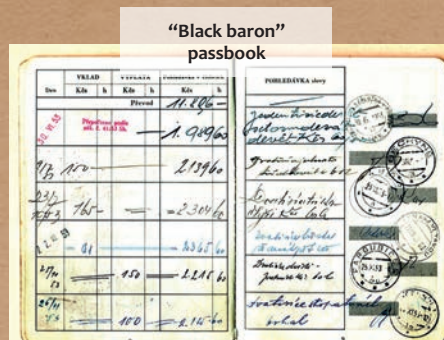
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## TECHNICAL AUXILIARY BATTALIONS

**Technical Auxiliary Battalions (in Slovak Pomocné technické prapory, hereafter PTP) were special units of the Czechoslovak People's Army active from 1950 to 1954. Around 60,000 men – politically unreliable persons eligible for conscription – performed their military service in the PTP: physical labour and re-education. Due to their uniforms having a black insignia, they were mockingly referred to as the „black barons“.**



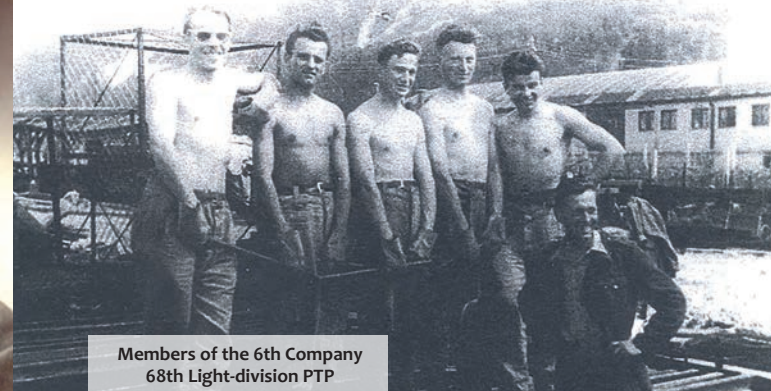
Bedřich Reicin (1911–1952), the main organizer of PTP



"Black baron" passbook



B. Bokor as a PTP conscript



Members of the 6th Company 68th Light-division PTP



Alexei Čepička (1910–1990), Czechoslovak Minister of National Defence in 1950–1956



PTP conscript B. Bokor with friends



Constructing tracks near Banská Bystrica

The first units for politically unreliable soldiers were four detached road battalions – conducting on-site services – established on 1 October 1948 as part of engineer regiments. Despite being engaged in construction and earthworks, they nevertheless had combat unit status. Such units included students expelled from universities, young men arrested for illegally crossing the state border, theologians, conscripts of German and Hungarian nationality, Roma, and sons of more affluent peasants, tradesmen, former owners of factories and apartment buildings, as well as criminals and soldiers that had breached regulations.

### PTP'S ORIGINS

The PTP was initiated by the Deputy Minister of Defence, General Bedřich Reicin. In June 1950, he proposed that camps be set up for politically unreliable soldiers at which, in addition to basic training without weapons, they would undergo re-education through hard work. PTP was officially established on 1 September 1950, when detached road battalions became light-division PTP. The order to create four heavy-division PTPs, which replaced the military sections for mining, was signed by the Minister of National Defence General, Alexej Čepička, on 1 October 1950. The former PTP conscript Milan Fekiač remembers as follows: „My grandfather was holding the call up papers, he said:

*'But Milan, you're studying'. I went to the military office to straighten things out: as a student I needn't go to war. Nobody spoke to me, so I had to enlist. I didn't know I'd be taken to the PTP.'*

Review committees at military units initially decided which soldiers would be enlisted in the PTP. Yet from 1951 all conscripts described by conscription committees as „politically unreliable persons“ were enlisted in the „black barons“. Such men could neither serve with a weapon nor be ranked higher than soldier, and had to undergo political „re-education“.

### WORK DUTIES

Light-division PTP provided the workforce for military construction companies that operated quarries and built houses, barracks, factories, roads, railways, power plants, dams, airports, and military training grounds; while heavy-division PTP worked in coal mines. The „black barons“ were forced to go above and beyond labour norms in order for their commanders to be duly rewarded; whilst such soldiers' accommodation, sanitation, and safety were bare minimum. The former PTP conscript Ján Paulíny remembers as follows: „They emphasised that the homeland is served not only with weapon in hand, but also through work. After medical examinations we were separated into groups. No one knew where we

were heading – we clambered blindly onto the trucks with our suitcases. Then at the train station, freight wagons awaited us. Come dawn we arrived at Orlová station in the Ostrava-Karviná coal district, where we were handed overalls, helmet, lamp, and shovel. We then descended 700 meters to work the coal face. We were a mixed bag: clerics, Hungarian and German soldiers, sons of tradesmen, and kulaks – from 20 to 46 years old.“ As a consequence, thousands suffered long-term health issues resulting from PTP deployment, and approximately 400 died from work-related injuries.

### PTP'S EXPANDED

As the recruitment of fresh conscripts failed to keep pace with the planned number of PTPs, from the end of 1951 at the behest of Minister Čepička „politically harmful persons and those shunning work“ aged 18-60 years were called up for „open-term“ extraordinary military exercises. Hence the PTP recruited prisoners of closed forced-labour camps, priests, monks, those exempted from standard conscription, soldiers who fought the Nazis on the Western Front, and former German soldiers. By the end of 1952, the original eight PTP battalions had been complemented by a further ten light- and two heavy-division battalions. Light-divisions PTP no. 54, 63 and 68 were stationed in Slovakia and headquartered in Lešť, Komárno, Nováky and Košice.