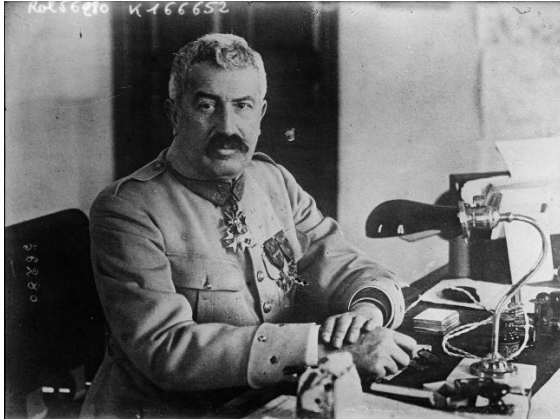


Štefánik and Janin: An alliance in the service of Czechoslovakia

Two men, one vision

Right in the middle of the First World War with Europe being torn apart, two men with radically different backgrounds joined forces to create an army and, with it, a new state: Czechoslovakia. **Milan Rastislav Štefánik**, a Slovak astronomer, aviator and diplomat who became a naturalised French citizen in 1912, embodied audacity and charisma. **Maurice Janin**, a seasoned French general and a specialist in Central European strategic issues, brought military rigour and field experience to the table. Their meeting, initially professional in nature, would seal a collaboration that would prove decisive for the history of Europe.



General Maurice Janin



General Milan Rastislav Štefánik

Crossing paths

Mobilised in 1914, Štefánik excelled in military aviation. He obtained his pilot's licence in 1915 and served in several squadrons, notably in Serbia, where he organised a weather forecasting service for the air force. It all began in 1915, when Štefánik, who was already committed to the Czechoslovak cause, was introduced to French military circles by General **Foch**. It was a decisive encounter. But it was in Russia that the shared destiny of Štefánik and Janin really took shape. Janin, head of the French Military Mission in Russia since 1916, was initially wary of Štefánik, influenced by the criticism of some of his peers. However, he eventually recognised him as a valuable ally, a man capable of mobilising thousands of Czech and Slovak volunteers, prisoners of the Austro-Hungarian army, to form a strong fighting unit on the side of the Allies.

A winning combination

Their collaboration was a model of complementarity. Štefánik, with his diplomatic skills, negotiated tirelessly with the French and Russian governments to obtain logistical and political support. He recruited, persuaded and gave a voice to the Czechoslovak cause on the international stage. Janin, for his part, took charge of the military aspect: he organised, trained, and commanded the Czechoslovak legions in Russia, transforming prisoners into disciplined soldiers. Together, they formed a formidable duo. Štefánik was appointed Janin's deputy in 1918, and although the latter was officially the commander, it was often the former who was perceived as the "effective leader" of this army in the making.

A shared legacy

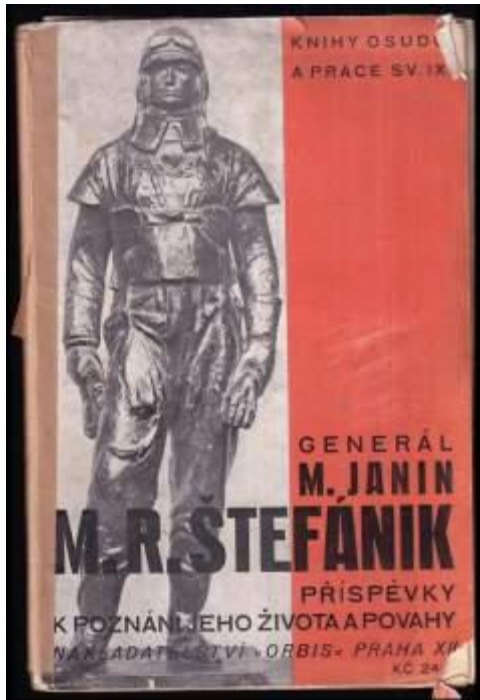
Their work bore fruit: the Czechoslovak Legions played a key role in the fight against the Central Powers and the Bolsheviks, and contributed to the international recognition of Czechoslovakia in 1918. After the war, Janin remained a defender of the memory of Štefánik, who died tragically in 1919. Their friendship, forged in adversity, went beyond the purely professional. They combined their talents to create an army and, with it, a sovereign state.



On 8 November 1918, at Place François-Ier in Cognac, Generals Janin and Chéré review 2,000 Czech soldiers.

Why their story still resonates today

The story of Štefánik and Janin is one of successful international cooperation, where diplomacy and military expertise complement each other to achieve a common goal. It reminds us that great achievements often arise from the meeting of different personalities, united by a shared vision. Their legacy lives on, both in Czechoslovakia (later the Czech Republic and Slovakia) and in France, where their role has been hailed as an example of solidarity and determination.



Maurice Janin: Milan Rastislav Štefánik: Contributions to Understanding His Life and Character

1932 | Nakladatelství Orbis, Prague

Suggested sources for further reading:

- Revue historique des armées (journals.openedition.org)
- Radio Prague International (francais.radio.cz)
- <https://ehne.fr/fr/node/12378/printable/print>
- <https://tracesdefrance.fr/a-lorigine-de-la-creation-de-larmee-tchecoslovaque-en-france-le-general-milan-rastislav-stefanik/>
- <https://www.sudouest.fr/charente/angouleme/cognac-l-hommage-aux-legionnaires-tcheques-et-slovaques-3250447.php>