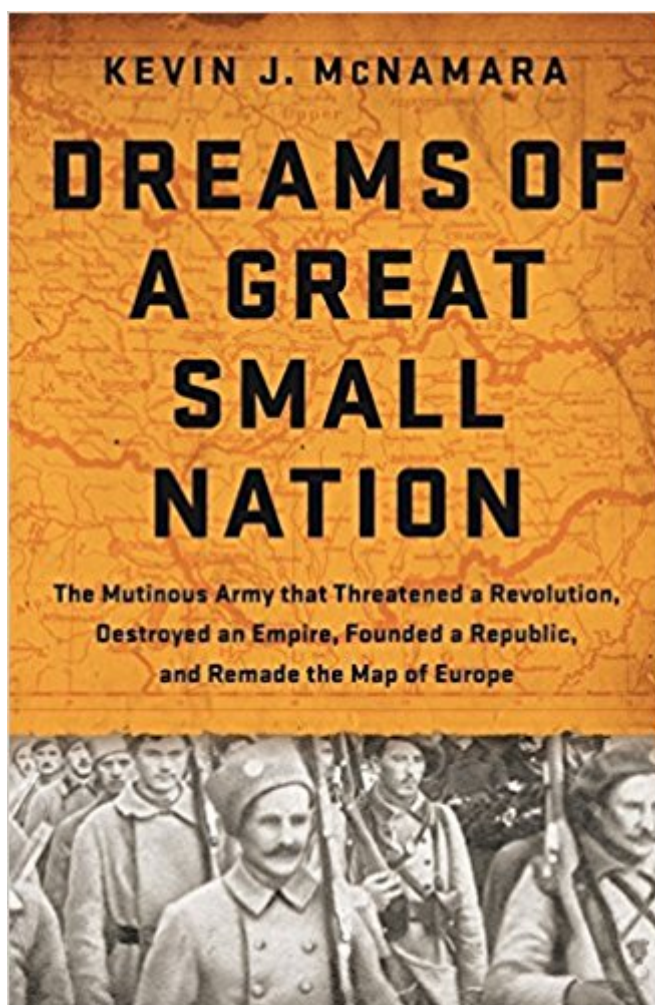


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Dreams Of A Great Small Nation: The Mutinous Army That Threatened A Revolution, Destroyed An Empire, Founded A Republic, And Remade The Map Of Europe





Synopsis

The pages of history recall scarcely any parallel episode at once so romantic in character and so extensive in scale. In 1917, two empires that had dominated much of Europe and Asia teetered on the edge of the abyss, exhausted by the ruinous cost in blood and treasure of the First World War. As Imperial Russia and Habsburg-ruled Austria-Hungary began to succumb, a small group of Czech and Slovak combat veterans stranded in Siberia saw an opportunity to realize their long-held dream of independence. While their plan was audacious and complex, and involved moving their 50,000-strong army by land and sea across three-quarters of the earth's expanse, their commitment to fight for the Allies on the Western Front riveted the attention of Allied London, Paris, and Washington. On their journey across Siberia, a brawl erupted at a remote Trans-Siberian rail station that sparked a wholesale rebellion. The marauding Czecho-Slovak Legion seized control of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, and with it Siberia. In the end, this small band of POWs and deserters, whose strength was seen by Leon Trotsky as the chief threat to Soviet rule, helped destroy the Austro-Hungarian Empire and found Czecho-Slovakia. British prime minister David Lloyd George called their adventure "one of the greatest epics of history," and former US president Teddy Roosevelt declared that their accomplishments were "unparalleled, so far as I know, in ancient or modern warfare."

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Customer Reviews

"An epic story unknown even to many World War I history buffs; With admirable energy [McNamara] has assembled the story by piecing together archival records and the memoirs of the

gallant men who served in the rejuvenated Czech Legion during the fateful spring and summer of 1918; A fascinating narrative. — Wall Street Journal; This incredible story lives up to its billing. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about it, though, is that it's a fable that's remained largely untold. Until now; A captivating tale, brilliantly told. — History of War; Extraordinary... McNamara, an impressive storyteller armed with a treasure of documents only recently available, ably narrates the remarkable feats of these men who fought every inch of the way; A fantastic addition to the shelves of World War I histories. — Kirkus Reviews, Starred Review; In this captivating narrative history, foreign policy scholar McNamara reveals the obscure yet grand story of how a small, motley, and hastily organized army ushered in the founding of the nation of Czechoslovakia. — Publishers Weekly, Starred Review; A valuable story that is relatively unknown and understood in the West; McNamara's work presents a vital first entry that opens the doors on this integral part of World War I history and the shaping of the Soviet-influenced Eastern European political and social fabric. — Library Journal; Kevin J. McNamara highlights this bizarre and heroic story... Much of his extensive source material is only recently available, and he uses it well. The brave misadventures of the Czech Legion deserve the wider recognition this fascinating history should provide. — Shelf Awareness; The saga of the Czech-Slovak Legion is one of the great unknown stories of the twentieth century. Kevin J. McNamara brings these fighters back to life by presenting their firsthand account of their travails in World War I and the Russian Civil War. His engaging and valuable work should be required reading for students of the period; and for anyone interested in stories of hardship and heroism. — Max Boot, author of Invisible Armies

Kevin J. McNamara followed the path taken by the Czecho-Slovak Legion shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, traveling almost 2,000 miles along the Trans-Siberian Railway. He was subsequently awarded research grants by the Earhart and Tawani Foundations to acquire and translate from Czech to English first-hand accounts by the men who had served in the legion, which were published in Prague in the 1920s but were suppressed following the Nazi and Soviet conquests of Czecho-Slovakia. A former journalist for Calkins Media Inc., and a former aide to the late U.S. Congressman R. Lawrence Coughlin, McNamara is an Associate Scholar of the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia, PA and a former contributing editor to its quarterly journal, *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs*. He earned a B.A. in journalism and M.A. in international politics from Temple University, where he was a student of the noted military historian, Russell F. Weigley. He

lives in Glenside, PA. Follow him at kevinjmcnamara.com.

This is a fascinating story about events during World War I that led to the foundation of the nation of Czechoslovakia. Using primary sources and a wide range of other scholarship, the author has told the story of a legion of Czech and Slovak soldiers who were caught in the crumbling Russian empire and had to fight their way to safety, which was rescue by Allied ships in Vladivostok. Along the way, they fought off continual attacks by Bolshevik armies. Apparently, there was an effort to hide this story on the part of the Russians and others, but here it is, told in a thorough and engrossing fashion by the author. This is a must-read for European history buffs.

This is an excellent book about one of the most fascinating episodes in 20th century history: the travails of the Czech Legion in Russia. The backstory is rather complicated, but ultimately it reminded me more than anything of Xenophon's *Anabasis*--a small, disciplined army far from home forced to hack its way through the wrack and ruin of a disintegrating empire to reach safety. While I've long been familiar with the general story about the Czech legion, this author does a great job of pulling together accounts from letters, diaries, etc. to paint a first-hand picture of what it was like. It is difficult to imagine the extremely complicated situation that the Czechs found themselves in, in the chaos of 1918 Siberia, where Reds, Whites, Americans, French, Japanese, German and Hungarian POWs all fought for control over the Trans-Siberian railroad, and the Czechs were constantly subject to threats, false promises, and misplaced hopes as their fortunes shifted with those of the overall progress of WWI. But despite it all, the Czechs came out on top...A large part of the book--probably about a third--deals with various diplomatic machinations regarding Czech independence which this reader found to be fairly tedious, but which certainly represents an important part of the story. It was primarily the success of the Czech Legion which inspired US and European leaders to support Czech independence, and thus the end of the Austro-Hungarian empire, after WWI.

An exciting history of the struggle for Czech/Slovak independence during and immediately after WW I. Long on details of the escape of the Czech/Slovak Legion from Czarist Russia and them from the Bolshevik armies through thousands of miles through Siberia to Vladivostok. A detailed story of the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic.

This is a dramatic narrative capturing the quite improbable chain of political and military events that

led to the establishment of the nation of Czechoslovakia in the wake of WWI. It's more detailed than necessary and I found myself skimming from time to time. But the scope and scale of the narrative is addictive even to the general serious reader. It captures the collapse of the Hapsburg dynasty illustrating how Czech leaders (Thomas Masaryk especially) declared war on Austria Hungary from Prague then created a national political movement to build the nation. The key instrument was the conversion of Czech POW units into an armed force that toward the end of the War controlled all RR transport East the Urals (effectively giving them control over Russian Siberia) and Murmansk on the Arctic approaches to far north Russia. Suffice to say Bolshevik arguments, betrayals, and political imperatives ultimately prevailed. This was leverage that led to establishment of a new Czechoslovak nation. The book captures the drama of creating a new government in the midst of huge stresses from the Versailles Treaty obligations imposed on Germany.

fascinating piece of history, should be much better known. Well written

A very nice historical account of the founding of Czechoslovakia, and the little known Czech Legion, and its epic journey through war-torn Russia. The efforts of Masaryk, and Benes to form a new Slavic nation out of part of the remains of Austria-Hungary are well described, and documented. All in all a good effort, and worth reading for anyone with an interest in the history of this transformative era.

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