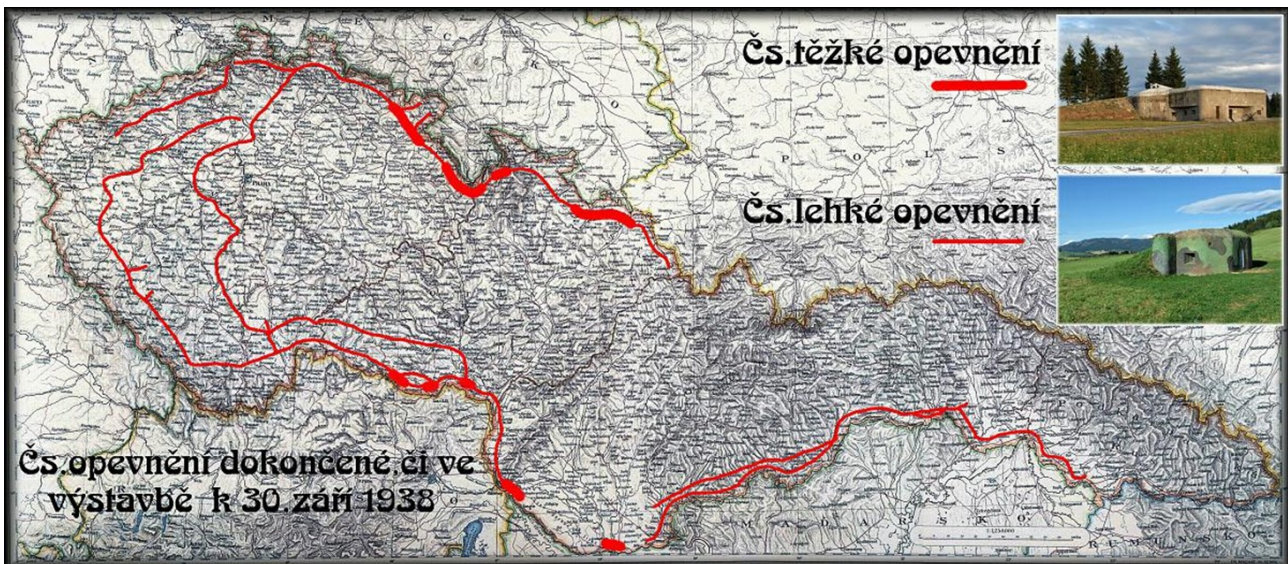


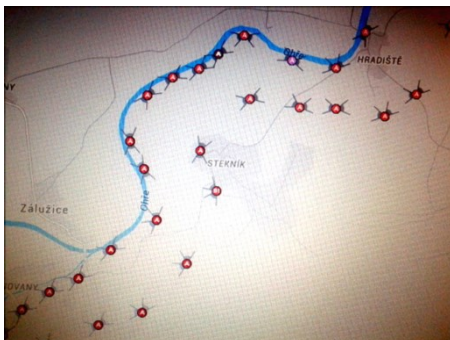
Řopík bunkers – construction of border fortifications in 1937

With the rise of Adolf Hitler to power in 1933, the threat of a German attack on Czechoslovakia intensified. This urgency propelled military preparations and the construction of border bunkers, modelled on French designs. Government approval for the project was granted in June 1936, leading to total expenditure of 10 billion crowns. Four “battlefields” were formed: *Northern Battlefield*: a 335 km line (Elbe-Odra-Jablunkov), consisting of 14 fortresses, 212 heavy fortifications, and 3,384 light fortifications. *Western Battlefield*: west of the Elbe and Vltava rivers, comprising 1,821 structures, with 216 isolated heavy fortifications along the main routes in the Ore Mountains, Bohemian Forest, and Šumava region. *Southern Battlefield*: covering Southern Bohemia and Southern Moravia, this area was to be secured by light fortifications totalling 658 structures. Finally, there was the *Slovak Battlefield*. A total of 1,276 heavy and 15,463 light fortifications were planned. The first structures built were known as the vz. 36 type, essentially copies of designs prepared by French engineering experts prior to 1928, rendering them outdated by 1936. Approximately 1,000 of these structures were constructed near the state borders.



The actual state of the Czechoslovak fortifications completed in 1938 after the cession of the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany in the wake of the Munich Agreement (source: Jan Straka)

Beginning in early 1937, a new type, the vz. 37 (known as *řopík*) was developed, becoming characteristic for the entire border region. These fortifications were constructed in continuous lines, typically in two or three tiers, designed for flanking fire. The front wall was capable of withstanding fire from a 10.5 cm gun, with each structure costing around 60,000 crowns to build. Each *řopík* was manned by two pairs of machine gunners armed with light or, in some cases, heavy machine guns. A total of 5,832 vz. 37 bunkers were built. Map of light military fortifications: section C-27 Lišany, in the Stekník area. The castle's *řopík* B1 is equipped with one side firing slit similar to the type A, and its second gunroom features a frontal slit. The corresponding side of the structure lacks a covering flank wall, and the frontal slit is also without protective shielding. While angular or slanted versions were built, these are exceedingly rare. The structures were utilised to provide fire cover for blind spots caused by unfavourable terrain configurations or along bends in the line. The first line of fortifications followed the



inland bank of the Ohře River, with a second line positioned a mere few dozen metres inland to provide mutual coverage and fire support. By late autumn 1937, the defensive zone in the Louny region was complete and ready for use. Orders to secure the borders were issued to all units in the Pooohří region on 22 September, mandating their standby in fortified zones. Following the infamous Munich Agreement, all fortifications were abandoned. A portion of the Ohře line remained in the annexed Sudetenland, while another part was situated within the rest of the encircled country. Under the original terms of the Munich Agreement, border regions with a German-speaking majority were to fall under the so-called Sudeten District, granting Germany the right to occupy this territory immediately. At this juncture, the fortifications became pointless and were demobilised. After Germany's occupation of the remaining territory of the former Czechoslovakia and the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, German authorities decided to preserve the bunkers within the Sudeten District, but to destroy the former Czechoslovak fortifications within the confines of the Protectorate, motivated by fears that they might be utilised in an anti-German uprising. In 1939, German firms demolished these structures by placing explosives inside and detonating them, effectively tearing the structures into pieces. Generally, the roof would remain intact but would be blown off the main body. The front wall often survived, while other walls were entirely obliterated by the explosion. These damaged structures were subsequently dismantled, with iron extracted from the rubble in 1940.

Despite German efforts, some bunkers were preserved due to their locations, where detonation posed a risk to nearby buildings. In these cases, the internal space was bricked up to the level of the firing slits. These circumstances explain why so few vz. 37 structures can be seen in the Louny region today. Indeed, out of several hundred bunkers in the part of Louny situated in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, only a handful remain. However, the situation is different outside the former Protectorate, towards Březno, where almost all these structures have been preserved.



Left: Line of *řopík* bunkers in open terrain.

Right: A Czechoslovak soldier with a vz. 26 light machine gun enters a bunker.



On **24 September 1938**, President Beneš announced **mobilisation**. The Czechs believed they could thwart an attack from the German army and restore order in the border regions. Soldiers were already patrolling the borders, and slogans appeared on the walls of Czech fortresses, such as:

“WE VOW TO STAND FIRM, NO SURRENDER”

Literature and resources used: Lounský Regiz, article: “Lounský podzim 1938”, A. Hlušík – J. Tlustý; source: archive: Jan Svoboda; texts and maps Jaromír Tlustý