

## Maurice Pellé (Douai 1863 – Toulon 1924)



### Biography – Students

Maurice was the second eldest son of Charles Henri Joseph Pellé, a French military officer in the city of Douai in northern France. Maurice was lucky in that besides strong moral and religious values, his family also encouraged the development of the boy's intellect and artistic talents.

Following in his father's footsteps, Maurice began his military career at an advanced technical school – the École Polytechnique in Paris (1882). In 1895, he completed his studies at the War College (École supérieure de guerre) with the rank of captain.

Starting in 1900, Pellé became close with Colonel Joseph Joffre who selected him as his orderly officer and assigned him to a mission in Madagascar, where the two traveled together (1902–1903). With the rank of lieutenant colonel he was then sent on a diplomatic mission to Berlin as a military attaché, i.e. military correspondent (1909–1912). Pellé was able to penetrate influential circles of German statesmen and inform the French government and the military leadership about the developments in German economic and military policies. Thanks to his intervention, the French

government responded to the German armaments policy by increasing the number of reserves to such an extent that after the outbreak of World War I, France withstood a massive and sudden German attack on the Western Front.

After the outbreak of the First World War, Pellé was called to the very top of the military hierarchy of command – the General Staff. There he was promoted to brigadier general and in 1918 was appointed divisional general for his achievements at the front.

Perhaps the most delicate and unpredictable task awaited Pellé at the turn of the year 1918/1919. The French Prime Minister Clemenceau, in cooperation with Marshall Foch, commissioned him to lead the French military mission in Czechoslovakia. Pellé found himself between a rock and a hard place, obliged to balance the conflicting interests of the Allies, respectively France, and the newly formed Czechoslovakia, where President Masaryk appointed him as commander of all military forces. As such, he distinguished himself in the war with Hungary over Slovakia (1919), for which President Masaryk awarded him the Czechoslovak War Cross on July 14, 1919.

With Pellé's position thus consolidated, he continued building a stable Czechoslovak army of officers with a fixed number of regularly renewed recruits. Pellé wanted to strengthen the alliance of France and Czechoslovakia, so that the new nations would have a modern army available under the alliance system even outside its territory. The fruit of his labor was the Defense Act and the creation of the Military Academy in Hranice (both in 1920). At the time of a looming conflict between Czechoslovakia and Poland in the Teschen (Těšínsko) region in the spring of 1920, Pellé stood firmly behind Czechoslovak soldiers, even risking insubordination to his commander Foch (because Poles too were members of the Allied Forces).

Pellé was also fond of Czechoslovakia for personal reasons – there he met Jarmila Braunerová, the belle of Prague's social elite, whom he married in 1921. A year later, their daughter Maryška was born. When he was ordered to resign from his position in Czechoslovakia and take up the post of High Commissioner of the French Republic in Constantinople (1921), he wrote to his future wife that he was leaving Czechoslovakia reluctantly. On the day of his departure from Czechoslovakia (January 1, 1921) he delivered a greeting to his troops in the Czech language and called Czechoslovakia his second homeland.

Pellé endured the peace negotiations with Turkey until the signing of the treaty in Lausanne, Switzerland. These interminable peace talks might have cost him his life. Pellé died from exhaustion in a hospital in Toulon, France on March 16, 1924. Before that, President Masaryk awarded him the Order of the White Lion. On the eve of his death, the French government awarded him the highest decoration of the Legion of Honor: the Grand Cross.

Source of the picture: Viktor Stretti: General M. Pellé, Czech military archives (VHÚ)

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