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## **БОЙОВЕ РОЗГОРТАННЯ ЧЕХОСЛОВАЦЬКИХ СУХОПУТНИХ СИЛ У ФРАНЦІЇ В 1940 році.**

*Стаття присвячена ключовому моменту так званого “Другого чехословацького Руху опору”, який розвивався навколо формування у Франції в 1940 р. Першої чехословацької піхотної дивізії під егідою Чехословацького національного комітету (Československý národní výbor). Остаточно створена 15 січня 1940 р. із вояків армії Чехословаччини та антифашистських інтернаціональних бригад. Дивізія в червні 1940 р. взяла участь у боях з гітлерівськими агресорами (які реалізували “Червоний план” із нападу на Францію) на південному сході від Парижа. Два піхотних полки дивізії (до 5000 бійців, 170 кулеметів та 17 мінометів, фактично без протитанкової зброї та польової артилерії) мужньо билися на берегах річок Сени і Луари. Незважаючи на військову поразку Франції, дивізія продемонструвала звитягу в боях під Жиєнью та Куломм’є. Після боїв 12-24 червня 1940 р. у полках залишилося в строю близько 2000 вояків. Наприкінці червня до 4000 вояків колишньої Чехословаччини були евакуйовані до Англії. Бойові дії дивізії стали відправною точкою формування сучасних військових традицій чеських сухопутних військ і відзначаються під час Меморіальних днів Міністерства оборони Чеської Республіки. У лавах дивізії служили й українці Закарпаття, яке у міжвоєнний період входило до Чехословаччини.*

**Ключові слова:** Друга світова війна, Другий чехословацький Рух опору, збройні сили Чехословаччини, Перша чехословацька піхотна дивізія, бої у Франції в 1940 р., бойовище за Жиєнь та Куломм’є.



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## MILITARY DEPLOYMENT OF CZECHOSLOVAK GROUND FORCES IN FRANCE IN 1940

*The article deals with the topic of so called Second Czechoslovak Resistance Movement, namely with the existence of the 1st Czechoslovak Infantry Division (1. československá pěší divize) that was formed in France in 1940 under authority of Czech and Slovak nations “Czechoslovak National Committee” (Československý národní výbor). The division itself was established in January 1940 and five months later, in June 1940, was deployed in battlefield eastern and southern of Paris. Since the military situation of France became disastrous after Germans commenced their Case Red (Fall Rot), the division underwent combat of retreat especially during the battles of Coulommier and Gien. Despite unfavourable circumstances, its struggle represents the first major military deployment of Czechoslovak ground forces during the Second World War and as such is commemorated in present-day military tradition of Army of Czech Republic (Memorable Days of Ministry of Defence of Czech Republic).*

**Key words:** *1st Czechoslovak Infantry Division; Battle of France; Battle of Coulommier; Battle of Gien; 1940; Second Czechoslovak Resistance Movement; Second World War.*

In 2020, the Army of the Czech Republic (Armáda České republiky) commemorates 80th anniversary of the military deployment of the 1st Czechoslovak Infantry Division (1. československá pěší divize; 1ère Division Tchèqueoslovaque) that was formed in France in 1940 and

took its part in combats in the Western Front in 1940. This formation underwent battles of Coulommier on 13 June 1940 and of Gien on 18 June 1940. Another important moment was 11 June 1940, when division took its position on Marne River near La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, some

65 kilometres east from Paris. This very moment is considered to be one of so-called Memorable Day of Ministry of Defence of Czech Republic.

These three key moments in the history of military deployment of Czechoslovak ground forces during the Battle of France (5 to 25 June 1940) and its anniversary is a window of opportunity to examine their origins and main events as well as their achievements and significance both in the battle itself and for the Second Czechoslovak Resistance Movement whose members and affiliates struggled during the Second World War to regain Czechoslovak independence.

To do so, it is necessary to use methods of (military) historiography and its established ways of work; it means that the article is based on archival research of relevant papers originated directly in headquarters of Czechoslovak military units, and also on other approaches of qualitative research. The most important resources are documents of the 1st Czechoslovak Infantry Division itself; these are deposited in the Central Military Archives – the Military Historical Archives (Vojenský ústřední archiv – Vojenský historický archiv; VÚA-VHA) that is based in the capital of the Czech Republic, Prague, in the fund called the Czechoslovak Military Units in France (Československé vojenské jednotky ve

Francii; ČVJF); there are namely war diaries of command of Czechoslovak division as well as its two infantry regiments<sup>1</sup>.

Primary resources represent memoirs. Unfortunately, in contrast to situation in other battlefields of Czechoslovaks during the Second World War, only few witness reports are available; in the first place there is memoirs of Zdeněk Stav who as a commander of company had a rank of lieutenant;<sup>2</sup> it also means that none of decisive Czechoslovak commanders (see below) left its recollections.

Secondary sources represent literature. Since the deployment of Czechoslovak division in 1940 is supposed to be one of the crucial moments in the Czech military history, there is couple of books and articles devoted to this topic. Its majority is quoted continuously in the text, but there is need to stress the most important ones. At the first place, there is a book about the 1st Czechoslovak Infantry Division from 2010; unfortunately, author focuses as a matter of priority on the progress of its forming and on its national composition, while description of combat is side-lined<sup>3</sup>.

This narrative, however, is for Czechoslovak military historiography of the Second Czechoslovak Resistance Movement typical and goes back to its beginnings in 1950's; see, e.g., the first synthesis on

<sup>1</sup> VÚA-VHA, fund (f.) ČVJF.

<sup>2</sup> Zdeněk STAV, *Povinnost nade vše* [Duty over All], Brno 2009, 479 pp. Other memoirs are of very low quality. See, e.g.: Josef SOUČEK, *Na francouzské frontě* [In French Front], in: Vojtěch DUBEN (ed.), *Na všech frontách. Čechoslováci ve II. světové válce* [In All Fronts. Czechoslovaks in World War II]. Praha 1992, pp. 53-63.

<sup>3</sup> Gustav SVOBODA, *1. československá divize ve Francii (1939-1940)* [1st Czechoslovak Division in France (1939-1940)], Praha 2010, 297 pp.

the topic from 1959,<sup>4</sup> or later works of Eduard Čejka who was devoted to the so called “Western Resistance”<sup>5</sup>. There is, nevertheless, another reason. The most effective Czechoslovak combatants during the Battle of France were pilots who served in French air forces; their achievements literally overshadowed those of the 1st Czechoslovak Infantry Division.<sup>6</sup> It means that study proceeds primarily from archival resources, and as such brings new findings.

Text is divided into four chapters and conclusion; in chronological order the first one depicts the history of formation of the Czechoslovak (Exile) Army in France, especially of ground forces, next one deals with the second phase of the Battle of France and third and fourth with military deployment of Czechoslovak division during the battle.

### **Formation of Czechoslovak army in France**

In 1938, France was key ally of Czechoslovakia that swiftly became in the eyes of Czechoslovak people a betrayer, when Édouard Daladier, French prime minister, signed the Munich Agreement according to which Czechoslovakia lost a great deal of its territory. In March 1939, when

Nazi Germany occupied remaining part of Czechoslovakia, foundations for formation of the Second Czechoslovak Resistance Movement were laid. In this moment, position of France changed once again, being considered “enemy of enemy”, i.e. of Nazi Germany. Its result was that France gradually became centre of Czechoslovak political emigration, and number of men enlisted the French Foreign Legion in expectation to get involved in the fight for Czechoslovak independence in anticipated military conflict. In France there was also community of Czechs and Slovaks, ca. 50,000 people, who left Czechoslovakia especially for economic reasons.<sup>7</sup>

For a long time, however, there were only hopes without any actual progress. It took half a year before so called Czechoslovak National Committee (Československý národní výbor), a representative body of Czechs and Slovaks abroad, was established and as such was recognized by French government on 17 November 1939.<sup>8</sup>

Unofficially, since 12 September 1939, there was established Czechoslovak military mission with General Jan Sergej Ingr in its lead as a chief;<sup>9</sup> later, status of mission was altered to be a military adminis-

<sup>4</sup> Za svobodu Československa. Svazek první [For the Freedom of Czechoslovakia. First Volume], Praha 1959, pp. 30-54.

<sup>5</sup> Eduard ČEJKA, Československý odboj na západě [Czechoslovak Resistance on the West], Praha 1997, 534 pp. He is also co-author of chapter in another synthesis: Vojenské dějiny Československa. IV. Za svobodu Československa [Military History of Czechoslovakia. IV. For the Freedom of Czechoslovakia], Praha 1988, pp. 79-101.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g.: Jiří RAJLICH, Českoslovenští letci – účastníci bitvy o Francii [Czechoslovak Pilots – Participants of the Battle of France], Historie a vojenství 2000, no. 1, pp. 135-179.

<sup>7</sup> Jan KŘEN, Do emigrace. Buržoazní zahraniční odboj 1938-1939 [Going Abroad. Bourgeois Resistance Abroad 1938-1939], Praha 1963, pp. 401-426.

<sup>8</sup> Later on, the Czechoslovak National Committee was recognized by the United Kingdom on 20 December 1939, by the South African Union on 12 February 1940 and by New Zealand on 15 January 1940. IBIDEM.

<sup>9</sup> G. SVOBODA, Armádní generál Sergěj Jan Ingr [Army General Jan Sergej Ingr], Praha 1998, pp. 35-36.

tration; its task was to make preparation for establishing an independent Czechoslovak army in France. Creation of Czechoslovak army was based on diplomatic note of Czechoslovak embassy<sup>10</sup> of 28 August 1939 and on proposal of Czechoslovak-French agreement on Czechoslovak army in France. One of the first steps was establishing the French military mission that represented French ministry of defence among Czechoslovak military administration. Its chief was General Louis-Eugène Faucher, who held this position before that, in era of independent Czechoslovak Republic. The decisive moment came when the Czechoslovak-French Agreement was signed on 2 October 1939. It was the greatest victory of representatives of Czechoslovak resistance so far. According to the agreement, there should be established “independent Czechoslovak Army” which in political aspect was subordinated to Czechoslovak representatives (anticipated as a provisional government) while in military aspect to French supreme military command; what is also necessary to stress, it is the fact that commanding officers in the Czechoslovak

Army should be completely Czechoslovak (not French).<sup>11</sup>

The reason the Czechoslovak representatives demanded creation of Czechoslovak army was simple. There was wide-shared idea of its necessity and a precedent from the First World War when so called Czechoslovak Legions existed long before Czechoslovak state was established. For example, Edvard Beneš, Czechoslovak president – at the time, nevertheless, he did not use this title –, called for a creation of Czechoslovak army since the beginning of war between France and Nazi Germany: “None war could be won without armed forces, each nation is always supposed to conduct military struggle. That is why we need to have our army [...]. [...] The army is the first bearer of banner of resistance, the army is the main expression of desire for freedom and determination of nation to reach the freedom, the army is the first and the most important symbol of state sovereignty and liberty.”<sup>12</sup>

The existence of Czechoslovak army had, moreover, its strong political connotation; it was manifestation of Czechoslovak

<sup>10</sup> Despite the fact that Czechoslovakia was occupied on 15 March 1939, its embassies did not cease to exist. Based on “diplomatic continuity theory”, Czechoslovak ambassadors were supposed to be aspects of so-called continuous existence of Czechoslovak republic, i.e. that legally Czechoslovakia existed even when its territory was occupied. This theory, however, did not prevail since its main representant, Štefan Osuský, relied entirely on support from France. On the other hand, E. Beneš, Czechoslovak president, who proposed “pre-Munich theory of continuity”, i.e. that everything after Munich Agreement was illegal and thus invalid, sought its support in the United Kingdom. See e.g.: Edvard BENEŠ, *Šest let exilu a druhé světové války* [Six Years of Exile and of the Second World War], Praha 1946, pp. 44-46; IDEM, *Paměti. Část II. Od Mnichova k nové válce a k novému vítězství* [Memoirs. Volume II. From Munich Agreement to Another War and Another Victory], Praha 1948, pp. 112-114, 135-138.

<sup>11</sup> On Czechoslovak side the agreement was signed by Š. Osuský as a Czechoslovak ambassador in Paris, on French, then, by Prime Minister É. Daladier. G. SVOBODA, *1. československá divize*, pp. 218-219.

<sup>12</sup> “Žádná válka bez vojska se nedá vyhrát, národ o svou svobodu musí také vždycky vojensky bojovat. Proto musíme mít vojsko [...]. [...] Vojsko je prvním nositelem praporu odboje, vojsko je hlavním výrazem touhy a vůle národa po svobodě, vojsko je prvním a hlavním symbolem státní suverenity a svobody.” Cited from: E. ČEJKA, *Československý odboj*, p. 129.

political programme, both outside Czechoslovak community and inside; exile representative body needed to continuously reassure Czechs and Slovaks that there are results of their effort and that the liberation and the restoration of independent state is just a matter of time; that is why in his message to occupied Czechoslovakia from 15 March 1940, E. Beneš emphasized how successful was the process of formation of the Czechoslovak Army and how determined are the Czechoslovak soldiers to fulfil their duties.<sup>13</sup> Despite the fact, as it is stated below, that it was true only partially.

First unit of the Czechoslovak Army in France, the 1st Czechoslovak Reserve Battalion (1. československý náhradní prapor) was built on 28 September 1939 from men discharged from the Foreign Legion, and some twenty days later, on 16 October 1939, the 1st Infantry Regiment was established. In time, there were formed other units and finally, on 15 January 1940, the 1st Czechoslovak Infantry Division was created.<sup>14</sup>

Since the military co-operation between Czechoslovakia and France became set on legal basis in late 1939, the Czechoslovak Army was built both from volunteers and from conscripts. By the end of 1939, there was more than 3,000 men in the Czechoslovak Army and by the end of May 1940, there was 11,400 men; but among them

only 3,200 (29 %) enlisted voluntarily, while 8,200 (71 %) were conscripted.<sup>15</sup> It is important to stress that there was a huge mental gap between both groups; while volunteers often risk their lives just to get from their occupied country to France, conscripts had only loose or none interest to fight for Czechoslovak independence; they and their numbers were, on one hand, necessary for creation of the Czechoslovak Army, but they also caused number of problems, especially during military deployment. There was also another group of Czechoslovak soldiers that later gave rise to complications; those were members of international brigades from the Spanish Civil War. Majority of them who enlisted the Czechoslovak Army were communists, regardless of their nationality; among them also Germans. The reason why did they do so was simple – it was a decision of Paris exile secretariat of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. As following course of events proved, they had only little or none interest to fight for independent Czechoslovakia.<sup>16</sup>

By February 1940, the 1st Czechoslovak division had some 8,500 men; 3,850 of them were Czechs (46 %), 3,800 were Slovaks (45 %), nearly 300 Germans (3 %) and other nations including Ruthenians (Ukrainians) due to fact that pre-war Czechoslovakia was multi-national state.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> E. BENEŠ, *Šest let exilu a druhé světové války*, Praha 1946, pp. 75.

<sup>14</sup> G. SVOBODA, *1. československá divize*, pp. 25-44.

<sup>15</sup> E. ČEJKA, *Československý odboj*, p. 157.

<sup>16</sup> G. SVOBODA, *1. československá divize*, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> *Vojenské dějiny Československa*, Vol. IV, p. 83. The composition of Czechoslovak army changed in time. Compare e.g.: G. SVOBODA, *1. československá divize*, p. 30. Newest on topic: Zdenko MARŠÁLEK, "Česká" nebo "československá" armáda? Národnostní složení československých vojenských jednotek v zahraničí v letech 1939-1945 ["Czech" or "Czechoslovak" Army? National Composition of Czechoslovak Military Units abroad in 1939-1945], Praha 2017, pp. 107-141.

The 1st Czechoslovak division was organized as a standard French infantry division. Its main combat power was concentrated in three infantry regiments; but only two of them, the 1st and 2nd, became operational by the outbreak of battle for France. Each infantry regiment was formed by three infantry battalions, by commander's company, assistance weapons company and support company. Except infantry there was (mixed) reconnaissance battalion of four companies (squadrons; i.e. mounted, machine-gun, motorcycle, and support) and one platoon. Division had its own artillery support provided by one artillery regiment of three artillery battalions, each of three batteries, and one support battery. Then there were couple of independent units under direct division command; those were anti-tank machine-guns company, company of assistance weapons, company of engineers and telegraphy battalion.<sup>18</sup>

Commander of the 1st Czechoslovak infantry division was at first General Rudolf Viest, then, in June 1940, General Bedřich Miroslav who used his cover name Neumann.<sup>19</sup> Among staff members there was General Jaroslav Čihák (cover name Znamenáček) as a commander of division infantry who later became one of the decisive figures during military deployment of the division. The com-

manders of key components of the division were Colonel Karel Janouch and later Colonel Jan Kratochvíl in the 1st Infantry Regiment, Colonel Jan Satorie in the 2nd Infantry Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Jaroslav Hrabovský (cover name Ostravský) officially as a deputy of commander in the 3rd Infantry Regiment, and Colonel Josef Vrzálek in reconnaissance battalion; then there was Colonel Alois Liška in artillery regiment. Most of them lately became decisive figures in struggle for Czechoslovak independence, mainly in 1944 and 1945, and some of them, like General R. Viest, were killed for their cause.<sup>20</sup>

The 1st Czechoslovak Infantry Division was stationed in Agde, commune near Mediterranean Sea shore in Southern France, and towns nearby, respectively; its headquarters, for example, was in Béziers, some 25 kilometres westwards from Agde, while the 1st Infantry Regiment has its garrison in Pézenas in north-east vicinity of Czechoslovak command.<sup>21</sup>

To be precise, the Czechoslovak Army comprised also of reserve unit that were not components of the 1st Czechoslovak Infantry Division and which were organized into ten sub-units (company/battery/squadron). And, as it was mentioned above, there was important effort to establish air force units. This goal was not fully achieved, but there were number

<sup>18</sup> Vojenské dějiny Československa, Vol. IV, p. 84. Organisation of 1st Czechoslovak infantry division, however, underwent number of changes and intended organisation was never entirely reached. Compare e.g.: G. SVOBODA, 1. československá divize, pp. 65, 69.

<sup>19</sup> The practise of using cover names instead of civil names was due to fact that most of Czechoslovak soldiers, especially higher-ranking officers, left their families at home and were afraid of repression against them.

<sup>20</sup> Vojenské dějiny Československa, Vol. IV, p. 85.

<sup>21</sup> IBIDEM, p. 86.

of Czechoslovak pilots in French units. It is fact that each eighth victory of French air forces during the Battle of France belonged to Czechoslovaks.<sup>22</sup>

### Case Red

On 5 June 1940, the German defence force, Wehrmacht, commenced so called Case Red (Fall Rot), i.e. the second phase of the Western Campaign (10 May to 25 June 1940). Its task was to defeat the French army and to force France to make a peace agreement. Germans intended to reach this goal by striking south from territory that they seized during the first phase of Western Campaign, i.e. from line on the Somme and the Aisne Rivers. Their forces were divided into three army groups (Heeresgruppen), “B”, “A” and “C”, composing of nine armies and two tank groups (Panzergruppe), “Kleist” and “Guderian”, named after their respective commanders. Together, Wehrmacht had 104 divisions and another 19 in reserve. Despite being deployed in combat, all division preserved their combat strength. Among them, so called “spear” of the “lance”, there were ten armoured divisions, Panzerdivisionen. Finally, Germans profited from their air supremacy, since already during the first phase of Western Campaign, the Luftwaffe and its two air fleets (Luftflotten), i.e. 2nd and

3rd, inflicted considerable loses to French Armée de l’Air.<sup>23</sup>

More important was the fact that during the battle, France remained isolated from its allies; in its territory there were only remainders of the British Expeditionary Force while mass of British army was evacuated, and armies of Benelux countries, Netherland, Belgium and Luxembourg, were written off as defeated. Together, French had probably 66 divisions, which all of them were infantry; armoured formations were destroyed or damaged which meant that French ground forces were largely without any means of rapid movements and incapable to fight back. French divided their forces also in three army groups (Groupe d’armées), from west to east those were 3rd, 4th, and 2nd, with eight armies together, and one army defending front line with Italy.<sup>24</sup>

In this moment, French high command deployed also forces of Czechoslovakia and Poland that were formed in its territory between autumn 1939 and spring 1940; both countries were occupied by Nazi Germany, so their armies were small, but their command was determined to fight at all costs.<sup>25</sup>

The very same moment the Case Red was commenced on 5 June 1940, the military situation of France became critical.

<sup>22</sup> Approximately, 12 % of all shoot down counts to the Czechoslovak. J. RAJLICH, Jediný československý maršál [The Only One Czechoslovak Marshall], Brno 2002, pp. 84-85.

<sup>23</sup> Karl-Heinz FRIESER, Blitzkrieg-Legende. Der Westfeldzug 1940 [The Legend of Blitzkrieg. The Western Campaign 1940], München 2005, pp. 395-398; B. H. LIDDELL HART, History of the Second World War, London 2014, pp. 100-102.

<sup>24</sup> Klaus A. MAIER – Horst ROHDE – Bernd STEGEMANN – Hans UMBREIT, Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Band 2. Die Errichtung der Hegemonie auf dem Europäischen Kontinent, Stuttgart 1979, pp. 282-319.

<sup>25</sup> For situation of Poles see e.g.: Wincenty IWANOWSKI, Z dziejów formacji Polskich na Zachodzie 1939-1945 [From the History of Polish Formations in Western 1939-1945], Warszawa 1976, pp. 48-87.



During first two days French forces were able to withstand German pressure, but when the Army Group “B” managed to reach the breakthrough on 7 June 1940, Germans advanced rapidly towards Rouen and crossed the Seine River without any difficulties on 9 June 1940. The decisive manoeuvre of the whole campaign was, however, done in Champagne Province; the Army Group “A” commenced its attack on 9 June 1940, quickly overcame French defence and then Guderian’s tanks penetrate south to Châlons-sur-Marne; there, Germans turned east and through Langres Plateau and Besançon reached the Swiss borders on 17 June 1940 driving the whole Maginot Line (Ligne Maginot) and three French armies with some 500,000 men into a trap. Another tank attack led by Kleist’ corps crossed the Marne River by Château-Thierry and aimed south through Seine and Loire forcing French defence to split in two; while French Army Group 3 was pressed westwards, the Army Groups 4 and 2 eastward with huge gap opening between them from Bourges to Vichy of more than 150 kilometres. That is why French government with newly appointed Prime Minister Philippe Pétain, the hero of Verdun, decided to sue for an armistice.<sup>26</sup>

It meant that in the moment the 1st Czechoslovak Division was deployed, French army was forced to retreat on the whole length of the front and the French

high command began to consider possibility of complete defeat.

### **Deployment of the Czechoslovak Army (1 to 10 June 1940)**

The first moment, men and officers of the 1st Czechoslovak Infantry Division experienced war reality took place on 1 June 1940, when alarm was sounded. The threat represented air attack. The Luftwaffe, however, did not aim at Czechoslovak garrison, but bombs hit number of cities in southern France. Alarms in Czechoslovak base, then, followed on a regular basis.<sup>27</sup>

When Wehrmacht begun its march to south, the building of the 1st Czechoslovak Infantry Division was not done yet. But its deployment was urgent. That is why there was established a special formation, so called “division infantry” according to the designation of section in division staff led by General J. Čihák. Major Maurice Mercier became his French liaison officer. Together, division infantry had some 4,900 men; 2,300 of them belonged to the 1st and 2,600 to 2nd Infantry Regiment.<sup>28</sup> There are, e.g., detailed information pertaining to situation in the 1st Infantry Regiment; at the time it had 52 heavy and 114 light machine guns and seventeen mortars of range 81 mm and 60 mm. But it also meant that the weapon situation was not satisfactory; there was especially shortage of anti-tank guns, hand grenades and of ammunition for machine guns.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> AK.-H. FRIESER, *Blitzkrieg-Legende*, s. 397; B. H. LIDDELL HART, *History of the Second World War*, p. 100; K. A. MAIER – H. ROHDE – B. STEGEMANN – H. UMBREIT, *Das Deutsche Reich Vol.2*, pp. 302-319.

<sup>27</sup> VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 14, inv. no. 118 – War diary of 1st Czechoslovak Division.

<sup>28</sup> IBIDEM.

<sup>29</sup> IBIDEM.

The organization and commander body of division infantry was as follows. Except both regiment commanders mentioned above there was Lieutenant Colonel Vladimír Přikryl, commander of 1st battalion, Major Vladimír Fajt of 2nd and Major Čeněk Slezák of the 3rd; all battalions were divided into four companies – each of four infantry platoons and commander's platoon. There were also three companies subordinated directly to regiment commander; it was so called commander's company (velitelská rota) of Captain Václav Kopečný, auxiliary company (pomocná rota) of Lieutenant Vítězslav Pospíšil and company of assistant weapons (rota doprovodných zbraní) of Lieutenant Z. Stav.<sup>30</sup> The 2nd regiment was organized the same way; Major Vladimír Bartošek was commander of 1st battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Antonín Bárovský of 2nd and Major Josef Chvalovský of 3rd; there was, then, commander's company of Lieutenant Vladimír Pludek (Lieutenant Josef Strnadel), auxiliary company of Lieutenant Rudolf Krzák and company of assistant weapons of Lieutenant Bohumil Vazač.<sup>31</sup>

On 3 June 1940, the division infantry was put on an alert and prepared for departure that was ordered two days later; the formation finally left for front on 6 June 1940. Its route followed the railway line from Agde through Avignon, Lyon and Dijon to Châtillon-sur-Seine and then

by foot through Troyes to the vicinity of Paris.<sup>32</sup>

On 10 June 1940, the 2nd Infantry Regiment received an order to take positions in front line near La Ferté-sous-Jouarre on the Marne River; two days later, also 1st regiment got an order to be deployed approximately 20 kilometres south of Meaux near Morcerf.<sup>33</sup> Since this moment both regiments were deployed independently despite original operational intentions which means that for the most of the time burden of responsibility held Colonel J. Kratochvíl of 1st and Colonel J. Satorie of 2nd regiment.

#### **Retreat from Marne and Grand Morin to Loire (11 to 15 June 1940)**

On 11 and 12 June 1940, both regiments marched to the front line in operational area of French 7th Army (7e armée) of General Aubert-Achille-Jules Frère and its XXIV Army Corps (XXIVe corps d'armée) of François-Marie-Jacques Fougère; the 7th Army itself was subordinated to the Army Group 3 that was commanded by General Antoine-Marie-Benoît Besson. The 1st Infantry Regiment, then in French denoted as "1re régiment d'infanterie tchèque", was integrated into French 23rd Infantry Division (23e division d'infanterie) and was ordered to continue to Coulommier, town upon the Grand Morin River of 7,000 some 60 kilometres east of Paris. The commander of division was General Joseph-Charles-Robert Jeannel. Except of

<sup>30</sup> VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 14, inv. no. 119 – Supplement of war diary of 1st Czechoslovak Division.

<sup>31</sup> IBIDEM; VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 23, inv. no. 198 – Supplement of war diary of 1st Czechoslovak Regiment.

<sup>32</sup> VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 14, inv. no. 118 – War diary of 1st Czechoslovak Division.

<sup>33</sup> IBIDEM.

Czechoslovak regiment, 23rd division consisted of three infantry regiments 126th, 32nd and 107th;<sup>34</sup> Czechoslovaks formed ad hoc combat group together with 126th regiment on the right flank of division. Its task was to block German advancement, especially around Coulommier, and to secure the division from being outflanked.<sup>35</sup>

On 13 June 1940, Colonel J. Kratochvíl was ordered to take positions in bridgehead on the north bank of Grand Morin between Guérard (outside) and Coulommier (including); the operational territory of regiment, thus, spread 12 kilometres. Soon its area was widened about another five kilometres to the east to Boissy-le-Châtel. The same time, its 1st battalion was reassigned and sent approximately 25 kilometres south to the area of Planoy and Vaudoy-en-Brie. During the evening, commander of the 23rd division decided to abandon the north bank of Grand Morin, to transfer the defence entirely on south bank, and to prepare bridges to be blow up during the night.<sup>36</sup> The reason was probably skirmish of German ahead-advancing reconnaissance unit with the Czechoslovaks and French and the fact that the position of 1st regiment was shelled by German artillery. This retreat, in fact, foretold following development in battlefield and unwittingly revealed French inability and reluctance to turn defence into attack.<sup>37</sup>

When retreating to south bank, Czechoslovaks suffered their first combat losses; while machine-gun platoon was completely destroyed, one infantry company did not receive order of retreat, got cut off and was forced to shoot its way from German encirclement.<sup>38</sup>

At 11.15 p.m. on 14 June 1940, another order of General J.-C.-R. Jeannel followed. According to this, full evacuation was ordered during the night. The 1st regiment arrived to Bois Blandureau, part of a small village Voinsles, 25 kilometres south of Coulommiers; there, the Czechoslovaks began to prepare to defence the line of 14 kilometres from Rozay-en-Brie through Vaudoy-en-Brie to Jouy-le-Châtel. But before the preparation for combat was ready, the regiment was once again tasked to retreat; the reason was probably the fact that terrain around Voinsles did not provide any special advantage for defenders; the only possible obstacle could provide, and only partially, just small river Yerres.<sup>39</sup>

So, retreat by walk continued to Monterreau-Fault-Yonne that was far another 45 kilometres southwards where Czechoslovaks take their position on the south bank of the Seine River; its operational area stretched from Monterreau to Vernou-la-Celle-sur-Seine. There, nevertheless, Czechoslovaks were not allowed to

<sup>34</sup> According to the memoires of soldiers, by that time the division had only two regiments. J. SOUČEK, *Na francouzské frontě*, p. 56.

<sup>35</sup> VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 14, inv. no. 118 – War diary of 1st Czechoslovak Division.

<sup>36</sup> IBIDEM; VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 23, inv. no. 198 – Supplement of war diary of 1st Czechoslovak Regiment.

<sup>37</sup> VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 14, inv. no. 118 – War diary of 1st Czechoslovak Division.

<sup>38</sup> G. SVOBODA, *1. československá divize*, p. 149.

<sup>39</sup> VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 14, inv. no. 118 – War diary of 1st Czechoslovak Division.

take part in the direct combat with Germans. Soon after 6.00 p.m. on 15 June 1940, regiment was replaced by French colonial troops with intention to be sent further south.<sup>40</sup>

Another loss, especially on weaponry, sustained Czechoslovak regiment due to fact that French had decided to destroy the last remaining bridge, and did not wait until all units managed to cross the river; the reasons were fears of French for being attacked, since the rear of French and Czechoslovak troop got into contact with advancing Germans. The result was that 1st battalion was stranded on the north bank and was forced to left all its machine guns and other equipment that could not be ferried across the river; in the chaos, that broke up, some men were lost and did not reunited with regiment.<sup>41</sup>

Following course of events resulted in distant retreat to the Loire River. At first, regiment was ordered to transfer some five kilometres to Ville-Saint-Jacques. Few hours later, nevertheless, it was changed for Poilly-lez-Gien. The second destination completely changed the situation since it required to move over hundred kilometres. During the night from 15 to 16 June 1940, the train with the 1st Infantry Regiment left Montereau.<sup>42</sup>

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The journey of the 2nd Infantry Regiment, for French as “2e régiment

d’infanterie tchèque”, was similar. Originally, the regiment should have been subordinated to 23rd division too, but the situation became complicated and by 12 June 1940 was incorporated into 239th Light Infantry Division (239e division légère d’infanterie) of General Eugène-Charles Dunoyer de Ségonzac. During the evening that day, however, regiment was informed that became part of 4th Light Motorized Division (4e Division Légère Mécanique) of Colonel Roger-Alexandre-Louis Leyer.<sup>43</sup> The reason for that arrangement was never clearly explained, probably it resulted from lack of communications between French authorities; for example, commander of 4th division expected he would have under his authority both Czechoslovak regiments, not the only one. Therefore, the situation was unclear both for French and for Czechoslovaks. After all, subordination of the 2nd Infantry Regiment to the 4th Light Motorized Division was even officially characterised as “provisional”. Another reason could be urge for reinforcement of 4th division. In fact, this formation was established only few days before, on 10 June 1940, by reorganization of the 1st Light Cavalry Division (1er Division de Cavalerie Légère) due to harsh losses that suffered in previous fighting.<sup>44</sup>

First combat experience of 2nd regiment took place near La Forté-sous-

<sup>40</sup> IBIDEM.

<sup>41</sup> IBIDEM.

<sup>42</sup> IBIDEM.

<sup>43</sup> VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 27, inv. no. 239 – Supplement of war diary of 2nd Czechoslovak Regiment.

<sup>44</sup> Neither historiography knows the answer for these unpredicted changes in subordination; some authors claims that the 2nd Infantry Regiment was subordinated to 239 th division. See: G. SVOBODA, 1. československá divize, pp. 144.

Jouarre, ca. 18 kilometres north of Coulommiers; there, Czechoslovaks set their defence on banks of the Marne River and during 12 June 1940 prepared for fight. Their effort payed off when they set back German attempt – most probably of reconnaissance units – to cross the river. During the day, however, two of its battalions was ordered to move some 25 kilometres south to Faremoutiers on the Grand Morin River. During the transfer that took place in the night hours, however, their task was changed; 1st battalion was ordered to defend narrow line behind La Forté-sous-Jouarre between Sept-Sors and Les Corbiers while 2nd battalion was sent some 10 kilometres west of La Ferté-sous-Jouarre to secure the meander of Marne around Changis.<sup>45</sup>

Next day, positions of Czechoslovak regiment got into artillery fire of Germans. At the time 2nd regiment was finally subordinated to 239th Infantry Division; but its situation was serious since its infantry regiment 59 that should have secure the left flank had retreated on its own.<sup>46</sup> In the afternoon at 2.30 p.m., Colonel J. Satorie was informed that German units were getting closer to the Marne River, and around 7.00 p.m. regiment received an order to retreat through Pierre-Levée, La Haute-Maison and Maisoncelles-en-Brie to La Villeneuve. Czechoslovak began their transfer at 10.00 p.m.<sup>47</sup>

Early in the morning of 14 June 1940,

the 2nd Infantry Regiment reached La Celle-sur-Morin near La Villeneuve on south bank of the Grand Morin River; but soon after, around 6.15 a.m., was given an order urging another withdrawal through Courbon, Hautefeuille, Pézarches, and Rigny to Rozay-en-Brie, i.e. some 16 kilometres to south. Before the transfer could begin, however, both Czechoslovak and French troops were involved in gunfight with Germans. Despite it was unclear where the Germans were, or even if there were any Germans at all, it lasted one and half hour until it stopped, and caused chaos among Czechoslovaks and French.<sup>48</sup>

When reaching an area near Rozay-en-Brie, both Czechoslovak regiments got close to each other, but not knowing about it. Before the 2nd Infantry Regiment was deployed in combat, it was ordered by commander of the 239th Infantry Division to retreat to Seina. So, around 11.00 p.m. on 14 June 1940, Czechoslovak regiment was transferred some 70 kilometres through Bernay-Vilbert, Courtomer, Aubepierre-Ozouer-le-Repos, Mormant, Bréau, Les Écrennes, Machault, Fontaineroux, and Champagne-sur-Seine to area of Veneux-Sablons. The Seina River was crossed in Champagne-sur-Seine and the last Czechoslovak squad pass over its bridge around 1.00 p.m. on 15 June 1940. This withdrawal, nevertheless, caused other losses; on the route, one platoon lost its orientation and never managed to reunite with a regiment.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 27, inv. no. 236 – War diary of 2nd Czechoslovak Regiment.

<sup>46</sup> VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 27, inv. no. 239 – Supplement of war diary of 2nd Czechoslovak Regiment.

<sup>47</sup> VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 27, inv. no. 236 – War diary of 2nd Czechoslovak Regiment.

<sup>48</sup> IBIDEM; Z. STAV, Povinnost nade vše, p. 127.

<sup>49</sup> VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 27, inv. no. 236 – War diary of 2nd Czechoslovak Regiment.

But the threat that the 239th Infantry Division would be cut off by advancing Germans was still imminent; that is why, while reaching area near Veneux-les-Sablons<sup>50</sup> around 4.15 p.m., Colonel J. Satorie obtained order to retreat to Gien upon the Loire River, ca. 90 kilometres far. At 7.15 p.m., regiment departed to railway station in Montigny-sur-Loing in vicinity of Veneux and at 11.30 p.m. its train was dispatched.<sup>51</sup>

### **Battle of Gien and final retreat (16 to 23 June 1940)**

At the same time around midnight from 15 to 16 June 1940, both Czechoslovak regiments, but independently, began their move to Loire which was accomplished during afternoon on 16 June 1940 when reaching Gien, town of 8,000 with impressive chateau from 15th century on the north bank of the longest French river. While the 1st regiment arrived between 12.00 a.m. and 2.00 p.m., the 2nd regiment three hours later.<sup>52</sup> It is an irony that despite being in the same location, both formations did not reunite until meeting in Nontron a week later.<sup>53</sup>

Soon after its arrival, mass of the 1st Infantry Regiment took its position southern of town. There was visited by General J. S. Ingr and General L.-E. Faucher who came for inspection. But part of regiment that was transferred by cars got stuck in

traffic jam in northern outskirts of Gien; in this situation number of Czechoslovak troops were lost, especially when having no knowledge of French. In the afternoon, moreover, German Luftwaffe repeatedly attacked bridge in Gien generating more confusion and inflicting other losses.<sup>54</sup>

For next day, 17 June 1940, regiment was given an order to prepare for defence of south bank of the Loire River, eastern of Gien in surrounding of Saint-Martin-sur-Ocre. The course of events proved, however, its short-time effect. In the morning of 18 June 1940, the regiment was tasked by commander of 23rd division to prepare for retreat, this time to Ménétréol-sur-Sauldre some 40 kilometres southwest from Gien; his intentions were to reset the defence of division on the Sauldre River. Nevertheless, neither this order came into force since the final decision was to move to Presly, additional eight kilometres southern of Ménétréol-sur-Sauldre.<sup>55</sup>

Meantime, when French were repeatedly rethinking their intentions, regiment got involved into gunfight with opponents and for most of 18 June 1940, until 11.00 p.m., was in contact with German forces. Reinforcement of the Czechoslovaks by French Artillery Regiment 23 arouse hopes and expectation to deliver counter-attack especially when its fire hit German positions. But Czechoslovaks were not

<sup>50</sup> Headquarters of regiment is set to be in "Surg". But such place could not be identified in vicinity of Veneux-les-Sablons or Montigny-sur-Loing.

<sup>51</sup> IBIDEM.

<sup>52</sup> IBIDEM.

<sup>53</sup> VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 14, inv. no. 118 – War diary of 1st Czechoslovak Division.

<sup>54</sup> IBIDEM.

<sup>55</sup> IBIDEM

given any ammunition and during evening French artillery suddenly cease its gunfire and stepped backwards.<sup>56</sup>

Without French support, Czechoslovak battalions began retreating a company by company while 3rd battalion covered their withdrawal until finally left shortly after midnight, around 1.00 a.m. on 19 June 1940.<sup>57</sup>

When in Presly, Czechoslovak regiment took its given positions north of the town in forest area while one company was deployed nearby in La Chapelle-d'Angillon, important junction of roadways.<sup>58</sup>

By the time the Czechoslovaks were heading to Presly, military and political situation of France deteriorated badly, and French government contacted Germans with armistice proposal. In these circumstances, the Czechoslovak National Committee decided to evacuate the Czechoslovak Army in order to reach the shore with intention to continue in the United Kingdom. That is why General J. Čihák, commander of division infantry, became once again important figure; on 19 June 1940, he contacted General J.-C.-R. Jeanne notifying him that Czechoslovaks are about to leave.<sup>59</sup>

Despite anticipating peace, the battle for France continued and 23rd division

was in imminent threat of encirclement by advancing German forces that torn apart its both flanks. It meant that Czechoslovaks were forced to keep retreating together with French to avoid being captured.<sup>60</sup>

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Meantime, the 2nd Infantry Regiment, in the moment of its arrival in Gien on 16 June 1940, was ordered to dispatch to L'Ormet, some 10 kilometres down the Loire River, and to take positions between location called La Ronce, north-west from L'Ormet, and L'Ormet itself, i.e. in span of three kilometres on the south bank of Loire. This task was fulfilled around 11.00 p.m. In La Ronce there was stationed also staff of division infantry.<sup>61</sup>

Next day morning, the representatives of military administrative, General J. S. Ingr and General L.-E. Faucher, visited the headquarters of division infantry and also the 2nd Infantry Regiment. The reason was not just to carry out an inspection, but, according to further development in battlefield, to look into the situation of French army. By that time, the Czechoslovaks began to prepare its positions for defence; for this purpose, regiment was reinforced by one artillery company and one company of machine guns.<sup>63</sup>

The Battle of Gien began on 18 June 1940. In very early hours of that day, around

<sup>56</sup> H. J. SOUČEK, *Na francouzské frontě*, p. 59.

<sup>57</sup> VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 14, inv. no. 118 – War diary of 1st Czechoslovak Division.

<sup>58</sup> IBIDEM.

<sup>59</sup> IBIDEM.

<sup>60</sup> IBIDEM.

<sup>61</sup> Do not confuse with location of the same name, today part of commune Châteauneuf-sur-Loire, some 30 kilometres western from Orléans and cca 40 kilometres down the river from Gien.

<sup>62</sup> VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 27, inv. no. 236 – War diary of 2nd Czechoslovak Regiment.

<sup>63</sup> IBIDEM.

2.00 a.m., positions of the 2nd Infantry Regiment were shelled by German artillery and resulted in exchange of fire both of artillery and machine guns; gunfight lasted until 8.00 a.m. Shortly after that Czechoslovaks discovered that Germans penetrated to the north bank of Loire in locations Les Guérets, Arcole, Ponta, and Chateau de Noues which are now all part of commune Dampierre-en-Burly. All pointed to forthcoming harsh clash between Czechoslovaks and Germans. But once again French command decided otherwise.<sup>64</sup>

Around noon, Colonel J. Satorie was visited by chief of staff of the 239th Infantry Division who told him the operational situation of the French. Due to the fact that Germans managed to cross the Loire River east of Gien the threat being cut off was once again imminent; that is why 239th division began its preparation for withdrawal that was set to take place in late evening. But Germans did not wait, naturally, until French left, and around 3.00 p.m. began their attack. In front of Czechoslovak regiment there were approximately two German companies supported with heavy machine guns that assaulted the banks of Loire. Immediately, both sides got into the contact and skirmishes and exchange of fire lasted until night. Simultaneously, French artillery unit bombarded German position on the north bank, but apparently without effect.<sup>65</sup>

By the time of these fights, at 3.30 p.m., the Czechoslovaks obtained anticipated

order of retreat. Colonel J. Satorie decided, the same way as Colonel J. Kratochvíl by 1st regiment, gradually recall unit by unit having placed in their positions only small force to cover their retreat. At first, at 5.00 p.m., French artillery ceased its fire, then, a half an hour later, 2nd battalion left its positions followed by rear of 1st and 3rd battalion thirty minutes later; finally, at 8.00 a.m., remaining troops of both battalions left. The last remained selected squads that were released from the contact with Germans by sunset. This time the transfer of Czechoslovaks was carried out by cars; the route led through Coullons, Argent-sur-Sauldre and Sainte-Montaine to Souesmes, approximately 50 kilometres from L'Ormet.<sup>66</sup>

Next day, on 19 June 1940, French command once again decided to set up its defence on the bank of river, this time it was Petit Souldre that form number of stream beds northern of Souesmes, small commune of 1,300 in the middle of mostly forest area. Second battalion was command to take its position north of Souesmes and 1st east of the commune, while 3rd one was put to reserve, some 2 kilometres southern of Souesmes. Despite preparation for defence, the regiment was instructed to be prepared to destroy all its ammunition before it should be taken by Germans; at 1.45 p.m., French artillery company left for good, leaving no trace; and finally at 3.00 p.m., General E.-C. Dunoyer de Ségonzac decided to retreat

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<sup>64</sup> IBIDEM.

<sup>65</sup> IBIDEM

<sup>66</sup> IBIDEM



to Saint-Georges-sur-Cher, some 100 kilometres west of Souesmes. Such far withdrawal, however, eased the final retreat of 2nd regiment and avert its capture.<sup>67</sup>

Exact course of events of following days is unclear, but soon after regiment left Souesmes was taken by Germans capturing small number of Czechoslovak soldiers; according to war diary, unit of twenty Germans, i.e. probably two squads, should have captured one complete French battalion.<sup>68</sup>

By early morning hours on 20 June 1940, regiment reached its destination in Saint-Georges-sur-Cher. From there its transfer south continued through Chézau-Chrétien on 21 June 1940, Ciron on 22 June 1940, and Massignac on 23 June 1940. At the same moment the armistice was signed, the division commander ordered partial disarming of 2nd regiment; Czechoslovaks were forced to hand in anti-tank cannons, mortars, all automatic weapons, optics and medical equipment; the only allowed weaponry remained rifles.<sup>69</sup>

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The most important decision for both Czechoslovak regiments, however, was made on 21 June 1940, when both French divisions, 23rd and 239th, were task as a matter of priority to withdrew both Czechoslovaks units as far as possible from the frontline. Also, that day French high com-

mand agreed to assemble all Czechoslovak units in the area of Narbonne in southern France, close to Agde where the 1st Infantry Division was established.<sup>70</sup>

Both decisions made situation for the Czechoslovaks clear, especially for the 1st Infantry Regiment that was by that time in Châteauroux. There, the Czechoslovaks faced the threat to be disarmed against their will by one French formations; that is why they prepared themselves even for possibility to get in conflict with – French. Luckily, next day they were transferred to area of Saint-Benoît-du-Saul, some 50 km from Châteauroux and then, on the night from 23 to 24 June 1940, through Saint-Martin-le-Mault and Saint-Junien-de-Combes to their destination, Nontron.<sup>71</sup>

Conditions became better also for the 2nd Infantry Regiment. In Massignac, finally, command of Czechoslovak division infantry discovered its position and shortly after talks between General J. Čihák and General E.-C. Dunoyer de Ségonzac took place, the regiment was dispatched to Nontron and thus withdrawn from battlefield.<sup>72</sup>

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On 23 June 1940, both Czechoslovak regiments finally reunited in Nontron and together with command of Czechoslovak division infantry began their escape to the United Kingdom. By that time both regi-

<sup>67</sup> IBIDEM.

<sup>68</sup> IBIDEM.

<sup>69</sup> IBIDEM.

<sup>70</sup> G. SVOBODA, 1. československá divize, p. 168.

<sup>71</sup> IBIDEM, p. 168-169.

<sup>72</sup> VÚA-VHA, f. ČVJF, box 27, inv. no. 236 – War diary of 2nd Czechoslovak Regiment.

ments got only 1,600 men.<sup>73</sup> They continued southwards and through Narbonne and Agde reached Sète with important sea harbour.

During its deployment, the 1st Czechoslovak Infantry Division sustained losses of approximately 1,600 men and officers; this is, however, just estimation since exact numbers are not available; among these losses there is verifiably 187 casualties, but most probably it would be much higher, about 400 dead; the rest belongs to captured, wounded and missing.<sup>74</sup> Other hundreds men, however, deserted during retreat of the 1st and the 2nd Infantry Regiment through France and were not put in this list of losses; it was approximately 1,700 men. So, it means that total rate of loss reaches nearly 3,300 troops, i.e. 29 % of entire Czechoslovak division. How large losses, on the other hand, were Czechoslovaks able to inflict to Germans, is unknown with no probable means to find out.

The final and symbolic scene of Czechoslovak military deployment in France took place in Sète. Before boarding, commander of the 1st Czechoslovak Division, General B. Miroslav, proclaimed that campaign is over and called upon those, who did not want to continue, to leave. This moment fully manifested the differences among Czechoslovaks; from remaining ca. 8,000 men approximately half of them gave up their duty and left

for home;<sup>75</sup> the rest stayed and later laid the foundations for Czechoslovak resistance in the United Kingdom and their achievements during the Battle of Britain in 1940 and during the Siege of Dunkirk in 1944 to 1945.

### **Conclusion**

Measured by the principles of military art, the military deployment of Czechoslovak ground forces during the second stage of the Battle of France was failure, even in respect to desperate situation of France that in mid-June 1940 got on the verge of collapse and its army, demoralized, was hopelessly retreating. There is number of reasons for such outcome; military training of most of Czechoslovak troops was not finished, formation of the 1st Czechoslovak Infantry Division was not complete as well as its arming. Its military deployment was in fact improvisation, especially when considering that two Czechoslovak regiments fought independently. That is why there was no place for any other military decision except of French.

These circumstances let to the situation that initial moral of soldiers vanished and the zealous ones could not impress the remaining majority; it could be documented on high rate of desertion and on final dissolution before departure to the United Kingdom. But Czechoslovak effort did not come to nothing. The core of the Czechoslovak Army that was built in France did not disappear and became inte-

<sup>73</sup> E. ČEJKA, *Československý odboj*, p. 221.

<sup>74</sup> Petr HOFMAN, *Ztráty československé armády v letech druhé světové války* [Losses of Czechoslovak Army during the Second World War], in: Zlatica ZUDOVÁ-LEŠKOVÁ (ed.), *Československá armáda 1939-1945 (plány a skutečnost)* [Czechoslovak Army 1939-1945 (Plans and Reality)], Praha 2002, pp. 156-160.

<sup>75</sup> *Vojenské dějiny Československa*, Vol. IV, pp. 95-100.

gral part in history of the Second Czechoslovak Resistance Movement. That is why in present military tradition the Army of the Czech Republic remembers the day Czechoslovak ground forces were deployed for the first time as a symbol of endeavour to restore independent Czechoslovakia.

### Summary

The 1st Czechoslovak Infantry Division (1. československá pěší divize) was the first ground force formation of the Czechoslovak (Exile) Army that was deployed in the battlefield of the Second World War. Initial intentions of representative authority of Czech and Slovak nations, the Czechoslovak National Committee (Československý národní výbor), that division would have taken part in the fighting as a compact unit, however, were not fulfilled. The reason was that in the moment its need to be sent to the front line was urge, process of its formation was not complete yet. Instead, two infantry regiments were put under joint command and exclude from composition of division with task to take part in the Battle of France. Nevertheless, this ad hoc formation, so-called division infantry, was not deployed together, but each regiment was subordinated to different French division.

On 11 June 1940, the Czechoslovaks reached the front in area eastern of Paris; in present time this moment is commemo-

rated by the Army of the Czech Republic when symbolizing endeavour to restore independent Czechoslovakia. The 1st Infantry Regiment of Colonel Jan Kratochvíl took part in defence of Coulommier on 13 June 1940. But by that time the France was on the verge of collapse and French command decided to retreat. That is why the deployment of the regiment consisted mainly from withdrawal marches and transport. The next relevant combat took place in Gien, town on the Loire River. But after couple of skirmishes and artillery gunfire on 18 June 1940, French, together with Czechoslovaks, retreated once again.

The deployment of the 2nd Infantry Regiment of Colonel Jan Satorie was generally the same; began in La Ferté-sous-Jouarre in vicinity of Coulommier on 13 June 1940, continued in Gien on 18 June 1940 and was concluded southern of Loire in Messignac. On 23 June 1940, both regiments reunited once again and began their escape to the shore of southern France in goal to reach the United Kingdom.

Military deployment of the 1st Czechoslovak Infantry Division in 1940 could be assessed by two approaches. Strictly in military sense it did not reach any achievement. On the other hand, its formation and involvement was not in vain since both aspects laid foundations of the Czechoslovak (Exile) Army and its tradition during the Second World War.



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