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THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK INDEPENDENT BRIGADE ON THE RIGHT-BANK OF UKRAINE IN 1943–1944

The study deals with the topic of deployment of Czechoslovak armed forces on the Right (West) Bank of Ukraine in 1943 and 1944 during the Second World War. During the war, Czechoslovak army was formed on the territory of the Soviet Union and by the time of its engagement in Ukraine it had the strength of brigade; its official designation was the ‘1st Czechoslovak Independent Brigade (1. československá samostatná brigáda)’. After its deployment in the Battle of Kyiv, the brigade took part in two important operations, Zhytomyr-Berdychiv and Korsun-Shevchenkivsky in turn of 1943 and 1944. It led to three engagements, in the battles of Ruda, of Bila Tserkva and of Zhaskiv (or of Hirskyy Tikych). The aim of the study is to examine deployment of Czechoslovak Brigade and to asses its contribution in both operations.

Key words: *Battle of Ruda; Battle of Bila Tserkva; Battle of Zhashkiv; 1st Czechoslovak Independent Brigade; Zhytomyr-Berdychiv offensive; Korsun-Shevchenkivskyy offensive; Second World War; 1943; 1944.*

During the Second World War, Ukraine was a particularly exposed territory in Europe, both politically and militarily. Therefore, its history has a significant overlap with military traditions of the Army of the Czech Republic (Binar, A. 2020). After 1942, the Czechoslovak army was formed on the territory of the Soviet Union; first

at the level of a battalion, then at about the size of a brigade, to finally reach the status of an army corps. Its combat deployment then took place in territory of Ukraine. The first encounter near Sokolovo in March 1943 was followed by its participation in the Battle of Kyiv in November 1943 and in Right-Bank Ukraine at the turn of 1943

and 1944. As the Czechoslovaks' participation in the Kyiv operation was the subject of a separate study in one of the magazine's previous issues (Binar, A. 2021), this time attention is drawn to the events immediately followed the conquest of the Ukrainian capital.

Introduction

The study aims to examine engagement of the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Brigade (*1. československá samostatná brigáda*) during the Zhytomyr-Berdychiv offensive and in the first days of campaign of the Korsun-Shevchenkivskyy. Specifically, it is about becoming familiar with its organization and combat abilities, operational assignment and its course, and thus clarifying the extent to which the Czechoslovak Brigade had its own operational independence. At the same time, the study seeks to place the interpretation into broader context of the battles in Right-Bank Ukraine with an intention to evaluate the overall contribution of the Czechoslovaks to the combat efforts of the Red Army.

The research intention mentioned above is justified not only by the fact that the fighting on the right bank of the Dnieper River represents one of the key engagements of the Czechoslovak army in Ukraine but also by the current state of knowledge. The interest of Czech historiography in the given topic has declined over the last thirty years. It has limited itself to specific subsets of study, such

as the combat deployment of tank troops or the biographies. As a result, the state of knowledge of the combat deployment of the brigade in the battles of Ruda (Руда), of Bila Tserkva (Біла Церква) and of Zhashkiv (Жашків) stagnated at the level it was in 1950s (*sic!*) (e.g.: Janeček, O. 1957, pp. 215–246; Krátký, K. 1957, pp. 328–359; *Vojenské dějiny Československa*. 1988, pp. 318–363; *Za svobodu Československa*. 1959, pp. 375–451), for even newer titles have not been able to overcome the factual material or come up with a new interpretation (Vališ, Z. 2014, pp. 63–74; *Idem*. 2014 [2], pp. 46–56); there are also important exceptions (especially: Kopecký, M. 2001, pp. 24–47).

The text is based on established methods of military history. Its primary tool is a survey of documents that arose from the activities of the Czechoslovak army in the Soviet Union. These are currently deposited in the Prague Central Military Archives — Military History Archives (*Vojenský ústřední archiv — Vojenský historický archiv*; VÚA-VHA), especially within the following archival funds. First one is '1st Czechoslovak Independent Brigade in the USSR', then 'Czechoslovak Tank Units in the USSR' (*Československé tankové jednotky v SSSR*) and 'Command of Czechoslovak Military Units in the USSR' (*Velitelství československých jednotek v SSSR*). Of these documents, war diaries are of particular importance, both of the brigade itself and of subordinate units, and

operational orders, maps and reports on the fighting. Other fund closely related to the engagement in Right-Bank Ukraine include ‘Czechoslovak Military Mission in the USSR’ (*Československá vojenská mise v SSSR*) as superior authority.

Additional significance in archival research belongs to the German Military Department of the Federal Archives (*Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv*; BA-MA) with its funds devoted to the units of German Armed Forces (*Wehrmacht*) that fought with Czechoslovaks. Not all documents are preserved, but for purpose of this study there were made use of following funds; these are ‘4th Panzer Army’ (*4. Panzer-Armee*) that is deposited under nomenclature RH 21-4 — which means the 21st group of funds while number four indicates the designation for 4th Panzer Army; the next one is ‘75th Infantry Division’ (*75. Infanterie-Division*; RH 26-75); both funds belong in collection ‘Reichsheer-Heer’ (*Ground Forces of Reich-Ground Forces*).

To examine the battles of Czechoslovaks in Right-Bank Ukraine also memoirs of participants could be used. Despite their lack of criticism, they enable a close look from individual point of view and shed a light for such details like motivation or daily routine (selectively: Buršík, J. (1992), pp. 59–61; Směr Praha. 1955, pp. 117–141; Svoboda, L. 1959, pp. 7–9; Svoboda, L. 1960, pp. 160–177).

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The study thematically connects to older one (Binar, A. 2021), but its text is conceived to form an independent paper. That is why the first chapter shortly deals with the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Brigade, its organisation and combat value, the next one with the Zhytomyr-Berdychiv offensive and thus forming a frame for further explication; the other four chapters, with exception of passage dedicated to explanation of Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi offensive, discuss the key engagements of the brigade, i.e. battles of Ruda, of Bila Tserkva and of Zhashkiv (or its two phases, to be precise); the last section presents the evaluation of the results in combat achieved by the Czechoslovaks.

Czechoslovak Armed Forces in the Soviet Union

During their deployment in Right-Bank Ukraine, the Czechoslovak troops in the Soviet Union were organized at the level of a brigade, whose full designation was ‘1st Czechoslovak Independent Brigade’. Officially, the brigade was formed on 30 May 1943. The fact that it had ‘independent’ in its name indicated that it was not intended to become part of a division but to fall under a higher level of command, that is, of a corps or of an army. Its organization and armament were adapted to this.

The brigade commander was Brig. Gen. Ludvík Svoboda. He was subordinated to Brig. Gen. Jan Kratochvíl, who held the position

of commander of all Czechoslovak military units in the Soviet Union, but in reality, influence of the latter on the events in the brigade was minimal. However, Brig. Gen. L. Svoboda spent a substantial part of the Zhytomyr-Berdychiv operation in Moscow, where the then Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš paid a visit, discussing the wording of the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty. He therefore was not in charge until 2 January 1944. In the meantime, the actual operational command passed to his deputy, Col. Vladimír Přikryl; Col. V. Přikryl had been assigned to the Eastern front from London relatively recently, as early as July 1943. Of the officers making up the brigade's command, it is necessary to mention Cpt. Bohumír Lomský, who held the position of Chief of Staff of the Brigade. The staff itself was composed of four departments — for operations, for intelligence, for signal and for personnel organization —, of the commander of artillery, and of engineer and of chief physician; also, the staff company was subordinated directly to the brigade command together with the auxiliary company, medical company and motorized company.

The combat forces of the brigade consisted of two infantry battalions, the first headed by Maj. Miloslav Kukla and the second by Cpt. Josef Khol. The organization of the infantry battalions had been preserved from the time of the Battle of Sokolovo, which

means that it had six companies — three infantry, one machine guns, one mortar, and finally one anti-tank. In addition to light infantry weapons, their armaments included twelve medium (82 mm) and eighteen light (50 mm) mortars. The tank battalion of Col. Gustav Krátký (Krautstengel) had in its composition one independent platoon, three armoured companies, i.e. a company of armoured cars, of light and of heavy tanks and then a company of submachine gunners. Before the start of the attack on Ruda, the tank battalion had nine BA-64 armoured vehicles, seven T-34 medium tanks and six T-70 light tanks¹ at its disposal — out of 30 vehicles at the beginning of their deployment.

Artillery, anti-aircraft and engineer units provided combat support. Artillery was concentrated in two battalions commanded by Cpt. Ivan Pazderka and Lt. Ladislav Jilma, respectively. Due to losses the brigade suffered when moving to the front, the first artillery battalion consisted of only two batteries instead of the original three, and the second one was organized as an anti-tank unit. The artillery battalions had in its composition four (of initial six) howitzers 122 mm, four anti-tank guns 76 mm and eight anti-tank guns 45 mm. Aerial defence was

¹ However, the exact number of operational tanks could be only a matter of discussion. Tanks often suffered technical problems and very often needed service intervention, albeit plain (Kopecký, M. 2001, p. 38).

provided by a company of large anti-aircraft guns under Lt. Václav Růžička with seven heavy machine guns 12.7 mm and an anti-aircraft artillery battery commanded by Lt. Julius Odstrčil with four canons 37 mm. Finally, engineers were concentrated in the company under Lt. Václav Kovařík (Janeček, O. 1957, pp. 235–246; Vojenské dějiny. 1988, pp. 320–329; Za svobodu Československa. 1959, pp. 236–301).²

As mentioned above, it is evident that the Czechoslovak brigade was a unit in which several types of military branches were represented; those were mainly infantry, artillery, tank troops, and engineers.

Before the start of the Battle of Ruda, the brigade had 3,204 members, of which 124 were officers, 25 sergeants, 940 non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and 2,115 men. It was also crucial for the composition of the brigade that it consisted of groups of people with diverse life stories and different nationalities. They included those who 1) experienced the Polish campaign, who 2) passed through the Slovak army, but the majority was represented 3) by Ukrainians and Ruthenians; the last mentioned came from Subcarpathian Ruthenia (*Zakarpattia*) and fled to the Soviet Union during the Hungarian occupation. However, for illegal crossing of the state border, they ended up in the forced

labour camps of the Gulag system. Gradually, from the summer of 1943, more and more 4) officers came, who were assigned to the Soviet Union from the United Kingdom, and whose experience and value orientation were incompatible with what was happening in the communist dictatorship. While members of Czechoslovak armed forces who experienced Polish campaign, who came from Slovak army and who were reassigned from London decided to fight for Czechoslovak independence in fact voluntarily, Ukrainians and Ruthenians had no choice — it was a decision on highest level of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union (Vojenské dějiny Československa. 1988, pp. 186–200).

This situation could be illustrated statistically; from an ethnic point of view, as of 1 October 1943, the brigade consisted of 66.0 per cent Ukrainians and Ruthenians, 16.8 per cent Czechs, 10.3 per cent Slovaks and 6.9 per cent of other nationalities (Maršálek, Z. 2017, p. 309).

Zhytomyr-Berdychiv Offensive

At the end of September 1943, Soviet troops crossed the Dnieper River, conquered Kyiv in early November 1943 and began their advance in Right-Bank Ukraine. In mid-December 1943, Stavka, i.e. Soviet high command, approved a campaign that would be later named the Zhytomyr-Berdychiv offensive. Campaign that occurred from 24 December 1943 to 12 January 1944 represents a one of the decisive engagements on the Eastern Front

² VÚA-VHA, f. Československá vojenská mise v SSSR, box. 8, inv. no. 67 — Organization of the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Brigade.

and when was carried out it became the largest military operation of the Second World War of that time. This was due to the strength of the forces deployed on both sides and operational plans. The Soviets sought to secure the positions they gained, especially Kyiv, by conquering the rest of Ukraine; it meant to advance to the southern course of the Bug River, about 500 km to the west. At the same time, the Red Army endeavoured to liquidate German formations on the southernmost section of the Eastern Front. On the other side, the command of the German Armed Forces intended to reach the Dnieper again and create a defensive line to survive the winter months.

The campaign itself also had its personal dimension and can be understood as a 'duel' of two titans of the military art of the Second World War. The Soviet 1st Ukrainian Front³ was commanded by Army Gen. Nikolai Vatutin, while the commander of German Army Group 'South' was Field Marshal Erich von Manstein.

In the original plan of the campaign, the Soviet command did not attach any special importance to the area of the future deployment of the Czechoslovak army. The core of the attack was directed along the junction between the towns of Kyiv, Zhytomyr (Житомир) and Berdychiv (Бердичів).

³ 'Front' in Soviet terminology is an equivalent of army group.

The order of battle of Soviets was as follows. The 13th Army was deployed on the right flank and consisted of two corps (24th Rifle and 25th Tank) and one independent tank brigade (150th), with the strength of three infantry divisions and five brigades. Lt. Gen. Ivan Chernyakhovsky was at the head of the 60th Army, which consisted of two corps (15th Rifle and 18th Guards Rifle) with three divisions. Another formation, the 1st Guards Army, was significantly more numerous than its neighbour on the right. It consisted of two corps (107th Rifle and 94th Rifle), two independent divisions and an independent tank brigade, i.e. eight divisions and one brigade in total. The 18th Army had the strength of eight divisions, which were incorporated into three corps (22nd Rifle, 101st Rifle and 52nd Rifle). Another formation, the 3rd Guards Tank Army consisted of three corps (6th Guards Tank, 7th Guards Tank and 9th Mechanized) and one independent tank brigade, which had in total twelve brigades. The smallest formation was the 38th Army under Col. Gen. Kirill Moskalenko, which consisted of only one corps (74th Rifle) with two divisions, while the 1st Tank Army consisted of one corps (8th Guards Mechanized) of four brigades. Finally, the 40th Army of Lt. Gen. Filipp Zhmachenko, advancing on the left flank, was composed of one corps (51st Rifle) with three divisions and two independent brigades. In addition,

there were two tank corps (4th Guards Tank and 5th Guards Tank) with eight brigades under the direct command of the front. Air support for the ground forces was provided by the 2nd Air Army with three air divisions.

The total combat strength of the 1st Ukrainian Front was about 450,000 soldiers, 1,100 tanks and self-propelled guns, 5,830 guns and mortars (of calibre 76 mm and more), which were distributed between 27 divisions and 32 brigades (*Dějiny druhé světové války*. 1980, pp. 60–76). It means that some 3,200 men, 13 tanks and 20 pieces of artillery (including mortars of calibre 76 mm and more) made from Czechoslovaks only small partner for Soviets, i.e., 0.8 per cent in men, 1.2 per cent in tanks (and self-propelled guns) and 0.4 per cent in artillery.

The Red Army's main opponent became the 4th Panzer Army, which belonged to Army Group 'South'. The tank army was commanded by Gen. Erhard Raus, a distinctive German commander of tank forces and coincidentally a native of South Moravia, in fact, a 'compatriot' of the Czechoslovaks. At the turn of 1943 and 1944, his army consisted of six corps, including two panzer corps,⁴ and two independent divisions. Its left flank was held by LIX Army Corp with three divisions⁵ and XIII Army Corps with five divisions

(including one panzer). The mass of the army forces was in the centre, where the XXXXVIII Panzer and XXIV Panzer Corps were stationed; the first one had the strength of five panzer divisions, two of which belonged to the SS, the second one had three divisions, two of which were panzer and panzer-grenadier.⁶ The VII Army Corps of four divisions was stationed on the elongated right flank of the army and the XXXXII Army Corps also with four divisions closed the German order of battle of 4th Panzer Army in the right.

Altogether, German army consisted of 26 divisions, had about 300,000 soldiers, some 600 tanks and self-propelled guns, 3,500 guns and was supported by 500 aircraft (*Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*. 2007, pp. 387–394).

The Zhytomyr-Berdychiv offensive began on 24 December 1943 with heavy artillery fire. Then the units of the three armies of the 4th Ukrainian Front, 1st Guards, 18th and 38th, launched their attack; their strike hit the positions mainly of the XIII Army and XXXXII Army Corps. During the first day, they managed to penetrate the German defence, making use of the moment of surprise and numerous reserves.

Also, taut situation of German Army Forces contributed to swift Soviet advance. After the Battle of Kursk,

man division was equal to Soviet army corps and so on.

⁶ I.e. mechanized infantry.

⁴ I.e. tank/armoured corps.

⁵ German formation was significantly larger than Soviet and very often combat value of Ger-

the Red Army inflicted one blow after another on the Wehrmacht. As a result, most troops were deeply understrength. That is also a case of the VII Army Corps which as result lacked any reserves. For example, its 168th Infantry Division had suffered such heavy losses in previous months that it had to be merged with the 233rd Infantry Division to maintain combat capability.⁷

Although the Red Army advancement gradually slowed down from the first days of January, they made significant gains by 12 January 1944. The Soviets penetrated about 200 km in the main offensive direction, about 80 km on the side sections of the front, taking control of the area of today's Kyiv and Zhytomyr Oblast. When the campaign ended, the war front took the shape of a promontory extending several hundred kilometres towards Cherkasy (Черкаси). This disposition threatened to cut off and encircle part of the German forces located on the Dnieper; German counteroffensive ended without significant achievement. Germany's plan to base its defence on the Eastern Front on the Dnieper River went to ruin, and instead, its armed forces were compelled to retreat and vacate a large area of Ukraine (Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. 2007, pp. 387–394).

⁷ BA-MA, RH 21-4/132 — War diary of the 4th Panzer Army (28 to 30 December 1943).

Battle of Ruda

The first combat deployment of the Czechoslovak Brigade in the Battle of Kyiv became outstanding success with only small losses for Czechoslovaks. The same result, with some losses of armoured vehicles, brought the engagement that took place in area of Vasylkiv (Васильків). It means that Czechoslovak brigade kept its combat value and the esprit de corps remained high (Binar, A. 2021, pp. 110–131; Vojenské dějiny Československa. 1988, pp. 330–348).

During the first six days of the Zhytomyr-Berdychiv offensive, until 29 December 1943, the Red Army advanced approximately one hundred kilometres into the depths of opponent's territory. At that moment, the front line took the shape of a triangle. Its tip pointed to the southwest, while its base was located directly between Zhytomyr and Bila Tserkva.

The Soviet command feared that the Germans would use the situation to mount a pincer manoeuvre, in which it would encircle the strike group of the 1st Ukrainian Front. After all, the outlined disposition, albeit on a smaller scale, was reminiscent of the distribution of forces before the Battle of Kursk (of Kursk Salient), which was still fresh in the minds of the Red Army commanders. Bila Tserkva was also important for purely defensive reasons. Towards the southwest of Bila Tserkva, at the

junction between the towns of Skvyra (Сквира; about 30 km west of Bila Tserkva) and Uman (Умань; about 150 km south of Bila Tserkva), a crack opened in the German defence, through which the 38th and 40th Armies quickly advanced. If the Germans remained in Bila Tserkva, they could effectively threaten the side and rear of Soviet troops from there.

The task of the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Brigade in the Zhytomyr-Berdychiv campaign was to defend the section of the front on the left flank of the 1st Ukrainian Front. In the first days of the campaign, the brigade was relocated several times, always with the same order, to build and secure a defensive position. Finally, on 29 December 1943, the brigade received an order to join the attack on Bila Tserkva. Because the attack on the town was carried out from the west, the brigade was to take up its starting position in Ruda, a village with about 1,500 inhabitants, located 25 km west of Bila Tserkva. In addition, Ruda was an important communication hub of the access roads to Bila Tserkva. There is a road passing here, which is the only one leading from Bila Tserkva to the west and connects it with Skvyra; in the village, there is also a crossing over the Rostavytsia River (Роставиця), a left tributary of the Ros River (Рось).

According to the original assumption of Soviet command, Ruda should have been abandoned by Germans. However, this information turned out to be wrong,

and it became necessary to seize control of the village by force.

For the planned strike, there was a change in the organization of the brigade. Until then, it fell directly under the command of the 40th Army of Lt. Gen. F. Zhmachenko. As part of the battle for Ruda, the brigade was relegated to the 50th Rifle Corps of Maj. Gen. Sarkis Martirosyan. The rifle corps, as was customary in the Red Army, consisted of three rifle divisions (and briefly of four of them). The key one for the Czechoslovak army was the 74th Rifle Division, with which the brigade formed a combat group. The division was commanded by Col. Mikhail Kuznetsov.

The attack of Czechoslovaks on Ruda began on 30 December 1943 at 8.45 a.m. as Soviet corps command planned. With one exception, i.e., without required artillery preparation, which should have been provided by Soviet artillery. The strike itself was divided into two manoeuvres. The first attack against the village, from the west, was inflicted by both infantry battalions of the brigade. The I battalion was stationed on the right and the II on the left flank, while the mass of the 74th Rifle Division was set in the centre. Their task was to bind the forces of the opponent. The core of the attack was placed on the left flank. The II infantry battalion, on the one hand, received reinforcements in the form of an artillery battery, and, on the other hand, artillery support was preferentially directed to its sec-

tion; finally, its attack was supported by part of the tank group forces.⁸

The tank group, which consisted of both tank companies, two platoons of submachine gunners, a battery of anti-tank guns and the 87th Tank Regiment, was ordered to outflank Ruda from the north, break into the rear and get the control of opponent's retreat routes. For this attack, the group had 21 tanks, i.e. seventeen T-34 and four T-70. The task of the submachine gunners was to support tank attack first and then, after outflanking of Ruda, to penetrate from the rear into the village.⁹

The conquest of Ruda took place, despite partial complications, basically according to the plan; the loop, made up of Czechoslovak and Soviet troops, gradually tightened until the adversary troops had no choice but to retreat southeast after 4.00 p.m. From war diary of 75th Infantry Division, another component of the VII Army Corps, follows, however, that the withdrawal of Germans was planned in most of its front section.¹⁰

Meantime, however, the tank group got into a difficult situation. According to the battle plan, tank crews got through to the southeast into Matiushi (Матиу-

⁸ VÚA-VHA, f. 1. československá samostatná brigáda, box 1, inventory no. (inv. no.) 11 — War diary of the brigade (30 December 1943).

⁹ VÚA-VHA, f. Československé tankové jednotky v SSSR, box 1, inv. no. 13 — War diary of the tank battalion (30 December 1943).

¹⁰ BA-MA, RH 26-75/96 — War diary of the 75th Infantry Division (30 December 1943).

ши), a village located east of Ruda along both banks of the Rostavytsia River. However, the 163rd Rifle Division, which should have attacked the village from the south, did not fulfil its task. Therefore, the tank group got into encirclement. This mistake claimed the loss of two tanks before the unit was able to break through and link up with the core of its own forces.¹¹ It was tank battalion commander, Lt. Col. G. Krátký, who was blamed for this failure and by brigade commander, Brig. Gen. L. Svoboda, was called a coward.¹²

In military history there is often stated a claim that the defence of Ruda consisted of two SS battalions. However, this information is not correct. German archival resources confirm that there was exclusively Wehrmacht in Ruda, specifically units of the 88th Infantry Division.¹³ The 88th Infantry Division itself was part of the VII Army Corps, which occupied the defence east and west of Bila Tserkva.

Battle of Bila Tserkva

The next day after seizing control of Ruda, on 31 December 1943, the Czechoslovak and Red Army soldiers

¹¹ VÚA-VHA, f. Československé tankové jednotky v SSSR, box 1, inv. no. 13 — War diary of the tank battalion (30 December 1943); box 2, inv. no. 24 — Battle of Ruda (without data).

¹² VÚA-VHA, f. Československá vojenská mise v SSSR, box 68, no. 8 — Report of the brigade commander on the engagements (9 February 1944).

¹³ BA-MA, RH 21-4/132 — War diary of the 4th Panzer Army (30 December 1943).

advanced west towards Bila Tserkva. Bila Tserkva was a medium-sized town that had a population of almost 55,000 before the First World War. Its strategic importance was underlined by the fact that there was a bridge over the Ros River. The river flows from west to east and then into the Dnieper. It is thus an obstacle to penetrating south, mainly due to its irregular and often steep banks (Směr Praha. 1960, p. 124).

During its advance to Bila Tserkva, the Czechoslovak brigade was divided into two tactical groups. The tank group, reinforced by the 169th Rifle Regiment, was regulated under the 74th Rifle Division, and advanced further north along the junction of Ruda, Fursy (Фурси) and Bila Tserkva. In contrast, the infantry advanced further south towards the village of Chmyrivka (Чмирівка). The infantry had to repulse several raids before managed to take up a position at spot height 208.4, about five kilometres southwest of Bila Tserkva, in the early morning hours of 1 January 1944. The spot height was a slightly elevated but essentially unprotected area. Both infantry battalions took up an all-round defence; the first battalion defended the western, southern and eastern parts of the perimeter, the second battalion the northern.¹⁴

The reason why Czechoslovaks took the spot height was to cut off German retreat roads from Bila Tserkva.

¹⁴ VÚA-VHA, f. 1. československá samostatná brigáda, box 1, inv. no. 11 — War diary of the brigade (31 December 1943 to 1 January 1944).

That is also why the units of German 88th Infantry Division endeavoured to gain it back. Their attack, supported by twelve tanks and self-propelled guns, began at 11.00 a.m. Under pressure of Germans, the Czechoslovaks were forced to leave their position and to retreat about three kilometres west to the bank of Ros; in fact, they abandoned their position in panic leaving large amount of equipment and weaponry in battlefield. One of the reasons of their haste withdrawal was that Czechoslovak artillery did not manage to cross Ros on time and Czechoslovaks were left without its support (Svoboda, L. 1959, p. 7–9).¹⁵ Then, they took up a new position in the villages of Chmyrivka and Hlybochka (Глибочка), while propping their defence on the forest on the right bank of the Ros River.¹⁶

At the very same time as the southern group advanced towards spot height, the tank group mounted with infantry lead an attack on the northern edge of Bila Tserkva, from starting positions in the close vicinity of the town; as a commander of this group was appointed Lt. Lumír Písarský. The strike took place along the road from the village of Fursy. The tank crews managed —

¹⁵ VÚA-VHA, f. Československá vojenská mise v SSSR, box 68, no. 8 — Report of the brigade commander on the engagements (9 February 1944).

¹⁶ VÚA-VHA, f. 1. československá samostatná brigáda, box 1, inv. no. 11 — War diary of the brigade (1 January 1944).

after first unsuccessful attempt that was deflected by defenders — to penetrate the outskirts of the urban development, where they switched to a defence during the night. Raid into the town, nevertheless, claimed two Czechoslovak tanks. On 1 January 1944 at 8.00 a.m., however, tank group received an order to leave its position and join the rest of the Czechoslovak brigade in the area of Hlybochka.¹⁷

The last two days on the Bila Tserkva battlefield were free of intense fighting for the Czechoslovaks. In principle, they limited themselves to artillery support for the 74th Rifle Division and to participation in repelling the opponent, who launched ten counterattacks in just one day; however, this impressive resistance by the Germans, as is already known today, is obscured by the fact that it also consumed their last reserves.¹⁸

In the morning hours of 3 January 1944, the Czechoslovak brigade received an order to break contact with the opponent and concentrate in the village of Trushky (Трушки), about five kilometres west of the front line. At this point, their involvement in the Battle of Bila Tserkva terminated. According to another order, which followed the evening of the same day, the brigade began moving south

¹⁷ VÚA-VHA, f. Československé tankové jednotky v SSSR, box 1, inv. no. 13 — War diary of the tank battalion (1 January 1944).

¹⁸ BA-MA, RH 21-4/181 — War diary of the 4th Panzer Army (1 January 1944).

towards Hirskyi Tikych (Гірський Тікич) (Vojenské dějiny Československa. 1988, pp. 354–356; Za svobodu Československa. 1959, pp. 426–432).

As follows from what is stated above, the same tactics used in the conquest of Ruda were used in Bila Tserkva; albeit in a different order. The task of capturing the opponent's main forces was entrusted to the tank group together with the 163rd Rifle Regiment, while the penetration into the rear to block off the retreat routes was carried out by the infantry.

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In the battles of Ruda and of Bila Tserkva the Czechoslovak brigade suffered significant losses. After that, it had 143 officers, 49 sergeants, 880 NCOs and 1,679 enlisted men, reaching a total strength of 2,751;¹⁹ it was more than 500 people less than before the combats began (official losses of 411 men; see chapter Assessment). As a result, the number of combat-ready men in infantry companies often dropped to only thirty or forty (out of ca. 200 men) (Směr Praha. 1960, p. 133). The losses of military equipment were also noticeable and counted four tanks, four anti-tank cannons (76 mm), one howitzer (122 mm), four mortars, and 37 machine guns (Za svobodu Československa. 1959, p. 430).

This situation prompted a reorganization of the brigade.

¹⁹ VÚA-VHA, f. 1. Československá samostatná brigáda, box 1, inv. no. 11 — War diary of the 1st Czechoslovak Brigade (3 January 1944).

On 7 January 1944, the machine gun companies of both infantry battalions were dissolved and transformed into the III infantry battalion. The tank battalion was also reorganized. In addition, there was a change in the position of the commander. Lt. Col. G. Krátký, at his own request, was recalled by Brig. Gen. L. Svoboda and replaced by Lt. Vladimír Janko who served as a chief of staff of tank battalion before. Also Col. V. Přikryl, deputy commander, left brigade and took command over newly formed 2nd Czechoslovak Airborne Brigade (Vyhlídal, M. 2020, pp. 73–74). On the other hand, the brigade was reinforced by an anti-aircraft battalion, which was formed on 5 January 1944 (Za svobodu Československa. 1959, pp. 430–434).

First Phase of the Battle of Zhashkiv

In the morning on 10 January 1944, the Czechoslovak brigade received an order to take a defensive position in the line of some 15 km wide along villages Osychna (Осична), Khmelivka (Хмелівка) and Klyuky (Клюки), which was fulfilled during afternoon hours. The significance of this front section lay in the fact that the dividing line between the 38th and 40th Armies passed through here. The new destination of Czechoslovaks was located about 70 km south of Bila Tserkva and about 25 km west of Zhashkiv. The brigade was again — after couple of days in direct subordination

to 40th Army of Lt. Gen. F. Zhmachenko — placed under the 50th Rifle Corps of Maj. Gen. S. Martirosyan.²⁰

Since the Czechoslovaks were deployed in vast area of Hirskyi Tikych River and Zhashkiv, there is no unity in Czech historiography in terminology; that is why the fighting is referred to as the Battle of Zhashkiv (*boje u Žaškova*) or Battle of Hirskyi Tikych (*boje na Horním Tikiči*), certain phases of the engagement are sometimes considered as an independent battle etc. Due to the fact that this text is primarily intended for Ukrainian readers, these details are put aside and all the combats south of Zhashkiv are designated as a single deployment with two phases.

However, the next day, 11 January 1944, the Czechoslovak Brigade got another ordered to take up a new position on the line Stupky (Ступки), Novosilka (Новосілка), Knyazha Krunytsya (Княжа Криниця), and the western edge of the village Ivakhny (Івахни). This new location, at about the same width, was nearly 20 km south of the previous one. Finally, on 16 January 1944, the brigade received its first combat order. In holding the current position, it should have to set aside a motorized group consisting of a tank battalion, one infantry company, two machine gun platoons, an artillery battery, and an engineer platoon. The commander

²⁰ VÚA-VHA, f. 1. československá samostatná brigáda, box 1, inv. no. 11 — War diary of the 1st Czechoslovak Brigade (10 January 1944).

of this group became Lt. V. Janko, and his task was to move immediately towards Zhashkiv to the village of Puhachivka (Пугачівка). However, the transfer was cancelled, or, to be precise, was related to the entire brigade. That is why in the morning hours of 17 January 1944, the brigade took up position on the line of Adamivka (Адамівка) Manor (i.e. хутір), Puhachivka, Zhytnyky (Житники), and Lytvynivka (Литвинівка); brigade's area of responsibility again reaches about 15 km wide. The task there was to lead defensive battles and not allow the adversary to advance north or northwest. The value of this front section laid mainly in the fact that the road northeast to Zhashkiv led through it.²¹

There was a change in command on the same day, 17 January 1944, and the brigade was transferred under the 51st Rifle Corps of Maj. Gen. Pyotr Avdeenko. Czechoslovaks were also reinforced by the 322nd Fighter Anti-Tank Artillery Regiment, and later by the 4th Guards Anti-Tank Artillery Regiment with a medium rocket launcher (BM-13 'Katyusha') and a heavy rocket launcher (BM-31 'Andryusha'). At the same time, for the fourth time in a short period, the brigade was ordered to transfer to a new line, this time along the north bank of the Hirskyi Tikych River. With its right flank, the brigade continued to rely on the Adamivka Manor, from where its position with

a total width of about 12 km stretched east up to the village of Buzivka (Бузівка). The brigade's order of battle was then, at around 11.00 p.m., as follows — the I battalion on the right flank, the III battalion in the middle and the II battalion on the left flank. The task was to defend the occupied position and to avert the opponent to cross the river and advance north to Zhashkiv.²²

The layout of the terrain also helped the brigade in this task. Hirskyi Tikych meandered widely and the watercourse formed two lakes there. Water was covered with ice, but due to mild winter it was not thick enough to support heavy vehicles, which means that water areas served that time as an obstacle (Buršik, J. 1992, pp. 60–61).

In the following days, the brigade was to engage in heavy fighting for Ostrozhany (Острозжани), which was located on the southern bank of the river, between the two lakes. Since there was a bridge over the river in the village, around which the Germans kept a small bridgehead, it threatened to become the starting point for their attack to the north. On the other hand, if Ostrozhany would have been controlled by the Red Army or by the Czechoslovak Brigade, it could enable to clear out the south bank of Hirskyi Tikych of German troops.

²² Ibidem (17 January 1944); VÚA-VHA, f. Československá vojenská mise v SSSR, box 68, no. 8 — Report on engagement in January and February 1944.

²¹ Ibidem (11 to 16 January 1944).

In the morning hours of 18 January 1944, the Czechoslovak artillery supported the attack of one battalion of the 240th Rifle Division, whose goal was to seize control of Ostrozhany. The defenders repulsed the attack by infantry with support of several tanks and heavy self-propelled guns; it later emerged that the defenders also had anti-tank guns. Even simultaneous attack of another Soviet battalion of 232th Rifle Division from west did not change the situation on the battlefield, and only led to confusion and friendly fire between Red Army units.²³

On the same day around 11.00 p.m., the company of submachine gunners under Lt. Antonín Sochor received an order from the corps commander to launch an attack on Ostrozhany to seize the bridge over the river. The attack, which took place at night, was deflected by heavy fire of all weapons and the unit returned to its starting position at about 3.00 a. m.²⁴

The next day, on 19 January 1944, in connection with the preparation of the Soviet attack, which was to be mounted against Ostrozhany from the west and southwest, Brig. Gen. L. Svoboda decided to support it with the II infantry battalion of the Czechoslovak Brigade

and probably also with tanks.²⁵ The II battalion was to lead the strike in cooperation with the 232nd Rifle Division and its 794th Rifle Regiment with 87th Tank Regiment, respectively. Czechoslovaks and the Red Army opened their attack at 8.45 a.m. This time, the attackers managed to take control of a large part of the village including church in centre of village. However, around 9.30 a.m., the Germans switched to counterattack. Fierce close combat ensued and fight took place house to house and man to man; these fights lasted until the evening. At that time, German 16th Panzer Division, advancing from the south, was supposed to arrive on the battlefield and join the forces defending Ostrozhany. Under pressure from defenders, the 794th Rifle Regiment retreated; however, several other Soviet troops remained surrounded in the area southwest of the village. Under these circumstances, the commander of the II battalion, Cpt. J. Khol, also ordered the withdrawal and after dark, the unit moved to the north bank of Hirskyy Tikych²⁶ under cover of tank fire (Buršík, J. 1992, p. 61; Svoboda, L. 1960, pp. 174–175). Although the task was not completed, it was to be, as it turned out, the most serious attempt to take control of Ostrozhany.

²³ VÚA-VHA, f. 1. československá samostatná brigáda, box 1, inv. no. 11 — War diary of the 1st Czechoslovak Brigade (18 January 1944).

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ The ice on the river, however, cracked under the pressure of tanks and tank crews did take direct part in the engagement in Ostrozhany (Buršík, J. 1992, pp. 60–61).

²⁶ Ibidem (19 January 1944).

Despite the failure, the next day Lt. Gen. F. Zhmachenko ordered to repeat the attack with a particular emphasis on seizing the bridge over the river. The blow was to be struck by a much greater force this time. Ostrozhany should have been attacked by tank and submachine gun units of the Czechoslovak Brigade together with the 794th Rifle Regiment and two tank brigades, the 55th and 64th. The advance to Ostrozhany began in the afternoon, and by the evening, the troops managed to get close to their destination. Czechoslovak and Red Army troops gradually took control of Zarubyntsi (Зарубинці), Vladyslavchuk (Владиславчик) and Князhyку (Княжики). The actual attack on Ostrozhany began at 7.15 p.m. and was carried out by the Czechoslovak submachine gunners and the 794th Rifle Regiment. However, no tank units were directly deployed in the attack; actually, tanks together with Czechoslovak and Soviet artillery were given the task to provide fire support.²⁷ The absence of armoured vehicles in the battlefield, nevertheless, was probably the reason why the successfully developing attack first stopped and then was thrown

back under the pressure of German counterattack.²⁸

On 21 and 22 January 1944, the core of the fighting in the Ostrozhany area was borne Soviet troops, namely the 74th and 232nd Rifle Divisions and one regiment of the 42nd Guards Division; in the course of their engagement, however, they got into encirclement. It took three days of harsh combat, until they managed to break through, advanced towards position of Czechoslovaks and unite with the rest of the Red Army. At that moment, however, the Germans struck at Buzivka where the II battalion was located; the assault was deflected with significant Czechoslovak losses. After all, shortly before, a Soviet reconnaissance team had found out considerable concentration of German troops south of Ostrozhany; the highest estimates spoke of more than 200 tanks and about 2,800 men. These numbers, however, were exaggerated; after all, II battalion alone managed to avert the attack. Location of Khol's men got once again into focus of German forces when Luftwaffe repeatedly assaulted their position.²⁹ This situation was later on assessed as the most critical for a brigade; luckily

²⁷ Possible reason could be fact that by that time Czechoslovak Brigade had only five operational tanks while nine others were in service. VÚA-VHA, f. Československé tankové jednotky v SSSR, box 2, inv. no. 19 — Situational report (19 January 1944).

²⁸ VÚA-VHA, f. 1. československá samostatná brigáda, box 1, inv. no. 11 — War diary of the 1st Czechoslovak Brigade (20 January 1944).

²⁹ Ibidem (21 and 22 January 1944).

for Czechoslovaks,³⁰ in following days German pressure significantly dropped.

Korsun-Shevchenkivskyy offensive

During the next two days, 23 and 24 January 1944, combat intensity dropped and became limited to crossfire and artillery raids.³¹ However, the fighting took on a whole new strategic dimension. That is because in these days the Soviet troops launched an offensive that led to the Battle of Korsun-Cherkasy (Korsun-Shevchenkivskyy offensive); on German side, the battle is referred to as the Battle of the Cherkassy Pocket (*Kesselschlacht von Tscherkassy*) — a term, which inadvertently captured the campaign's primary objective.

The Soviet command took advantage of the fact that after completing the Zhytomyr-Berdychiv campaign of the 1st Ukrainian Front and parallel Kirovograd offensive of the 2nd Ukrainian Front the battle line took the form of a protrusion wedged between the two Soviet formations. According to the Red army plan, the strikes were to be carried out by the 53rd Army, the 4th Guards Army, two mechanized corps and later the 5th Guards Tank Army of the 2nd Ukrainian Front and the 6th Tank Army of the 1st Ukrain-

ian Front. These units were to advance towards each other and meet in the area of Zvenyhorodka (Звенигородка), about 50 km southwest of Korsun (now Korsun-Shevchenkivskyy; Корсунь-Шевченківський). Its aim was to close the pocket around the rest of the troops of the German 8th Army that was located in area of Cherkasy and destroy them. Later on, this plan was subsequently successfully implemented and the entire German XI Army Corps and its five divisions were encircled (*Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*. 2007, pp. 394–419; *Dějiny druhé světové války*. 1980, pp. 68–74).

Second Phase of the Battle of Zhashkiv

In preparation for the encirclement operation, the Czechoslovak Brigade was ordered to carry out another attack but with a different goal than before. This time, its task was to destroy a bridge near Ostrozhany on 25 January 1944. The brigade, or more precisely its strike group, was supported by the 232nd Rifle Division. However, neither this fourth attempt nor another assault that followed on the night from 25 to 26 January 1944 by the 232nd Rifle Division worked out.³² From this effort to destroy the bridge over the Hirskyi Tikych River, the Soviet operational plan also comes to the surface. It is obvious, that main purpose of the engagement

³⁰ VÚA-VHA, f. Československá vojenská mise v SSSR, box 68, no. 8 — Report of the brigade commander on the engagements (9 February 1944).

³¹ VÚA-VHA, f. 1. československá samostatná brigáda, box 1, inv. no. 11 — War diary of the 1st Czechoslovak Brigade (23 and 24 January 1944).

³² VÚA-VHA, f. 1. československá samostatná brigáda, box 1, inv. no. 11 — War diary of the 1st Czechoslovak Brigade (25 and 26 January 1944).

in this area was to prevent German troops from endangering the flank or rear of the Soviet position, which could allow Red Army to focus on completing an encirclement of Germans in Cherkasy. Later on, exact date is not certainly known, the bridge was destroyed by airborne attack, reportedly by Germans and supposedly by mistake (Směr Praha. 1960, p. 135–136).

As for the German operational plans, the answer seems to be provided by the attack launched on 26 January 1944. It is said that it was to be led by three panzer divisions simultaneously, namely the 6th, 16th and 17th. The strike was directed from the east towards the villages of Tsybuliv (Цибулів) and Ivakhny,³³ i.e. some 20 km east of Ostrozhany. For the German plans, the control of Ostrozhany, therefore, seems necessary to prevent the Soviet incursion into rear of German offensive forces. As the strike group advanced more and more to the west, it began to expand dangerously for Soviets.

In this situation, Czechoslovak Brigade received an order from the commander of 40th Army to hand over its positions on the north bank of Hirskyi Tikych and concentrate on a new defensive line. The new position was located in the direction of the expected German advance, about 15 km west of Tsybuliv and Ivakhny. The forehead of defence line between Sabarivka (Сабарівка), Balabanivka

(Балабанівка) and Frontivka (Фронтівка) was turned to the southeast. However, before the brigade could take up this position, it was ordered to move to the area of Stupky (Ступки). Detailed order was issued by the commander of the 51st Rifle Corps. But once again; before this order could be carried out, the brigade was directed to the area of Lukashivka (Лукашівка), about 10 km northeast of the initially intended position. These dynamic changes were caused not only because of changes in subordination of Czechoslovaks but also by the fact that the German strike broke through the Soviet defence, and instead of directly to the west, as expected, it turned north.³⁴

Subsequently, the brigade's destination changed several times, before, on 28 January 1944, it finally took defence on the line of the Yushkivtsi (Юшківці) and Rozhychna (Рожична), about five kilometres west of Lukashivka. It became clear that the task would be to prevent the opponent from penetrating north. The situation was, nevertheless, for Czechoslovaks critical, since the position of the I battalion was meantime occupied by Germans and Czechoslovak right flank was without any cover; that is why the I battalion was directed to area of Rozhychna. After all, Soviet troops in strength of five rifle divisions got into encirclement when two attacking

³³ Ibidem (26 January 1944).

³⁴ Ibidem (26 January 1944).

German formation met together in area of Balabanivka. Anyhow, after this achievement, German advancement culminated. So, the brigade held the set line until 31 January 1944, experiencing only small skirmishes until surrounded Soviet troops broke through and joint the core of their forces.³⁵

At this moment, the Czechoslovak Brigade's participation in the Battle of Zhashkiv, also in the Korsun-Shevchenkivskyy campaign, ended. Although in the following days, the brigade changed several positions yet it did not get involved into direct combat. Finally, on 9 February 1944, the brigade was transferred in the second line and again placed under command the 50th Rifle Corps.³⁶

Assessment

The fighting in area of Zhashkiv were for Czechoslovaks in number of aspects unique. There, for the first time, the Czechoslovak Brigade met with defectors from the German side. This fact is evidence that morale was beginning to decay among the German Armed Forces. For example, on 10 January 1944, deserted Pvt. Josef Jan Goralčík. Before the Second World War he had Czechoslovak citizenship,

but after German occupation he was called to the Wehrmacht. His fate, however, was not typical, because into German Armed Forces only selected groups of Czechoslovaks were compelled to enlist; among them people from Teschen Silesia (*Těšínsko; Śląsk Cieszyński*) or Hlučín Region (*Hlučínsko*) (see: Maršálek, Z. — Neminář, J. 2019, especially pp. 104–117).

On the other hand, as far as the Czechoslovak Brigade is concerned, the morale of their members was assessed, according to war diaries, as 'very good'. However, several incidents indicate that this wasn't quite the case. After all, the brigade was very often moved from one place to another, usually without the possibility of any rest. Losses also gradually increased and the first combat failures also started to appear. One of these incidents, as an example, is the case of Pvt. Jurij Mumriak, a member of the 3rd company of the I infantry battalion. He deserted after his company was endangered by mortar fire. However, he was immediately caught. Although he faced the death penalty for 'cowardice before the enemy', his company commander decided to pardon him and reassigned him to his unit. Soon after that, German tanks approached the position of the I battalion. Pvt. J. Mumriak took advantage of the chaos that erupted and ran away a second time. This time, he got caught after four days. Since it was his second failure, he

³⁵ Ibidem (27 to 31 January 1944); VÚA-VHA, f. Československá vojenská mise v SSSR, box 68, no. 8 — Report on engagement in January and February 1944.

³⁶ VÚA-VHA, f. 1. československá samostatná brigáda, box 1, inv. no. 11 — War diary of the 1st Czechoslovak Brigade (1 to 9 February 1944).

was shot on the spot. This happened on 25 January 1944, at the time of harsh combat. To understand this, it is necessary to once again remind the fact that majority of members of Czechoslovak Brigade did not served voluntarily.

In this view, it is essential to assess all combats of Czechoslovaks. The fighting for Ruda and of Bila Tserkva, as was indicated above, claimed for Czechoslovak total losses of 411 men, i.e. approximately every eighth member of the brigade, i.e. 12.8 per cent (out of 3,204 men); among them there were 66 killed (and 270 wounded and 75 missing in action). Losses on the German side remain unknown and are now virtually impossible to know for sure. The war diary of the Czechoslovak brigade contains references to around 1,050 casualties that were inflicted upon the Germans, but these numbers are most likely exaggerated (Vojenské dějiny Československa. 1988, p. 356). Verifiably, German documents testify that the Czechoslovaks actually caused 'significant' losses to the German Armed Forces and that they were caused mainly by artillery.³⁷

The participation of the brigade in the Battle of Zhashkiv then claimed 160 casualties, (including 46 killed inaction); 5.8 percent in relative terms (out of 2,751 men before the engagement).

³⁷ BA-MA, RH RH 21-1/122 — War diary of the 1st Panzer Army (passim).

The amount of losses on the German side remains also unknown, but given the operational situation, they are unlikely to reach the relevant number, not even at the tactical level; thou Czechoslovak Brigade claimed 1,000 casualties among opponent (Vojenské dějiny Československa. 1988, p. 362). Altogether, during its engagement in Right-Bank Ukraine, Czechoslovaks lost between 30 December 1943 and 31 January 1944, i.e. within 33 combat days, in total 571 men or 17.8 per cent (out of initial 3,204 men). Together with lost equipment, the combat ability was seriously affected which meant that Czechoslovak were transferred in fact in the rear.

The engagement in Ruda and Bila Tserkva demonstrates the sophistication of Red Army operational planning, which had mastered the most progressive tactical lessons at the time (indirect attack, so called pincer manoeuvre). Above all, it was the intention to deploy an attack with its task to bind the forces of opponent in combination with a outflank strike, which was aimed at the rear of the adversary's retreat routes. However, another encounter near Zhashkiv gives a totally different picture. Repeated frontal strikes towards Ostrozhany — despite apparent failures and considerable losses — testifies of the rigidity of the Soviet command and its blind obedience to the issued orders. It is therefore clear that the approach to resolving

the situation on the battlefield depended on the position of a particular military headquarters and varied significantly from case to case.

Conclusion

From December 1943 to January 1944 the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Brigade was deployed in the Zhytomyr-Berdychiv offensive and partially in the Korsun-Shevchenkivskyy campaign. In first engagement with offensive, in second one with defensive task. This led to the battles of Ruda, Bila Tserkva and of Zhashkiv. In both campaigns the Czechoslovaks were assigned on a less exposed section and outside the centre of gravity of the Soviet attack. This, together with the fact that the Czechoslovaks represented only a tiny fraction of the Soviet forces — not even one per cent — means that their share in the Soviet offensive efforts was limited. The brigade also achieved uneven results in the fighting. The battle of Ruda proceeded in principle according to a plan; the attack on Bila Tserkva brought only partial results; and the fighting near Zhashkiv ended without any achievement. The reason was not only caused by the rapid wearing down of the force of the Czechoslovak Brigade, but also errors in coordination with Soviet troops and units and very often inappropriately chosen operational assignments.

This last factor was particularly important, as the brigade had only very limited operational autonomy. The orders they received were often detailed and concerned not only the brigade as a whole, but also its individual components (battalions, companies). This means that the role of the Czechoslovak command was largely restricted to just handing over the order to subordinate units. Paradoxically, its 'independent' character also contributed to this. Since it included a tank battalion, the brigade was very often divided into ad hoc combat groups. The purpose of these measures was to enable the Czechoslovak tanks to provide support not only to Czechoslovak but also to other infantry units of the Red Army.

Although the brigade was given several tasks that could not be accomplished, the key objectives for Czechoslovaks of both the Zhytomyr-Berdychiv and the Korsun-Shevchenkivskyy offensive, to prevent German troops from endangering the Soviet flank and rear was fulfilled, which led to Soviet victories in both campaigns. This also allowed other Soviet troops to focus their efforts entirely on the main offensive. This is the main contribution of the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Brigade during the fighting in Right-Bank Ukraine.

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РОЗГОРТАННЯ ЧЕХОСЛОВАЦЬКОЇ ОКРЕМОЇ БРИГАДИ НА ПРАВОБЕРЕЖНІЙ УКРАЇНІ У 1943–1944 рр.

Під час Другої світової війни на території Радянського Союзу були створені чехословацькі збройні формування. З їх скромного початку, коли існував лише один батальйон, навесні 1943 року він був розширений до окремої бригади. Її офіційна назва була «1-а чехословацька окрема бригада» (1. československá samostatná brigáda). Після участі в Київській битві 1943 р. бригада взяла участь у двох важливих операціях Червоної армії на Правобережній (Західній) Україні, тобто в Житомирсько-Бердичівській та Корсунь-Шевченківській відповідно в 1943 та 1944 роках.

Дослідження має на меті вивчити оперативне розгортання чехословацької бригади та оцінити її внесок в обох операціях. Для цього на основі



історіографічних методів було проведено дослідження бойових документів, особливо в архівах обох воюючих сторін, тобто чехів (Vojenský ústřední archiv-Vojenský historický archiv) і німців (Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv).

В обох операціях чехословаки були розгорнуті у другому ешелоні наступального напрямку; їхнім завданням було прикрити радянські фланги.

Метою дослідження є вивчення бойових дій 1-ї чехословацької окремої бригади під час Житомирсько-Бердичівського та Корсунь-Шевченківського наступів. Зокрема, йдеться про ознайомлення з її організацією та бойовими можливостями, оперативним призначенням та її курсом наступу, і таким чином з'ясувати, наскільки Чехословацька бригада мала власну оперативну незалежність. Водночас дослідження спрямоване на те, щоб у широкому контексті боїв на Правобережній Україні оцінити загальний внесок чехословаків у бойові дії Червоної армії.

Ключові слова: *1-а чехословацька окрема бригада, Житомирсько-Бердичівський наступ, Корсунь-Шевченківський наступ, битва за Руду; битва за Білу Церкву; Жашківська битва; Друга світова війна, 1943 рік, 1944 рік.*