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**Slovak Troops in occupied Ukraine in 1941-1943:**

**Presentation of the problem.**

**Summary.** In this article the issue about not enough developed problem of Slovak troops’ participation in occupation of Ukraine is raised. The article also studies the basic aspects of status and the actions of military formations that were Nazi Germany allies on the occupied Soviet territory.

**Key words:** Slovak troops, Nazi Germany allies, occupation of Ukraine.

The question about the participation of military formations of Nazi Germany satellite states is very diverse. Last but not least, it refers to those political goals that were pursued by the countries entering into the alliance with the Third Reich. Another important side of the question is the assessment of the circumstances under which satellite states of Germany entered this union.

The ending of the World War I (1914-1918) was not only marked with the advent of new independent states on the map of Europe, but also concurred with the beginning of mass expansion or radical ideas. It is notable that both industrialized countries (Germany, Poland) and agrarian countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia) were appeared to be surrounded with political authoritarian regimes. Slovakia didn’t escape such ideas; its’ territory was a part of Hungary for a long time and between two World Wars it was the part of Czechoslovak Republic.

As German historian Ernst Nolte who researched Nazi ideology stated Catholic priests had a huge influence in agrarian Slovakia, both the founder of Clerical Nationalistic Slovak People Party Andrej Hlinka and future president of Slovakia Josef Tiso were priests. On Nolte’s opinion, neither Hlinka, nor Tiso were true Nazi, but they were only clergymen who didn’t like Czech freethinking [12, p. 245, 248]. Besides, the centuries of Hungarian domination that was changed on Czech domination led to that Slovak didn’t have “neither heroic past, nor bright future” as historian Petra Schmidt said [9, p. 20]. This factor enhanced with abovementioned agrarian Catholic surrounding, made the basis for appearance and development in Slovakia the idea of leaving the Czechoslovakia.

On the one hand, formal independence of Slovakia would create the illusion spread among Slovak elite of motherland saviors from forcible magyarization and union with Czech that as they thought was the treat to the Slovak nation existence [13, p.31]. On the other hand because of the Versailles system of international relations crisis in Europe that reflected both in Munich Agreement of 1938 and indifferent attitude of Great Britain and France to proposed USSR program of collective European security, Slovakia had no other choice but to go on convergence with Nazi Germany. Germany considered Slovakia as a kind of balance beam between the demands and conflicts of neighbor states, first of all Poland and Hungary. The economic and political, military and strategy importance of Slovakia as future bridgehead was significant for Germany [13, p.34]. In the end of 1938 with the support of Hitler, Slovak government elite put in the set of claims to the central government in Prague. Among others there were claims to enlarge the number of seats in government for representatives of Slovakia as well as to create an independent Slovak army [8, p. 263]. After Germany occupied the Czechoslovakia in the March of 1939 the part of nowadays Slovakia became an independent Slovak Republic with Josef Tiso as the president. And the part of its’ territory in South and East was given to Hungary, and in the North and West to the Germany. In return it was promised to Slovaks to extend the territory at the expense of Poland territory [5, p. 191].

It is worth mentioning that all important processes in the country were under supervision of Germany: for instance, labor and state security bodies were made under the German model [13, p.36-37] and Slovak troops (4 infantry divisions, 2 aviation regiments and 69 LT-35 tanks) obeyed to general German command under the agreement of 1939, August 24 [5, p. 183]. And from August 1940 General German Command started to intensify the military in Slovakia. The Nazi principle “Party is the nation, and Nation is the Party” dominated in German state ideology [13, p.31]. As Polish historian Cheslav Madajczyk stated the position of Slovakia in the propaganda called “oasis of tranquility in the heart of Europe” varied between German satellite and German protectorate during the war [11, p.95, 97].

On the background of Soviet and German relations tension in the first half of 1941 and preparation of the attack on Soviet Union, German General Staff planned to use Slovak troops on the border herewith do not inform them about the invasion to the Soviet Union [6, recording of 1941, June 14], but later it was decided to engage Slovaks in action. Slovak troops fighting in the East Front were numbered at 45 000 men [7, p. 408]. They were armed with weapon of Czech production, heavy weapon (anti-aircraft and field guns, grenade launchers) were made in Germany. On the saved photos Slovak soldiers sometimes had captured Soviet weapon.

First, Hitler opposed the participation of Slovaks in military actions on the territory of Ukraine as he was worried by the fact that they would not want to fight with Slavs. However, Slovak government expressed its’ readiness to fight and on 26 June first units under the command of Defense Minister Ferdinand Chatlosh moved to the Eastern Front, stepping through Lviv and Vinnitsa. For the attack on Ukraine the so called “Fast group” was appointed (1,9 thousands men with artillery and 30 tanks), it was subordinated to 17th field army of general Carl-Heinrich von Stülpnagel of Army group “South” and two Infantry divisions. On 8 June “Fast group” was enlarged to 3, 5 thousand people and was renamed in “Fast brigade”. On 23 August brigade had 8,5 thousand people and was subordinated to 6th army of Walter von Reichenau. Staff of the brigade was in Kozyatyn and then moved to Zhitomyr [9, p. 72, 94]. From August 1941, after the reorganization the First Motorized Division (10000 men) and the Second Security division (6000 men) of Slovak army fought on the territory of Ukraine. From the air they were covered by two squadrons of Slovak aviation aircrafts.

The first big battle of Slovak and Soviet armies occurred near Lipovets in Vinitsa oblast, 22-25 July, 1941. At that time Slovak divisions suffered significant losses (by the way, the biggest for all the campaign, based on the losses for the one day of fighting) and were taken out to the rear where they did patrol service to the west from highway Lviv-Stryi. Under the archives it is known that Slovak troops (in particular, combat parts) were involved by German organizations of military construction on maintenance of highway Rivne-Zhytomyr [2, p.43] (before, they were willing to take part in such works [3, p. 4-5]). Soon after when Red Army put up the strong resistance in Ukraine, German command sent Slovaks back to the front in the middle of September.

The first motorized division, advancing from the Vinnitsa district to the North through Berdychiv and Zhytomyr, on 15-22 September covered the bridgehead on the Dnipro to the South of Kiev. On 22 September the part of division moved to Bila Tserkva to the reserve of Army group “South”, but in 10 days they took part in battles with the 1st panzer army in the district of Kremenchuk on the right bank of Dnipro. From there, advancing in October towards village Radyans’ke (Solonyanskiy district of Dnipropetrovsk oblast’), in the end of October the first division got to the coast of Azov Sea on the line Mariupol’-the river Mius where it spent its’ first military winter. The Slovak propaganda film “From Tatr to Azov Sea” was devoted to these events (Od Tatier po Azovské more, 1942); it is evident that the film was made on the examples of similar German propaganda films. Then, with the beginning of summer campaign of 1942, the first Slovak division took part in battles on the Caucuses together with German troops. During the retreat of Germans in 1943 it suffered significant losses while covering German withdrawal back to Ukraine, then it was defeated near Melitopol and the next month it was moved to Romania as the construction team. The second Security division stationed in the rear in the Western Europe, and then it served in Zhytomyr oblast’. In the spring of 1943 it was moved to Belorussia and in the autumn of the same year after the mass desertion it departed to Italy. Defeats and big losses provoked Germany to permit Slovaks even to enter the SS army: it is known due to the documents addressed to the Slovak citizen Franz Dvorzhak, lieutenant from SS oberabschnit “Danube” dated back to March 1943 [4, p.1].

Participation of Slovak troops in battles on Eastern Front on the side of Nazi Germany, which though presented as collaboration of two independent states (in October 1941, president Tiso went on official visit to occupied Kiev) can’t be assessed unambiguously. It is known that rank and file didn’t want to swear oath to the Reich and the number of officers considered collaboration with Germans as disgrace for Slovakia [9, p.56, 134]. Slovak German conflicts on the front even everyday were not rare [9, p. 79, 179-180]. Thus, in the field Slovaks unlike the Germans had difficulties with supply: soldiers got 0, 5 of bread per person per day, the dinner and supper were insufficient; the payment was 1,5 koruna per day while the price of kilo of brown bread was 4 koruna (at the rate 10 Slovak koruna were equal to one German Reichsmark) [9, p. 79, 94; 5, p.186]. Food shortages must be confiscated on the spot. Among archive documents, the receipts of Slovak command were saved. They were given on the territory of Donbas in the autumn of 1941 to the local citizens for the cattle, wheat and vegetables [1, p. 287 ob, 311, 314, 322]. Desertion was the usual case: for instance after the defeat of Germans in Stalingrad battle the whole regiment of the first division (2,8 thousands of men) went over the Red Army, and 800 men from the second division – to the Ukrainian partisans [11, p. 101]. It is known about the secret agreement between Slovak units and partisan detachment of Sidor Kovpak about mutual non-agression [10, p.93].

All these features make the contradictory picture of Slovak troops stay in Ukraine. Besides, it is worth denoting that unlike the detailed study of the battle way of Slovak units, much more questions arise about their stay on occupied Soviet territories, in particular, Ukrainian territory as occupying troops. It’s not a secret that in this occasion the attitude of the local citizens to them was twofold: on the one hand they were perceived as Nazi alliance, on the other hand as culturally close Slavic nation. Slovaks were amazingly distinguished from the total mass of allied German troops that were on the occupied territory, for example, Hungarians and Romanians. Among the big amount of documents for military crime investigation on the territory of Ukraine there were no mass mentioning of Slovak troops. Nevertheless, Slovaks didn’t avoid the inescapable for German occupying troops fights with partisans: in October 1941, they conduct antipartisan actions near Zhytomyr and in the beginning of 1942, the 102nd infantry regiment of the second security division burnt several villages in Mozyr district of Belorussia (at that time it was the part of Reichscommissariat Ukraine) [9, p. 94, 98]. However, Slovaks that were involved in military crimes on Ukrainian territory weren’t engaged in execution of Jewish population and Slovak military clergymen were one of the first who already in the end of summer of 1941 informed the Vatican about the mass executions of Jews in Ukraine [9, p.67].

Meanwhile it is remarkable that there were no Slovak occupying structure in Ukraine (as well as in Belorussia), though such existed among Italian troops that were in the front line of Reichscommissariat Ukraine. But saved documents (including mentioned receipts) with Slovak – not German stamps, affirm the document circulation. In favour of this theory the long stay of Slovak troops in rear districts of Ukraine while there are facts of simultaneous existence of German and Hungarian occupation authorities. According to this the possibility of existence of certain occupation model is needed to be enhanced that was probably partially applied by Slovaks.

On the background of described subjects involved with the attitude of Slovak soldiers to the war in the East as well as the participation of Slovak troops in military crimes on the territory of Ukraine it seems important to identify those characteristics and features that will tell whether it is possible to set the question about Slovak occupation regime in Ukraine during World War II.

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**Баринов И.И. Словацкие войска в оккупированной Украине в 1941-1943 гг.: к постановке вопроса. – Статья.**

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматриваются вопросы участия словацких войск в оккупации Украины. Также автор исследует основные аспекты статуса и действий союзных нацистской Германии военных формирований на оккупированной советской территории.

**Ключевые слова:** словацкие войска, союзники нацистской Германии, оккупация Украины.

**Анотація.** У статті розглядаються питання щодо участі словацьких військ в окупації України. Також автор досліджує основні аспекти статусу і дій союзних нацистської Німеччини військових формувань на окупованій радянській території.

**Ключові слова:** словацькi вiйска, союзники нацистської Німеччини, окупація України.