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Czechoslovak and Yugoslav Military Units Created in the USSR during the Great Patriotic War: Effectiveness Analysis

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Abstract: Based on the example of the history of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps and the 1st Yugoslav Infantry Brigade created on the territory of the USSR during the Great Patriotic War, there are revealed the peculiarities of the effectiveness of “foreign” military units on the territory of a third country. To date, these issues have not been sufficiently studied in historical science. The source base used in the research includes both published and unpublished documents from the funds of the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, the Russian State Military Archive and Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. It is shown that despite similar conditions of the formation and assistance from the USSR, the destinies of the Czechoslovak army corps and the Yugoslav brigade were different. The former became a symbol of Czechoslovakia’s struggle against Nazism and the basis of the new Czechoslovak army, whereas the Yugoslav brigade underwent “reformatting”, “dissolved” in the People’s Liberation Army of Yugoslavia; it did not become the basis of the new Yugoslav army and then practically passed into oblivion. The author concludes that with regard to the effectiveness of the Czechoslovak army corps and the Yugoslav brigade, the decisive role was played by the relationship of their command with the main political participant in the process of creating these military units, on whose will both the achievement of the goals set and their very existence depended; the other factors were indirect.

Keywords: World War II, foreign military units, armed forces of Eastern and Southeastern Europe, Red Army, Soviet-German front

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Чехословацкое и югославское воинские формирования, созданные в СССР в годы Великой Отечественной войны: анализ эффективности

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Аннотация: На примере истории 1-го чехословацкого армейского корпуса и 1-й югославской пехотной бригады, созданных на территории СССР в годы Великой Отечественной войны, выявляются особенности эффективности «иностранных» воинских частей на территории третьей страны. До настоящего времени в исторической науке эти вопросы были раскрыты недостаточно. Источниковая база включает в себя как опубликованные, так и неопубликованные документы из фондов Российского



государственного архива социально-политической истории, Российского государственного военного архива и Центрального архива Министерства обороны РФ. Показано, что несмотря на схожие условия формирования и помощь со стороны СССР, судьба чехословацкого армейского корпуса и югославской бригады сложилась по-разному. Первый стал символом борьбы Чехословакии с нацизмом и основой новой Чехословацкой армии, в то время как Югославская бригада подверглась «перестроению», «растворилась» в составе Народно-освободительной армии Югославии, основой новой Югославской армии не стала и затем практически была предана забвению. Автор приходит к выводу, что в вопросе эффективности чехословацкого армейского корпуса и югославской бригады решающую роль сыграли взаимоотношения их командования с главным политическим участником процесса создания этих воинских формирований, от воли которого зависело и достижение поставленных при их создании целей, и само их существование, а остальные факторы были косвенными.

Ключевые слова: Вторая мировая война, иностранные воинские части, вооруженные силы стран Восточной и Юго-Восточной Европы, Красная армия, советско-германский фронт

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Introduction

The relevance of the study is determined by the need for objective coverage of the history of the Great Patriotic War and the role of the Soviet Union in the liberation of Eastern European countries from Nazism.

In the period until the 1990s, in the USSR and Czechoslovakia, many works were published devoted to the history of Czechoslovak military units that appeared during World War II which contain important information about the process of the formation and procurement of Czechoslovak military units created in the USSR. However, the study of this issue was ideology-driven. In historiography, many important political and other problems of the formation and combat use of Czechoslovak military units were glossed over¹. A number of studies on this subject have been published in modern Russian and foreign historiography² (in particular, the dissertation of S.N. Kartavy³ covers the process of the formation of foreign military units on the territory of the USSR). However, many political aspects related to their functioning are still not fully clarified.

In general, in historiography the history of the 1st Yugoslav brigade created in the USSR is covered poorly. Before 1991, in the publications dedicated to the liberation of Yugoslavia, it was not mentioned at all or was touched on in passing. In the Soviet studies the political problems related to the formation and combat use of this military unit were not analyzed. In Yugoslav historiography, the Yugoslav brigade created in the USSR was also an “outcast.” In many Yugoslav works devoted to the history of World War II,

¹ See for example: M.I. Semiryaga, “Formirovanie inostrannykh voinskikh chastey na territorii SSSR v gody Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny [Semiryaga M.I. Formation of Foreign Military Units on the Territory of the USSR During the Great Patriotic War],” *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 9 (1959): 54–69; *Za svobodu Československa: Kapitoly z dějin Československé vojenské jednotky v SSSR za Druhé světové války* [For the freedom of Czechoslovakia: Chapters from the history of the Czechoslovak military unit in the USSR during the Second World War], vol. 1, 3 (Praha: Naše vojsko, 1959, 1960).

² See for example: Aleš Binar, *Československý vojenský odboj za Druhé světové války na Východě (1939–1945)* [Czechoslovak Military Resistance during World War II in the East (1939–1945)] (Brno: Univerzita obrany v Brně, 2019); V.V. Mar’ina, “Chekhoslovatskie voinskiye chasti v SSSR. 1941–1945 gody [Czechoslovak Military Units in the USSR, 1941–1945].” *Novaya i noveyshaya istoriya*, no. 3 (2010): 83–106.

³ S.N. Kartavy, “Sozdanie v SSSR inostrannykh voennykh formirovaniy i podgotovka dlia nikh ofit-serskikh kadrov v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny [Creation of Foreign Military Formations in the USSR and Training of Officers for Them During the Great Patriotic War],” PhD dis., P.G. Demidov Yaroslavl State University, 2000.

there was no mention of it at all; when researchers wrote about the brigade, they sought negative aspects of its history. With regard to modern historiography, we should mention the monograph by Croatian historian M. Pojić “The 369th Croatian Regiment in the Eastern Theater of War, 1941–1943: War Diary,”⁴ which among other things touches on the history of the 1st Yugoslav Brigade. However, its fate has not yet been fully studied and, according to Serbian historian P. Bajić, it remains “one of the most delicate issues in the history of the national liberation struggle” of Yugoslavia⁵.

The purpose of the study is to identify the characteristics of the effectiveness of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav military units created on the territory of the USSR during the Great Patriotic War.

The source base used in the article includes both published and unpublished documents from the funds of the “Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks” (F. 17), “V.M. Molotov” (F. 82) and “State Defense Committee” (F. 644) of the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, the fund “Main Directorate for Prisoners of War and Internees of the NKVD-MVD of the USSR” (F. 1p) of the Russian State Military Archive, the funds “Main Organizational Directorate of the General Staff of the Red Army” (F. 7) and “Main Directorate for the Formation of Red Army Troops” (F. 56) of the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation.

Purpose of creating Czechoslovak and Yugoslav military units

During the Great Patriotic War, through the efforts and at the expense of the USSR, there were created foreign military units, including the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps (the creation began in July 1941) and the 1st Yugoslav Infantry Brigade (from November 1943). Their creation was primarily due to the political goal of demonstrating unity with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia in the anti-Hitler struggle. These units were also used as the basis for creating new armies of the respective countries in the post-war period⁶. The number of the personnel of the Czechoslovak corps and the Yugoslav brigade was small. The former amounted to about 3.5 thousand people in September 1943; 12.3 thousand people – in June 1944, 18.8 thousand people – in January 1945. The maximum number of the Yugoslav brigade was about 2 thousand people. The comparison of these figures with the data of the personnel of the Red Army, in whose operating units by May 1945 there were more than 6 million people, speaks for itself. It is not without reason that Czech military historian A. Binar believes that “the combat value of the Czechoslovak corps... did not matter”⁷, although it should be noted that this unit had military merits.

The political goals of creating the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav units determined the following main tasks set to them:

- sustainability, i.e. the existence and – if there are opportunities (primarily related to recruitment) – the progressive development of the military unit during the war as proof of the strength of political relations between the USSR and the corresponding country;
- applicability as a political tool. Its first criterion was the very fact of the military unit participation in hostilities as the demonstration of the unity of the anti-Hitler efforts

⁴ Milan Pojić, *Hrvatska pukovnija 369. na istočnom bojištu 1941–1943: ratni dnevnik* [Croatian Regiment 369 in the Eastern Theater 1941–1943: War Diary] (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv Publ., 2007).

⁵ Predrag Dj. Bajić, *Saveznicka vojna pomoć NOP-u 1943–1945. godine* [The Allied Military Assistance to the National Liberation Movement in 1943–1945] (Belgrade: [N.s.], 2016), 275.

⁶ Vol. 3 of *Za svobodu Československa*, 305; Bojan B. Dimitrijević, “Sovjetska obavestajna služba u Jugoslaviji 1944–1948. godine [The Soviet Intelligence Service in Yugoslavia in 1944–1948],” in *Oslobodjenje Beograda: Zbornik radova* [Liberation of Belgrade: Collection of Works] (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2010), 451; *Velika Otechestvennaia voina 1941–1945 godo* [Great Patriotic War 1941–1945], vol. 8 (Moscow: Kuchkovo pole, 2014), 407.

⁷ Aleš Binar, *Československý vojenský odboj*, 96.

of the corresponding country and the USSR. At the same time, the results and duration of hostilities were not of fundamental importance: thus, in December 1942, the Soviet commission recommended sending the 1st Czechoslovak battalion to the front, so as not to “discourage” the moral and political state of its soldiers, and then, “after some time,” to withdraw the battalion from the front⁸. The second criterion was the use of the foreign unit created in the USSR as not only a military, but also a political basis for the organization of a post-war army of the corresponding state.

The implementation of the aforementioned tasks was supposed to be an indicator of effectiveness and proof of the correctness of the decision to create Czechoslovak and Yugoslav military units on the territory of the USSR.

These units were created under similar conditions. The fates of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav states which were destroyed and dismembered by the Nazi bloc during World War II were similar. The puppet states of Slovakia and Croatia created on the ruins of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia entered the war against the USSR on the side of Germany, as a result of which Slovak and Croatian prisoners of war became part of the contingent for the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav military units created on the USSR territory. The Soviet Union provided both units with high-quality training and procurement. At the same time, the USSR authorities chose a neutral political course towards the created units, which, firstly, was based on the “pan-Slavic factor” rather than the “communist” one⁹, and, secondly, on the emphasized affiliation of the created military units with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia as sovereign states and to their “traditional” (“bourgeois”) armies¹⁰. On the other hand, the USSR authorities sought to keep the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav units under their control¹¹. In political and ethnic terms, the contingent of these units was not homogeneous: they included supporters of different political parties and representatives of many ethnic groups (Czechs, Slovaks, Rusyns, Jews; Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Slovenes, etc., respectively), which contributed to the political and ethnic contradictions within the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav units. Similar was the role of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav communists who were far from the majority in the personnel of the units, but were able to take them under their political control¹². Finally, the similarity was due to Great Britain’s influence on the process of creating the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav units; Great Britain tried to prevent the rapprochement of the emigre governments of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia with the Soviet Union¹³.

At the same time, the process of the creation and functioning of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav military units had significant differences.

⁸ Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation (henceforth – TsAMO), f. 56, op. 12238, d. 65, l. 2.

⁹ Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (henceforth – RGASPI), f. 17, op. 125, d. 300, l. 82; *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii sovetsko-chechoslovatskikh otnoshenii* [Documents and materials on the history of Soviet-Czechoslovak relations] (henceforth – DMISChO), vol. 4, bk. 2 (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1983), 74.

¹⁰ TsAMO, f. 7, op. 30, d. 580, l. 53; M.I. Semiryaga, “Formirovanie inostrannykh voinskikh chastey,” 54; Milan Pojić, *Hrvatska pukovnija 369*, 83.

¹¹ TsAMO, f. 7, op. 30, d. 580, l. 63; M. Dzhilas, *Besedy so Stalinyim*, 48; Josef Kalvoda, *Czechoslovakia’s Role in Soviet Strategy* (Washington (DC): University Press of America, 1978), 126.

¹² I.I. Shinkarev, “Rol’ Sovetskogo Soiuza v sozdanii vooruzhennykh sil stran Vostochnoy i Yugo-Vostochnoy Evropy v gody Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny [The Role of the Soviet Union in the Creation of the Armed Forces of Eastern and Southeastern Europe During the Great Patriotic War],” 115, 136. PhD diss., Military-Political Order of Lenin Red Banner Academy named after V. I. Lenin.

¹³ DMISChO, vol. 4, bk. 1, p. 177; V. Sipols, *Velikaia Pobeda i diplomatia. 1941–1945* [The Great Victory and Diplomacy. 1941–1945 (Moscow: Novina Publ., 2000), 224; A.Yu. Timofeev, *Russkii faktor: Vtoraia mirovaia voina v Jugoslavii, 1941–1945* [The Russian Factor: World War II in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945] (Moscow: Veche Publ., 2010), 405.

Legal foundations for creating military units

The relations between the USSR and the emigree government of Czechoslovakia were very close and productive, and in this process both the Soviet and Czechoslovak sides showed a propensity for reasonable compromise¹⁴. On July 18, 1941, the USSR and Czechoslovakia signed an agreement on mutual assistance in the war. On September 7, 1941, the parties signed the “Military Agreement,” according to which the Czechoslovak units created in the USSR were intended “to jointly fight with the troops of the USSR and other allied powers against Germany.” The “Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Post-War Cooperation” concluded on December 12, 1943 became an additional basis for the creation and functioning of the Czechoslovak military unit¹⁵.

After the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War, the Soviet Union made an attempt to get closer to the emigree government of Yugoslavia, but it did not happen through the fault of the Yugoslav side. Nor was there any cooperation on the issue of creating the Yugoslav military unit¹⁶. The emigree government refused to participate in this endeavor, stating that “Yugoslav prisoners of war violated their oath and entered the service of the Germans.”¹⁷ From the second half of 1942, the relations between the USSR and the Yugoslav government steadily deteriorated and were eventually frozen¹⁸.

As a result, the leadership of the USSR made the decision to create the Yugoslav military unit without any agreements with the emigree government¹⁹ using as a legal basis only the “petition of prisoners of war of the German, Italian and Hungarian armies of Yugoslav nationalities” received in October 1943. (It is significant that in their appeal to the Soviet leadership, the prisoners of war asked to ignore the attitude of the emigree government towards the national liberation movement in Yugoslavia)²⁰. Croatian historian M. Pojić believes that the significance of the statement of the prisoners of war “should be treated with caution,” because the creation of foreign troops was already part of the USSR policy²¹. In our opinion, on the contrary, in the current conditions of the “legal vacuum,” the expression of the will of the prisoners of war had the critical legal significance.

Moral and political characteristics of personnel

The core of the personnel of the Czechoslovak military unit included soldiers of the Czechoslovak army who got to the Soviet Union from Poland in September 1939, refugees from Transcarpathia occupied by Hungary²², the USSR citizens of “Czechoslovak nationality” (primarily Volyn Czechs), as well as prisoners of war²³, some of them voluntarily took sides with the Soviet Union²⁴ or did not fight against the Red Army at all (workers of the Todt military construction organization)²⁵. The sentiments of the bulk of

¹⁴ S.N. Kartavy, “Sozdanie v SSSR inostrannykh voennykh formirovaniy,” 70.

¹⁵ *Kyjev – Dukla – Praha* (Praha: Naše vojsko, 1975), 49.

¹⁶ M.I. Semiryaga, “Formirovanie inostrannykh voinskih chastey,” 69; Iliya Kukobat, *Sovjetski uticaji na jugoslovensko vazduhoplovstvo, 1941–1949: Između saradnje i suprotstavljanja* [Soviet Influences on the Yugoslav Air Force, 1941–1949: Between Cooperation and Opposition] (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju Publ., 2020), 40.

¹⁷ S.N. Kartavy, “Sozdanie v SSSR inostrannykh voennykh formirovaniy,” 78.

¹⁸ A. Yu. Timofeev, *Russkii factor*, 234–235, 238, 241, 254–256.

¹⁹ S.N. Kartavy, “Sozdanie v SSSR inostrannykh voennykh formirovaniy,” 78.

²⁰ TsAMO, f. 19, op. 11539, d. 46, l. 27–27 ob, 73.

²¹ Milan Pojić, *Hrvatska pukovnija 369*, 82.

²² *Za svobodu Československa*, 117.

²³ V.V. Mar’ina, *Sovetskii Soiuz i chekho-slovackii vopros*, 90.

²⁴ DMISChO, vol. 4, bk. 1, p. 390; Zarozhdenie narodnykh armii stran-uchastnits Varshavskogo Dogovora, 1941–1949 gg. [The emergence of the people’s armies of the countries participating in the Warsaw Pact, 1941–1949] (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1975), 30.

²⁵ RGASPI, f. 644, op. 1, d. 184, l. 161–162.

the Czechoslovak soldiers who ended up in the USSR were “sound,”²⁶ and if there was discontent, it was often caused not by reluctance to fight, but, on the contrary, by dissatisfaction with the delay in sending to the front²⁷.

The overwhelming majority of the soldiers of the Yugoslav battalion were former prisoners of war, including from the Croatian Legion as part of the Wehrmacht. Many of them shared the chauvinistic “Ustasha” ideology, went to the Eastern Front voluntarily and fought on the Soviet-German front in full force²⁸. According to the command and political commissars, the sentiments in the Yugoslav military unit created in the USSR were “unsound”²⁹; the political state of this unit was unstable³⁰, and the discipline of the former prisoners of war was poor³¹.

The moral and political characteristics of the commanders of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav military units also differed. L. Svoboda was a career officer in the Czechoslovak Army and never served in Hitler’s troops. He was a staunch supporter of Czechoslovakia’s participation in the war against Nazism. Svoboda had constructive and, to the necessary extent, trusting relationships with the representatives of the Soviet government. M. Mesić was a commander of the artillery division of the Croatian Legion (in January 1943, before surrendering, he took command of the entire legion), holder of Hitler’s Iron Cross³². His biography was so “dubious” that the Soviet propaganda had to conceal its details³³. The Soviet authorities could not trust him, and Mesić was appointed as commander of the Yugoslav unit created in the USSR only because of his popularity among the bulk of the military contingent of this unit.

Development of military units

The development of the Czechoslovak military unit was progressive throughout the war. In April 1943, the Czechoslovak battalion was reorganized into a brigade, and in April 1944 into an army corps. The number of the personnel of this military unit was increasing; the supply of weapons and equipment was improving; there were created types of troops – aviation, airborne and tank units. The Czechoslovak military unit achieved both stability and applicability. It received “baptism of fire” on the territory of the USSR in March 1943 and then from time to time took part in the hostilities: in November 1943 – January 1944, September – October 1944 and January – May 1945. From the political point of view, it was important that the Czechoslovak corps, together with the Red Army, entered the territory of Czechoslovakia and then participated in the liberation of the country. As it was planned by the leadership of the USSR, the corps

²⁶ Russian State Military Archive (henceforth – RGVA), f. 1п, op. 5а, d. 1, l. 39–42; V.V. Mar’ina, “Chekhoslovackiy legion v SSSR (1939–1941 gg.) [The Czechoslovak Legion in the USSR (1939–1941)],” *Voprosy istorii*, no. 2 (1998): 71.

²⁷ TsAMO, f. 56, op. 12238, d. 65, l. 1.

²⁸ O.V. Roman’ko, “Khorvatskie dobrovol’cheskie formirovaniia na sovetско-germanskом fronte (1941–1943) [Croatian Volunteer Formations on the Soviet-German Front (1941–1943)],” *Voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv*, no. 9 (2011): 77; Muromtseva, L.H. “Istoriia boevykh deistvii sovetskikh voisk protiv khorvatskikh formirovaniia na sovetско-germanskом fronte v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny (1941–1943 gg.) [The history of the fighting of Soviet troops against Croatian formations on the Soviet-German front during the Great Patriotic War (1941–1943)],” 281, 283. PhD Dissertation, Voronezh State Pedagogical University, 2021.

²⁹ Nikola B. Popović, *Jugoslovensko-sovjetski odnosi u drugom svetskom ratu (1941–1945)* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1988), 246.

³⁰ Branko Petranović, and Sava Dautović, *Jugoslovenska revoljucija i SSSR: 1941–1945* [The Yugoslav Revolution and the USSR: 1941–1945] (Beograd: Narodna knjiga Publ., 1988), 277–278.

³¹ Nikola B. Popović, *Jugoslovensko-sovjetski odnosi*, 244, 244.

³² Veselin Đuretić, *Saveznici i jugoslovenska ratna drama* [The Allies and the Yugoslav War Drama], bk. 2 (Beograd: Narodna knjiga Publ., 1985), 96, 198.

³³ See: *Krasnaia Zvezda*, January 8, 1944, p. 3; *Pravda*, February 16, 1944, p. 2.

became the basis of the army of the new Czechoslovakia³⁴, and in April 1945 its commander L. Svoboda was appointed as Minister of Defense of this country.

The Yugoslav military unit was also developing progressively while being on the territory of the USSR. In May 1944, the battalion created in November 1943 was re-organized into a brigade. From January to August 1944, the number of the personnel of the Yugoslav unit increased 2.5 times. The brigade received weapons and necessary equipment from the Soviet Union. It could really have become the basis of a new army of Yugoslavia, because the Soviet leadership – in many ways rightly – considered the Yugoslav people's liberation movement under the command of J.B. Tito as a loosely organized group of partisan detachments and sabotage groups³⁵. In the summer of 1944, when the 1st Yugoslav Brigade was completing its formation, the situation for Tito's army was serious. However, the new circumstances prevented the effectiveness of the Yugoslav brigade.

Emergence of new Yugoslav political force and “reformatting” of the Yugoslav brigade

The decision to create a Yugoslav military unit in the USSR almost coincided with the recognition by the Soviet Union of the National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia (NCLY) created at the end of November 1943 under the chairmanship of communist J.B. Tito as the “provisional government” of this country. However, the creation of the Yugoslav battalion initially took place only with the participation of the USSR.

The situation changed in April 1944, when the Yugoslav military mission led by Lieutenant General V. Terzić (in fact, the “embassy” of the NCLY) arrived in Moscow. The leadership of the NCLY headed for joining the Soviet camp, including the recognition of the Yugoslav unit created in the USSR as an independent military unit of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NLAY)³⁶. In return, the Soviet government which with regard to foreign policy made a bid for further cooperation with J.B. Tito “stepped aside” and virtually transferred complete political control over the Yugoslav military unit into the hands of the mission. The USSR left this unit without its political supervision and interference, although it continued its training and procurement.

Through the Yugoslav military mission, the NCLY immediately set a course towards eliminating the “bourgeois” foundations of the Yugoslav unit supported by the Soviet authorities. On May 4, 1944, in the battalion there were introduced the positions of political commissar of the unit³⁷ and commissars at the lower levels³⁸; there was created the party organization of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (prior to this, the communists had operated in the military unit unofficially). In late August 1944, communist officers loyal to J.B. Tito, including new political commissar J. Lončarević³⁹, were sent to the brigade “for reinforcement.” However, Tito’s attitude towards the command and personnel of the brigade was negative. In our opinion, the reason for this was not only the political distrust in the former “Ustasha,” but also the “jealousy” of the NLAY command towards the well-armed and equipped Yugoslav military unit created in the USSR.

The inspections conducted at the end of July 1944, before the departure of the 1st Yugoslav Brigade to the west, showed that its personnel were prepared to carry out

³⁴ TsAMO, f. 7, op. 30, d. 768, l. 3; Vol. 4, bk. 2 of DMISChO, 327, 361, 383–384; *Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina*, 405.

³⁵ RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d. 1371, l. 23, 34.

³⁶ I.I. Shinkarev, “Rol’ Sovetskogo Soiuza,” 137–138.

³⁷ Milan Pojić, *Hrvatska pukovnija 369*, 83, 85.

³⁸ TsAMO, f. 7, op. 30, d. 580, l. 29.

³⁹ Nikola B. Popović, *Jugoslovensko-sovjetski odnosi*, 245–246.

combat missions⁴⁰. In August 1944, in its appeal to the Soviet authorities, the brigade command officially confirmed the readiness of the Yugoslav soldiers to fight and asked them to send the brigade to the combat actions. However, it happened only after its arrival in Yugoslavia and its transfer to the NLAY on October 13, 1944. At the end of that month, the brigade was involved in the combat operations in the area of Čačak. Its offensive was successful⁴¹, but the brigade was unable to withstand the onslaught of the superior enemy forces⁴² with weak support from other units of the NLAY. Thus, despite all the “difficult moments” related to the political sentiments of its personnel, the brigade was ready to participate in the hostilities. It suffered heavy losses in the battles, and its missing soldiers accused by the NLAY command of “going over to the enemy’s side” accounted for only about 3% of the brigade’s personnel⁴³.

However, the NLAY command took advantage of the failures of the military operations near Čačak for its own purposes. On November 2, 1944, the brigade was sent to the rear and subjected to a radical “cleansing” and “reformatting”. On November 18, M. Mesić, chief of staff M. Prišlin and other officers from the former Croatian Legion were dismissed, and head of the intelligence service, Lieutenant N. Šabski was shot as a “Gestapo agent”⁴⁴. The Yugoslav command finally eliminated the “liberties” that distinguished the brigade from other units of the NLAY, and took away a significant part of the material resources given by the Soviet side⁴⁵.

Subsequently, after such harsh “reformatting”, the brigade fought with varying success for several months on the Syrmian Front, in Bosnia and Slavonia, but it was already a “different” military unit. By the end of the war, only about 20% of the fighters who were originally its part remained in the brigade. The rest died, were wounded or transferred to other units⁴⁶. As a result, the 1st Yugoslav Brigade never became the basis for the creation of a new army of Yugoslavia. In November 1945, most of its soldiers were demobilized, and the brigade virtually ceased to exist⁴⁷.

Failed attempts to “reformat” the Czechoslovak military unit

The Czechoslovak emigree government also sought to “reformat” the military unit created in the USSR in order to make it more loyal⁴⁸. President E. Beneš insisted on bringing officers from abroad to the Soviet Union⁴⁹ and tried to replace L. Svoboda with another commander. In May 1943, they almost succeeded, when J. Kratochvil, loyal to the London government, was appointed as the “commander of the Czechoslovak units in the USSR,”⁵⁰ and Svoboda remained the brigade commander. However, the plan to remove Svoboda failed. On the night of September 9–10, 1941, by the order of the Soviet command, Kratochvil accused of the failures of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps during the Carpatho-Dukla operation was removed from the post of the commander

⁴⁰ A. Antosjak, “Sovetsko-jugoslavskoe boevoe sotrudnichestvo v gody vtoroi mirovoi voyny [Soviet-Yugoslav Military Cooperation During World War II],” *Voenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal*, no. 5 (1978): 75.

⁴¹ Milan Pojić, *Hrvatska pukovnija 369*, 88, 90.

⁴² S. Vrgovich, *Partizanskimi tropami* [By Partisan Paths] (Moscow: Voenizdat Publ., 1977), 138.

⁴³ Calculated by: *Popović, Nikola B. Jugoslovensko-sovjetski odnosi... S. 243; Pojić, Milan. Hrvatska pukovnija 369... S. 90.*

⁴⁴ Milan Pojić, *Hrvatska pukovnija 369*, 84, 90, 92; Mesić was first left “at disposal” and then dismissed from the army. After 1948, he was persecuted not only for his “Nazi past”, but also for possible connections with the Soviet intelligence services, then became disabled as a result of an accident, and died in 1982.

⁴⁵ A.Yu. Timofeev, *Russkii faktor*, 347–348.

⁴⁶ S. Vrgovich, *Partizanskimi tropami*, 139.

⁴⁷ Milan Pojić, *Hrvatska pukovnija 369*, 92.

⁴⁸ Vol. 1 of *Za svobodu Československa*, 111.

⁴⁹ Karel Richter, and Antonín Benčík, *Kdo byl Generál Píka: portrét čs. vojáka a diplomata* [Who was General Píka: Portrait of the Czech Republic’s Soldier and Diplomat] (Brno: Doplněk Publ., 1997), 172.

⁵⁰ I.I. Shinkarev, “Rol’ Sovetskogo Soiuza,” 102, 114.

and Svoboda was appointed in his place⁵¹. In addition, although a number of Czechoslovak officers arrived in the USSR from abroad, they did not take the leading posts in the military unit.

After the failed “reformatting,” the emigree government of Czechoslovakia continued trying to reduce the military-political significance of the unit created in the USSR. By the order of E. Beneš, in November 1944 General A. Hasal that arrived from London launched activities to create another, “alternative” army completely controlled by the emigree government, in the territory of Transcarpathia, which then belonged to Czechoslovakia. However, the Soviet side again demonstrated that only it played the main political role in the issue of creating Czechoslovak military units: the command of the 4th Ukrainian Front instructed Hasal to disband the units he had created, and send their personnel to the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps. Then the emigree government once again tried to create an “alternative” army in the liberated territory of Slovakia⁵², but the Soviet authorities again prevented it⁵³.

Conclusions

Thus, the analysis of the factors that influenced the fates of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps and the 1st Yugoslav Infantry Brigade created in the Soviet Union showed that in achieving the effectiveness of these units, a decisive role was played by their relationship with the main political participant in this process. It was on the will of this participant that both the achievement of the goals set during the creation of the foreign unit and its very existence depended. For the Czechoslovak corps, it was always the USSR, which did its best to ensure the stability and applicability of this unit, which was successfully achieved.

In April – May 1944, the 1st Yugoslav Brigade acquired a new main political participant (NCLY). Its jealous and generally negative attitude towards the brigade determined the impossibility of achieving the effectiveness of this military unit planned by the Soviet leadership. After the brigade entered the territory of Yugoslavia in October 1944, not only did its development stop, but also, thanks to the efforts of the NLAY command, it lost its original significance as a “model” unit intended to become the basis of the new Yugoslav army.

The impact of the above factor turned the fates of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav military units created in the USSR in different directions. Whereas the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps became a symbol of Czechoslovakia’s fight against Nazism (which is not denied by modern Czech historiography) and the basis of the new Czechoslovak Army, then the 1st Yugoslav Brigade was strictly “reformatted,” “dissolved” within the NLAY; it never became the basis of the new Yugoslav Army, and practically passed into oblivion.

The other factors only slightly influenced the achievement of the applicability and sustainability of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav military units created in the USSR, although they had a certain impact on various aspects of their creation and combat use. Among such factors were the legal framework (interstate agreements), belonging to the traditional army of the corresponding country, and the influence of other states (in this case, Great Britain).

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⁵¹ V.V. Mar’ina, “Chekhoslovatskie voinskie chasti,” 101.

⁵² Vol. 3 of *Za svobodu Československa*, 276, 284.

⁵³ Zdenko Maršalek, *‘Česká,’ nebo ‘československá’ armada? 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: Academia Publ., 2017), 339.

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