

# 1st Czech Armored Brigade

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Since the text of the reviewed book, which has been one of the primary sources for this small paper:

*1. československá Samostatná Tanková Brigáda v SSSR* , Milan Kopercký, 2001

is in Czech and therefore not immediately understandable, one must draw on other sources to get an impression of the Czechoslovak efforts in Russian service, among others:

*Red Death- Soviet Mountain, Naval, NKVD, and Allied Divisions and Brigades 1941 to 1945, Volume VII, in the series Soviet Order of Battle World War II, An Organizational History of the Major Combat Units of the Soviet Army, by Charles Sharp, Nafziger , 1995.*

The brigade was increased on 15 August 1944 and consisted of three armored battalions and one armored rifle battalion. The three armored battalions each had 21 T-34 tanks. A further 2 were included in the brigade staff.

The basis of the brigade was three armored battalions, which had previously been part of the 1st. Infantry Brigade and 2nd Airborne Brigade, as well as an independent armored battalion.

For its efforts in the battles in Czechoslovakia, on May 28, 1945, the brigade was awarded the Suvorov Order of the 2nd class - an order that could be given for well-planned and executed operations during which numerically inferior forces added a defeat!

Although there may of course also have been political reasons why the brigade received this order, the present book gives the impression that the order was well deserved!

## Equipment

The pictures in the Czech book give a good impression of the brigade's equipment - Russian tanks combined with Lend-Lease equipment of various kinds. Other equipment and material is of the Russian model.

Overviews and diagrams give an impression of the composition of the units as well as vehicle markings, including the tank's mutual numbering.

The color illustrations are drawings of various tank types that served in the brigade, as well as examples of German armored vehicles that the brigade encountered in battle.

It is not uncommon to see drawings and models showing Czechoslovak vehicles in Russian service. Often they are decorated with a nationality marking like this:

**Eksempel:**



Judging from the image material, it suggests that it was only for parades and the like that the units

painted the nationality insignia on the side of their tanks. In battle they apparently settled for the more neutral numbers. In this way, it was not revealed from kilometers away which units the enemy was facing.



The photo, found in several books, shows T-34-85 tanks of the 1st Czechoslovak Panzer Brigade during the push into Prague, May 1945.

(I found this picture "somewhere on the net".)

The picture is not reproduced in the reviewed book, but there are several others from the same event.

On the two front tanks you can see the nationality marking, immediately to the right of the number on the side of the turret.

## Uniforming



*Staff captain, 1st  
Czechoslovak Army Corps,  
1944.*

The uniform generally followed Russian systems, with some very special additions of Czechoslovak invention.

The officers' uniforms typically had open lapels and the crew did not wear the traditional Russian uniform blouse, but rather a uniform jacket of a more traditional cut.

The pictures in the reviewed book nicely support the impression of the somewhat different uniform.

The drawing comes from the Czech Army website, which once contained a series of uniform drawings. The drawing is also found in a booklet published by the Czech Ministry of Defense in 1994:

*NAŠI VOJÁCI v žerných, Mimisterstvo obrany ěR - 1994, ISBN 80-85469-69-3* (Thanks to Niels Blangsted-Jensen, who got me this booklet.)

The captain in the service uniform shown (presumably) does not look particularly Russian, one must say.

Among other things, the booklet also contains a picture of the brigade's banner, which is now in the Military Museum in Prague.

## **Postscript**

From another source:

*On All Fronts - Czechoslovaks in World War II - Part III, Lewis M. White (editor), East European Monographs - Columbia University Press, Boulder, New York 2000.*

(Thanks to Peter Gjørtler for borrowing the book and to Lexnet for the bibliographic information.)

it appears that among the members of the officer corps in particular, there were many political disagreements. On the one hand, officers who were communists or sympathized with them, and on the other, nationalists whose motive was the restoration of Czechoslovakia. The first group was in the salve and many accounts were settled after the end of the war, when many of the nationalist officers were purged.

Furthermore, the information surprising to me that there was a certain exchange of officers between the Czechoslovak units in English service (The Czechoslovak Independent Armored Brigade - those interested are advised to look more closely at what is hidden behind this address: <http://www.geocities.com/regimentwest/HistoryENG.html>) and the units in Russia. Several examples are mentioned of the units in Russian service receiving officers trained according to English standards - it took some time before they were fully "acclimatized".

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