

Slovak mobile devices in Russia

Introduction

Slovak units participated in Operation Barbarossa almost from the start of the campaign. In Slovakia, mobilization began on the morning of 22 June 1941. At the same time, the Minister of Defense gave the order to form a mobile group. This was ready already the same evening and moved into Russia on 25 June.

The group then consisted of the following:

- A reconnaissance battalion with two companies
- A tank battalion with two tank companies and two anti-tank companies
- A motorized infantry battalion with four companies
- A motorized artillery division with two batteries



The equipment of the Slovak army was derived, not surprisingly, from the old Czechoslovak army. This meant that the equipment, especially cannons and light small arms, was of quite excellent quality. Tanks and anti-tank guns, on the other hand, were nothing to shout about. The tanks were from Skoda (Panzer 35 & 38), armed with 37mm guns and the anti-tank guns were 37mm guns from the same company.

The mobile group crossed the San River and came under the command of the German 17th Army Corps. The group quickly engages Russian forces at Wojtkowa and has to retreat. On June 27, the Slovaks attack Russian positions at Sanok. It must be noted here that 37 mm guns are not particularly effective against concrete bunkers, with the accompanying infantry, knocking down the Russian positions.

The group loses a single tank here. After this, they move further east and in the first week of July the mobile group reaches Sambor.

In the meantime, the Slovak field corps has been increased and begins to slowly advance into Russia. The corps consists of two infantry divisions, two artillery regiments and various support troops. Since the advance takes place on foot and the corps at the same time started later than the mobile group, it is far behind.

On July 4, the group will be renamed the Mobile Brigade. It takes over the majority of the mobile units from the field corps. On July 8, the brigade consists of the following:

- A reconnaissance battalion with three companies (primarily on bicycle)
- A motorized infantry battalion with four companies
- A tank regiment with three tank companies and three anti-tank companies
- An artillery regiment with three divisions
- An engineer and an anti-aircraft company.

It is also here that they get their first mortars, 2 pcs. medium weight mortars.



On 9 July the advance continues to the east and on 21 July the town of Lipovec is approached. German intelligence reports that the majority of two Russian infantry regiments are in and around the city. The defense of the city is led by General Tkacenko, who is the commander of the 44th Siberian Mountain Division. He has two completely fresh infantry regiments and two somewhat worn regiments to defend the area.

The attack is launched early in the morning by the reconnaissance battalion. You quickly come across Russian units. These manage to keep the Slovak infantry at bay, but when tanks are deployed they break through. This is due, among other things, to the Russian lack of armor protection.

By midday, the front Russian lines are taken and they are ready for an attack on the city itself.

The tanks begin the attack, followed by the motorized infantry and anti-tank, who use the road into the city. This quickly comes under fire from Russian artillery, which destroys quite a few trucks.

A part of the city, including the railway station, is occupied during the evening. At that point, the Russians deploy an infantry regiment in a counterattack on the brigade's right flank. This attack ends up splitting the brigade into two parts and is stopped when two German infantry companies from the 97th Infantry Division are deployed.



During the evening, the brigade withdraws from Lipovec and has to leave behind five destroyed tanks, an armored car and quite a few trucks. Seven tanks and two armored vehicles were badly damaged.

There were enough spare parts to repair most of the tanks, but the personnel managed to pretend that this was not the case and all the tanks were sent back to Slovakia.

The attitude was that the tanks could be used better in Slovakia during an uprising against Germany than in Russia.

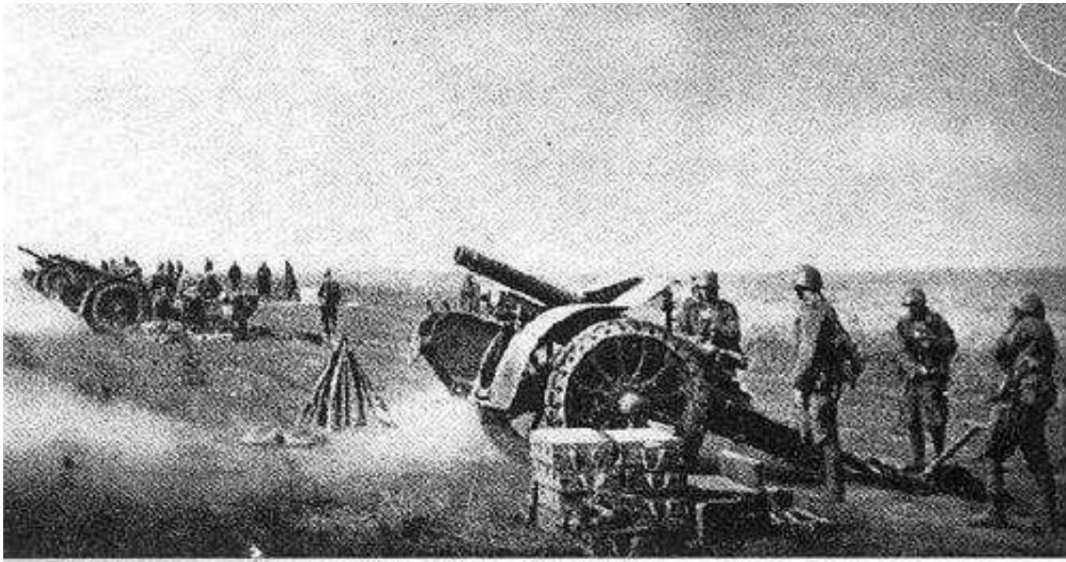
The rest of the brigade was placed under the German 295th Infantry Division, but morale must have been low after Lipovec. At least Colonel Turanec (newly appointed commander) writes the following about the infantry: *"The personnel are generally cowards; as soon as the Russian artillery starts firing, they run back. The officers are in the rear during attacks and in the front during retreats."*

At the beginning of August, the Slovak forces are reorganized. The mobile brigade becomes a mobile division and the Field Corps becomes a security division. The surplus personnel (35,000 men) are sent home, in time to participate in the harvest.

The division now consists of:

- Two motorized infantry regiments
- And the artillery regiment
- A reconnaissance battalion
- An engineer battalion
- Various support troops

After three weeks of training and reorganization, the division continues eastward and on September 14 it reaches the Dnieper River, at Kremenchug. Here it goes into position and repels a Russian attempt to cross the river.



At the end of September the advance continues and at the beginning of November the division is late to the Sea of Azov, between Mariupol and Taganrog. Here, the division acquires a fishing cutter, which, duly equipped with the Slovak flag, is used for patrolling along the coast.

At the end of November, most of the division is moved to defensive positions on the Mius River. The division resists all Russian attacks on this position and remains in these positions for 7½ months.

At the end of July 1942, the division takes part in the attack on Rostov and is the first unit to cross the Don River. In September, the division takes up positions south of Krasnodar and remains in these positions.

The division gets a new commander - Colonel Jurech. He is a strong opponent of the regime in Slovakia and plans to let the entire division go over to the Russians. The transition was planned for execution on January 28, 1943.

Due to the German retreat after Stalingrad, it will not come to fruition.

The division is evacuated to the Crimea, but loses a very large part of its heavy equipment. It has e.g. only seven guns left.



The division participates in the coastal defense of the Crimea, around Perekop. On 1 August, the division is renamed the 1st Infantry Division. This has no practical effect on the unit as it has already lost the bulk of its vehicles.

The division is evacuated to Romania and transformed into the 1st Technical Division. For the rest of the war, the division builds positions etc. - primarily in Hungary. In September 1944, it is disarmed and at the end of the war it goes into Russian captivity.

General information about the Slovak forces

At the start of the war, the Slovak army had plenty of material and generally of good quality. As in many other armies, there was a shortage of trucks. The staff, however, was another matter. There was a great shortage of officers and commanders. These two groups in the old Czechoslovak army were primarily occupied by people from the Czech part of the country and they were no longer available.

In general, the mobile brigade/division did a good job in Russia. Its efforts are of course affected by the lack of officers. At the same time, some of the officers were strongly anti-German and this, combined with the fact that they had no outstanding relations with Russia, naturally affected the effort. This is also reflected in the attempt to arrange the division's transition to the Russian side. Later in the war, the Russians set up a Czechoslovak parachute brigade. It consists primarily of Slovaks and is deployed in the uprising that takes place in Slovakia in the autumn of 1944.



Morale drops sharply during the winter/spring of 1942 and it all finally ends with the unit's disarmament in 1944.

The Slovaks had great problems in supplying their troops in Russia and for a time the mobile division's artillery is replaced with German guns, which are easier to supply. It happens, of course, that when the Germans themselves lack cannons, they take them again, which has hardly raised morale.

During the war, the Slovaks replace the personnel in the units as their term of service expires.

There were probably quite a few German and Russian soldiers who would have liked to have had the opportunity.