

## CZECHOSLOVAK MILITARY IN THE BATTLE OF SOKOLOVO (8—12 MARCH 1943)

*Erich Kulka*

On 21 June 1941 Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. Under an agreement between the Soviet government and the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, a battalion of volunteers, under the command of Ludvík Svoboda, was thereupon formed from Czechoslovaks living in the Soviet Union, a high percentage of whom were Jews.

Their training lasted seven months and, due to the lack of weapons, was extremely primitive. On 31 January 1943 the battalion received its operational orders. Exhausted by its long marches and inadequate provisions, the army was expected, right after its arrival in Sokolovo, to prevent a breakthrough by German tanks, but the shortage of ammunition kept it from holding the village. A counterattack the following night aimed at recapturing Sokolovo only compounded the disaster. The order to retreat came on March 13.

By awarding decorations the Moscow leadership and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia did their utmost to present the Sokolovo defeat as a victory.

The Jewish participation which made the formation of this combat unit possible in the first place has not been acknowledged to this day.