



SLOVAK NATIONAL UPRISING

1944

 **MINISTRY**
OF FOREIGN
AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Múzeum
Slovenského
Národného
Povstania

MUSEUM OF SLOVAK NATIONAL UPRISING

GOOD IDEA SLOVAKIA

The armed struggle of the Slovaks and national minorities living in Slovakia against Nazism was also a fight for the Slovaks' own national existence in the face of probable liquidation by the Nazis.

The growing national self-consciousness of the Slovaks manifested itself in the Uprising, sparked by their decision to end their vassal dependency on Nazi Germany.

They thereby proved both to themselves and to the democratic world at large that they had a distinct national existence.

This manifested itself in true patriotism and in a display of solidarity with anti-fascists from other European nations.

Division of Czechoslovakia

Following the annexation of Austria, interests of Nazi Germany turned against the last bastion of democracy in Central Europe – Czechoslovakia. On September 29, 1938, Germany, Italy, France and Great Britain ordered the Czechoslovak government to cede the Sudetenland to Germany in accordance with the Munich Agreement. Following the signing of the Vienna Arbitration on November 2, 1938, Germany and Italy permitted Hungary and Poland to take possession of Czechoslovak territory. On March 14, 1939, the Slovak State was declared, in effect dividing Czechoslovakia. On March 15, 1939, Nazis occupied Bohemia and Moravia and declared the founding of the Protectorate.

On July 21, 1939, the Constitution of the Slovak Republic was adopted. It was a corporatist constitution like those in fascist Italy and Portugal. Economic and foreign policy was subordinated to the interests of Nazi Germany. On October 26, 1939, a Catholic priest named Jozef Tiso, chairman of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, became president and head of state. The leading role of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party was embodied in law.



Division of Czechoslovakia



Concluding the Munich Agreement



Jozef Tiso visiting Adolf Hitler in Berlin on March 13, 1939

In addition to this Slovak political party, there were also a couple of ethnic minority parties – Deutsche Partei (Franz Karmazin) and Szlovenszkoi Magyar Párt (János Esterházy).

The Slovak Republic fought alongside Nazi Germany in the war against Poland on September 1, 1939, against the USSR on June 22, 1941 and declared war against the USA and Great Britain in December 1941.

*Declaration of the Slovak State
in Bratislava. March 14, 1939*





Political power was concentrated in the hands of pro-Nazi Hlinka's Slovak People's Party representatives – Vojtech Tuka and Alexander Mach



On completion of negotiations in Salzburg on July 27 and 28, 1940, Nazi policy began to be incorporated into the political system in Slovakia

Political emigrants found asylum in Paris and, after the defeat of France, in London. Former Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš was the leader of the London emigrant community. The Slovak Communists were represented in the London-based resistance by Vladimír Clementis. The Czechoslovak Communists in Moscow, led by Klement Gottwald, formed the other centre of resistance abroad. Following the German attack on the USSR, the Soviets acknowledged the Czechoslovak government-in-exile in London and broke off diplomatic relations with the Slovak Republic. The British government followed suit. On December 12, 1943, E. Beneš signed a Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Post-War Cooperation with the Soviet Union.

British Prime Minister Churchill inspecting the Czechoslovak unit, accompanied by E. Beneš and Brigade Commander General B. Neumann-Miroslav



Former political party members (mainly Social Democrats, Agrarians, Nationalists and National Socialists), members of civic resistance groups (Obrana národa, Flóra, Justícia, Victoire and Demec), the church, and the illegal Communist Party had fought since 1939 against the new conditions in Slovakia and against Nazi policy.

Those representing civil democracy and members of the Illegal Fifth Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia created an underground Slovak National Council in December 1943. The founding agreement and the first programme document – the Christmas Agreement, which demanded the restoration of the Czechoslovak Republic and the equal status of Slovakia within it, were signed by J. Ursíny, J. Lettrich and M. Josko on behalf of the civic bloc and K. Šmidke, G. Husák and L. Novomeský on behalf of the Communists in Bratislava. Social Democrats I. Horváth and J. Šoltés and representatives of other civic groups (P. Zaťko, J. Styk) made up the rest of the underground Slovak National Council in January 1944.



Czechoslovak National Committee (ČSNV) in Paris, the first resistance organization abroad. From the left: J. Šrámek, H. Ripka, General R. Viest, General S. Ingr, Š. Osuský, J. Slávik and E. Outrata

The Slovak National Uprising occurred partly as a consequence of the decision taken by Josef Tiso, President of the Slovak Republic, to concede to the German occupation of Slovakia on August 28, 1944 – the Uprising began the following day. It was also the result of long months of preparation, and the political ambitions of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile in Great Britain, the Czechoslovak Communists in Moscow, sections of the Slovak army becoming an insurgent force, and the work of the pro-democracy and Communist resistance. The Uprising began as General Staff Lieutenant Colonel J. Golian, the military commander of the insurgent Slovak army ordered Slovak troops to resist the German troops. The order with the code name: “Start the evacuation” came into effect at 8 pm that evening.



German occupation group SS Schill arrive in Nitra

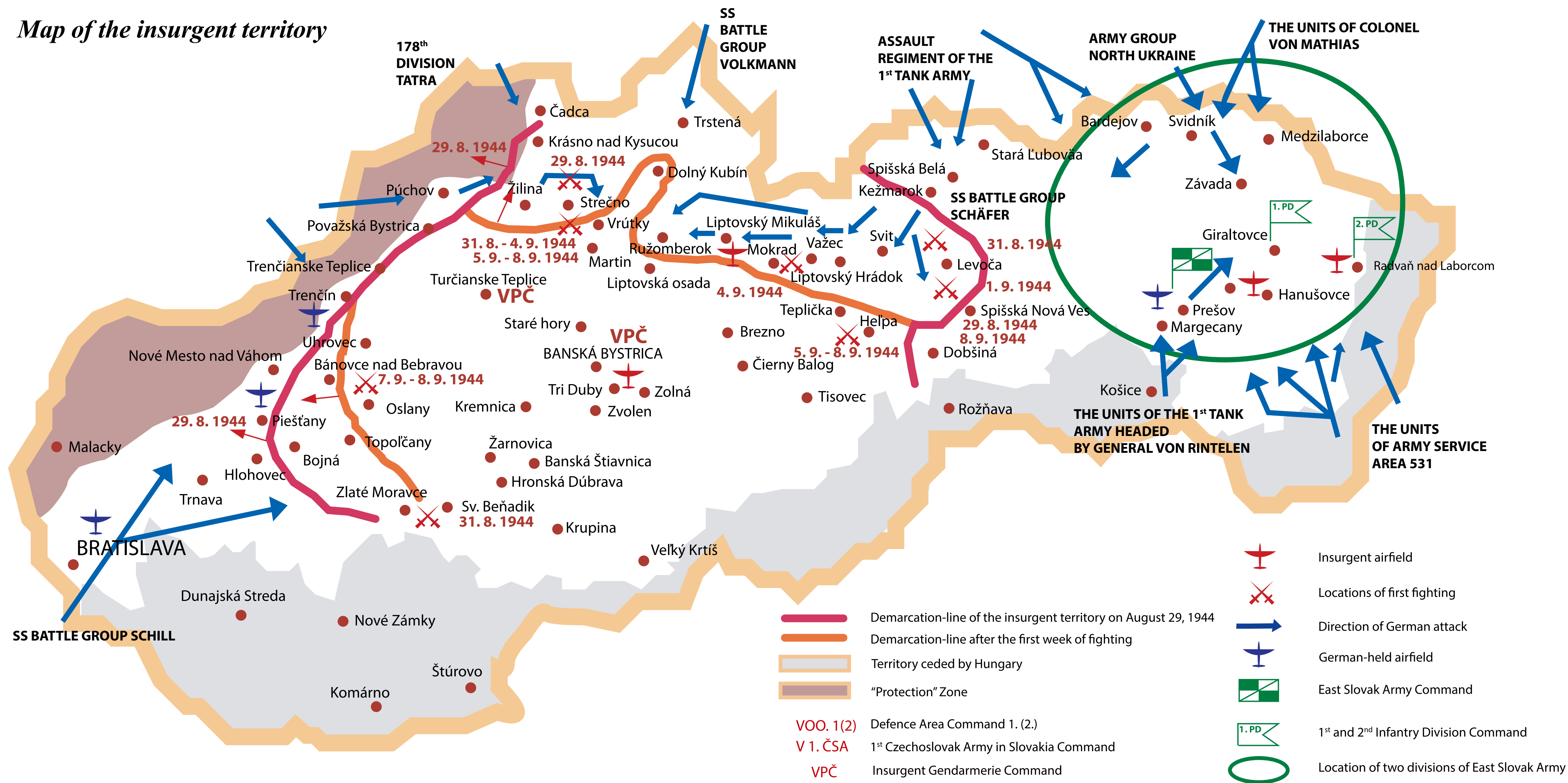
In response to Romania switching sides to join the anti-fascist Allied countries (on August 23, 1944), developments taking a turn for the worse on the Eastern front and increased pressure from the partisans, Nazi Germany decided to occupy Slovakia.

Banská Bystrica became the centre of the anti-Nazi uprising. The Slovak National Council and National Councils took power. Free Slovak Radio began broadcasting in Banská Bystrica. The insurgent army of around 60 000 men played a key role in defending the insurgent territory. The insurgent army fought alongside 18 000 partisans for 61 days against well-equipped German troops of over 48 000 soldiers with front-line experience. Disarmament of two East Slovak Divisions by the Germans before the outbreak of the Uprising, was a heavy loss.



Loading of weapons in Martin barracks

Map of the insurgent territory





*SS General Gottlob Berger
the first commander of the Nazi occupation forces
in Slovakia*



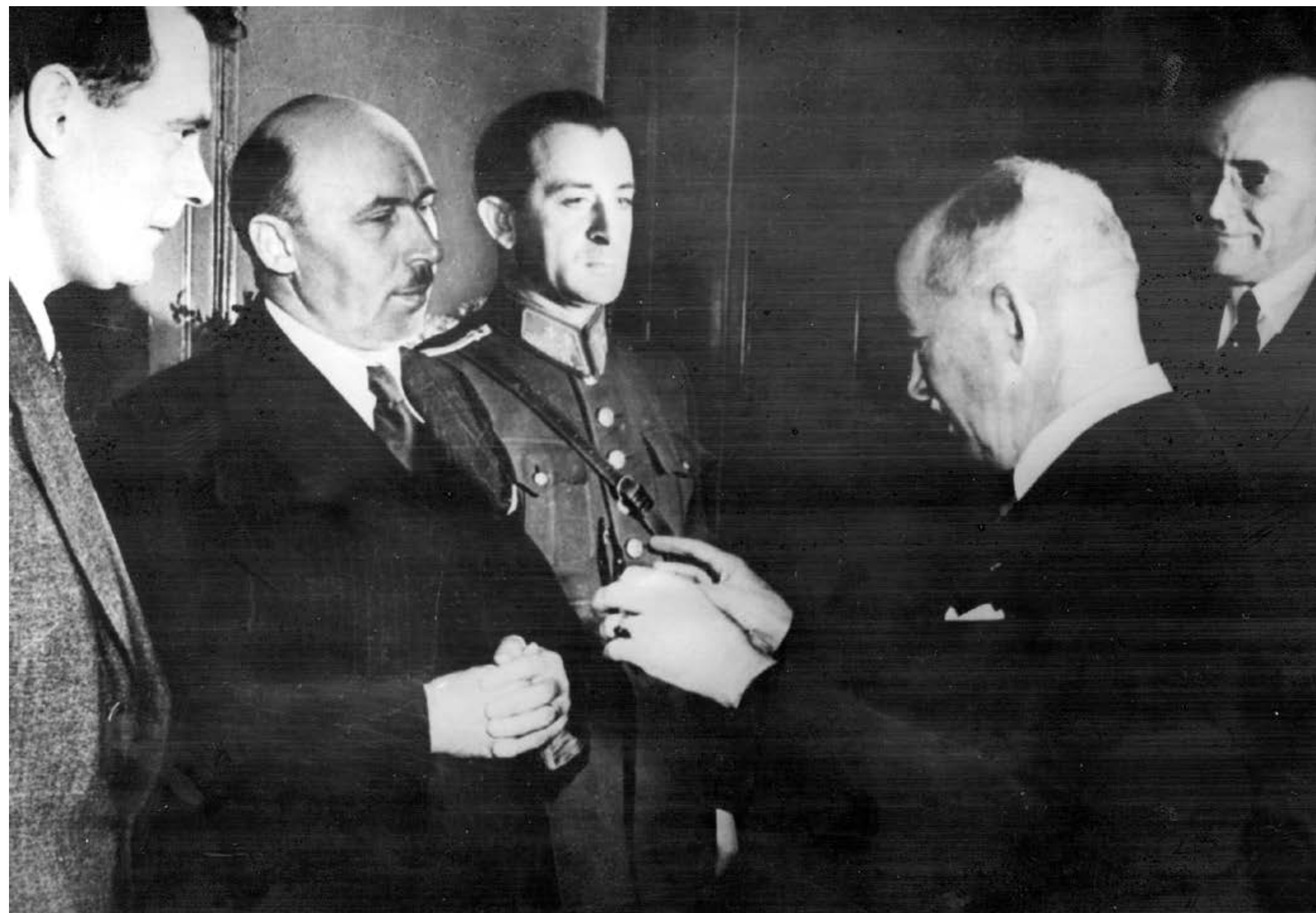
*General Staff Lieutenant Colonel
Ján Golian*



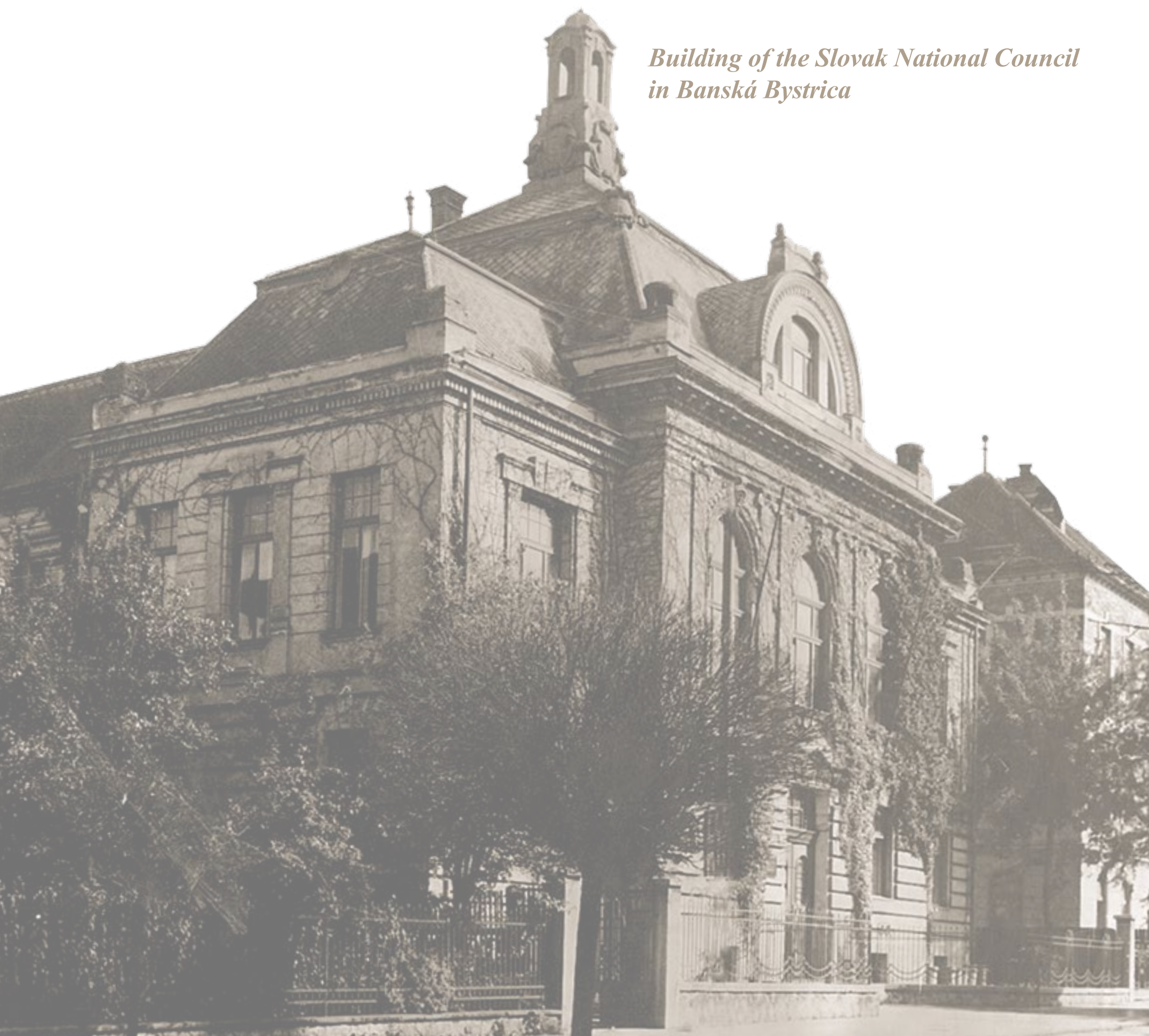
SS General Hermann Höfle

The Slovak National Uprising brought radical political, economic, and social change to those living in the liberated insurgent territory of Slovakia, an area measuring 20 000 km² and containing more than 30 districts and approximately 1 700 000 inhabitants. The Slovak National Council became the political power in the liberated zone and the supreme legislative, government and executive body. From September 1, till October 26, 1944, it issued 40 directives.

The Slovak National Council maintained executive authority in the liberated zone via the Revolutionary National Committees. These people's authorities and the administration oversaw life in the towns and villages in the liberated zone and organized civilian support for the insurgent fighters.



*Slovak National Council delegation visiting Eduard Beneš in London. He received the delegation on October 28, 1944.
From the left: Ladislav Novomeský, Ján Ursíny, Lieutenant Colonel Mirko Vesel, Dr. Eduard Beneš,
Jaromír Smutný – Chief of President's Office*



*Building of the Slovak National Council
in Banská Bystrica*



On October 7, 1944, a Slovak National Council delegation (Ladislav Novomeský, Ján Ursíny and Lieutenant Colonel Miroslav Vesel) left Tri Duby airfield to inform the President, the Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile and the Council of State about the political and military situation in Slovakia and the Slovak National Council's position on the political issues of the day



Vavro Šrobár – Chairman of the underground Slovak National Council



Gustáv Husák – Vice-chairman of the underground Slovak National Council, Provisional Minister of Interior and member of the Illegal Fifth Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia



Jozef Lettrich – member of the board of the underground Slovak National Council and Provisional Minister of Education and Culture

The main armed forces to defend the insurgent territory from August 29, 1944 onwards, was the Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia (from October 1, the 1st Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia). Together with the partisans, the insurgent army joined the Allied forces in the anti-Hitler coalition.

The Council for the Defence of Slovakia, the main operational and coordinating body of the Uprising, was established on September 12, 1944. Its primary task was to coordinate the advance of all the armed units (the 1st Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia, partisans, gendarmerie, financial guard and other armed units) and to organize the defence of insurgent territories.

The first phase in defending the insurgent territory lasted from August 29 till September 10, 1944. The insurgent military forces managed to secure the front despite losing large areas of territory. The Carpathian–Dukla operation run by the Red Army and the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps in the USSR greatly assisted in securing the front.



Lučatín, Military Roll Call before taking the oath, September 1944



Rationing ammunition in Liptovská Osada



Drilling through rock face



Insurgent LT-35 tank dug in near Hronská Dúbrava

The second phase in defending the insurgent territory lasted from September 10 till October 18, 1944. During this phase, the 1st Czechoslovak Fighter Regiment in the USSR and the 2nd Czechoslovak Paratroop Brigade in the USSR were incorporated into the 1st Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia. The Plesnivec and Kosatec units of the 2nd Tactical group made a successful counter-attack in the north-eastern and northern sections of the insurgent front in the Telgárt–Hranovnica and Malužiná–Kráľova Lehota areas. Units of the 6th Tactical Group took Liptovská Osada–Biely Potok and fought intensely in the Ostrô highlands. The enemy had the upper hand in the north-western section of the insurgent front, pushing the insurgents out of Turiec. The insurgents in the western section of the front retreated from the Handlová–Prievidza–Kremnica area and the Svätý Kríž nad Hronom area. Hungary remained neutral on the Uprising, and therefore southern sections of the insurgent defences saw no activity.



Commissioned officers in Lower Turiec discuss action plans. From the left: General J. Golian, Lieutenant Colonel J. Tlach, First Lieutenant of the Red Army P. A. Velichko, Lieutenant Colonel of Artillery E. Perko

The German Army began its general offensive against the insurgents during the third phase of the defence of the insurgent territory, from October 18 till the end of October 1944. The German Headquarters gradually amassed its military forces numbering approximately 48–50 000 experienced and well-armed soldiers. Hungary's unsuccessful attempt to exit the war under Regent M. Horthy's leadership on October 15, 1944, became grounds for Germany to launch its general offensive against the insurgent forces. Consequently the German occupation was able to create a base in Northern Hungary to launch an attack on the weakly defended and still inactive area south of the insurgent territory.



Armoured train – the Štefánik. Orders to start construction of the Štefánik armoured train had been issued by September 4, 1944. The trains were built in workshops belonging to the Slovak Railways in Zvolen. The first train was constructed in a record 14 days, the Hurban – the second armoured train – followed closely behind 11 days later. If we include a third train – the Masaryk – then the armoured trains were constructed in 5 weeks.

The Army

The 2nd Czechoslovak Paratroop Brigade fought hard in the Slovak National Uprising. It was engaged in many a battle en route from Jefremovo in the USSR to the insurgent territory in Slovakia, fighting in the successful Carpathian–Dukla Operation along the way. The deployment of the 2nd Czechoslovak Paratroop Brigade, due to begin on September 25, was delayed till October 19, 1944, owing to bad weather. Headquarters of the insurgents embattled the 2nd Czechoslovak Paratroop Brigade into the most vulnerable zones on the front.

Once the Slovak National Uprising had begun, a Combined Squadron was formed at Tri Duby airfield. Although the Combined Squadron used rather outdated aeroplanes, it supported the insurgent land operations and hampered the Luftwaffe air-raids. Combined Squadron members helped set up and maintain the Air Bridge of Soviet Long Range Aviation at Tri Duby airfield.

The 1st Czechoslovak Fighter Regiment in the USSR was the first Czechoslovak unit abroad to fly from the USSR to the insurgent territory in Slovakia. It engaged in battle on September 17, 1944, operating in the enemy's rear, first of all from Zolná airstrip, and later from Tri Duby airfield till October 25, 1944. The Army Corps in the USSR greatly assisted in securing the front.



From the left: L. Studničková, M. Petruňová and Moravcová – the female members of the 2nd Czechoslovak Paratroop Brigade



35 Luftwaffe aircraft carried out a devastating air-raid on Tri Duby airfield on September 10, 1944 at 4.45 pm. The Luftwaffe destroyed 17 of the Combined Squadron planes, causing 10 million Slovak crowns worth of damage. There were 20 dead, including 16 civilians – local villagers who had been working at the airfield prior to the bombing



Headquarters building at Tri Duby airfield following German bombing on September 10, 1944

With volunteers arriving at the end of August/beginning of September 1944, the number of partisans swelled to almost 18 000. On September 7, 1944, the Slovak National Council appointed K. Šmidke main commander of the partisan units in Slovakia. Two weeks later he became Commander of the Headquarters of Partisan Units in Slovakia.

The joint military actions carried out by insurgent soldiers, partisans, the gendarmerie and financial guard were coordinated by the Council for the Defence of Slovakia from September 12, 1944 onwards.



Partisans in the mountains

In terms of scope, military, national and international importance, the Slovak National Uprising was one of the greatest armed-political acts of the Slovak nation in its modern history. It was part of the wider resistance movement in Europe. The Slovak Uprising against Nazism was also a fight for the Slovaks' own national existence. The Slovak National Uprising provoked a great international reaction and became an important part of the European anti-fascist resistance during World War II. Thirty-three nations and nationalities from four continents were involved.



Major of the Red Army Ivan Ivanovich Skripka – Studensky, Chief of the Soviet Military Mission, sent out to Slovakia on September 5, 1944, with Brigadier General J. Golian, General Staff Major J. Tóth and Lieutenant Colonel M. Ferjenčík

International Participation in the Slovak National Uprising

Partisan units retreating to the mountains



French partisans put up a tough fight around Strečno



*Colonel of the Red Army
A. N. Asmlov, Deputy Commander of the
Headquarters of Partisan Units*



*Georges Barazer de Lannurien,
Commander of the French partisans
in Slovakia*



*Karol Šmidke, Commander
of the Headquarters
of Partisan Units*

Allied assistance

Soviet support for the Slovak National Uprising was legally formalised in the Czechoslovak and Soviet Agreement on Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Post-War Cooperation dated December 12, 1943. The Carpathian-Dukla Operation was the most important Soviet act in support of the Slovak National Uprising. The operation of the 1st and 4th Ukrainian Front lasted from September 8 till October 28, 1944. The Soviets also provided extensive air support to the Slovak National Uprising. All military and sanitary material was supplied via the Air Bridge. The Air Bridge was also used to fly in ground personnel of the 1st Czechoslovak Fighter Regiment, members of the 2nd Czechoslovak Paratroop Brigade and the operating Headquarters of the Corps of the Soviet Long Range Air Force, commanded by Colonel B. F. Chirskov.

During operations Manganese/Windproof, the British parachuted in a Czechoslovak intelligence and communication group near Veľké Uherce in Topoľčany district on June 10, 1944. On the night of September 18, 1944 to September 19, 1944, the crew of a Halifax BMk from the 148th RAF Squadron dropped containers holding radio and sanitary material in the Tri Duby area and also flew in a 4-member SOE group. The Amsterdam Group, consisting of Jewish volunteers, was also part of the SOE intelligence group.



*Commander of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps
General L. Svoboda*



Tri Duby airfield on October 7, 1944 – a group of Jewish volunteers

The US 15th Air Force provided military assistance during the Slovak National Uprising by transporting out US airmen shot down over Slovakia, particularly in Banská Bystrica, following the launch of the Uprising. In addition to military, communications and sanitary material, Western Allies also flew in a group of liaison and intelligence officers and OSS petty officers to Tri Duby airfield. The US Air Force (fighting on the same side as the insurgent armed forces) hit and destroyed large quantities of German military material and wagons at Vrútky railway station on September 13, 1944. The US Air Force bombing of the key Luftwaffe airbase at Malacky-Nový Dvor on September 20, 1944 was its greatest contribution in support of the Slovaks.



Unloaded military supplies flown to Tri Duby on 7 October 1944 aboard 6 American Fortress B-17 Gs

Life at the insurgent territory

Significant changes occurred in education, culture and training in the insurgent territory. The education system was nationalized, a Front Theatre was established, Free Slovak Radio began broadcasting and a military film company provided the News. Many Slovak writers, artists and musicians were involved in the Uprising.

The military and political authorities began publishing and delivering periodicals, leaflets and appeals within the insurgent territory. The most important of these was “Bojovník”, the bulletin of the 1st Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia. The National Committee of Banská Bystrica established an Information Agency.



Free Slovak Radio Transmitter

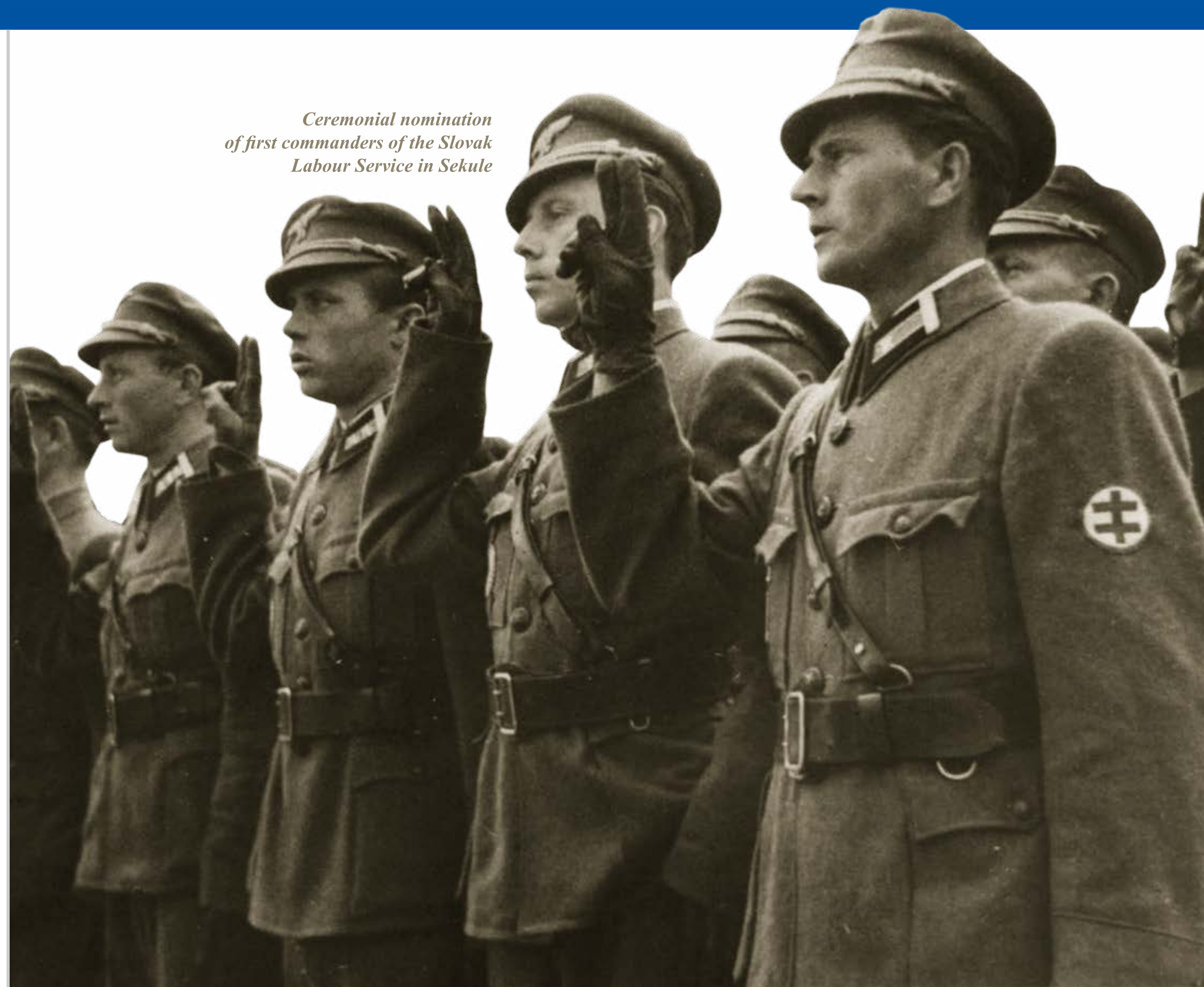


Members of the Front Theatre in Staré Hory Mountains

Hlinka Guard Flying Squads were established under Otomar Kubala's command on September 21, 1944. They underwent special training courses in Germany and Slovakia to prepare them for close cooperation with Nazi security services – SiPO, SD, DP, and FS. The Hlinka Guard had 37 flying squads and 6 troops in the field, comprising around 5000 guards on rotation, at the end of January 1945. They cooperated closely with the SS units in terrorist, intelligence and shock actions against the partisans, insurgent soldiers, civilians and racially persecuted. The Hlinka Guard Flying Squads also took part in the mass executions of the defenceless populations of Nemecká, Kremnička, Kováčová, Zvolen and many other places in Slovakia.

General Timotej Ištók, Supreme Commander of the gendarmerie, organized the remaining declassified gendarmerie, still faithful to the “Ľudák” regime once the Slovak National Uprising had begun, into three Flying Squads – in Bratislava, Banská Bystrica (from November 1944) and Trenčín. These cooperated with the Hlinka Guard Flying Squads and SiPo and SD German security services.

*Ceremonial nomination
of first commanders of the Slovak
Labour Service in Sekule*



Pro-regime military and repressive units

The Hlinka Youth also began organizing Flying Squads. Volunteers from Hlinka Youth Flying Squads attended special training courses. The intelligence and information service became their major task.

Minister of National Defence Š. Haščík focused on building up the Home Defence, the Slovak Republic war-time army, from September 1944 to April 1945.

It contained 41 533 men (29 139 in Slovakia and 12 394 abroad) including the Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiment, Air Force Regiment, permanent warning service, unarmed members of the Technical Corps and Labour Corps of the National Defence.

A paramilitary youth organization called the Slovak Labour Service was established on March 12, 1942 in accordance with Act No. 36. Young men, who were 18 years of age or less and had not yet joined the military, were called up to the Slovak Labour Service. Jews and those with criminal records were not called up. They joined the service for 3 to 6 months on average. The Slovak Labour Service became an important Home Defence reserve. In March 1945, its members numbered around 2 000.



Hlinka Guard Units on parade in Banská Bystrica

Nazi terror and the reprisals

The SIPO and SD Flying Squad Units led by SS Obersturmführer Jozef Witiska provide backup for German and Hungarian units occupying Slovakia. This Group contained 5 Flying Squads of approximately 500 men each. The repressive campaign it carried out in conjunction with pro-regime repressive units ended in the slaughter of 5 304 anti-fascists, racial persecuted individuals and innocent people, including children. They left behind 211 mass graves and more than 100 burnt out villages.



Chief of Hlinka Guard Flying Squads under Otomar Kubala (on the right)



From January 4 to January 11, 1945 members of EK 14 and Hlinka Guard Flying Squads executed and burned over 900 people in a lime kiln near the village of Nemecká

Nazi terror and the reprisals



Between November 20, 1944 and March 17, 1945, members of EK 14 assisted by Hlinka Guard Flying Squads executed 747 victims, including 211 women and 58 children near the village of Kremnička



Exhumation of victims murdered at the Jewish graveyard in Zvolen (128 victims, including 36 women and 6 children)

Defeat of the Uprising

48 000 Nazi soldiers from the Wehrmacht, Waffen SS and Volkssturm troops fought in the Slovak National Uprising. In spite of the initial self-confidence of the Nazi troops, the poorly armed insurgents resisted the enemy attack for almost two months (from August 29 till October 27, 1944). The German general offensive began on October 18, 1944.



Insurgent generals Ján Golian and Rudolf Viest were captured by Nazis and probably executed before the end of the War



Jozef Tiso decorating German soldiers for "bravery" in battle against the insurgents

Following the retreat of the insurgents into the mountains, around 20 000 partisans fought in 40 partisan units from the end of October 1944 till the end of March 1945. They carried out 169 subversive actions and hampered German troops on front line access paths and in the rear of retreating troops.



Civilians retreat alongside insurgent soldiers



The difficult march through Chabenec resulted in many victims

When the insurgents still controlled part of Central Slovakia, the units of the 1st and 4th Ukrainian Front together with units of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps crossed the Carpathian Mountains in the Dukla Pass region and entered Slovakia (East Carpathian Operation). The units formed a line running from the river Ondava to Vranov nad Topľou, central and southern Slánske hills and the river Hornád south of Košice. The south east of Slovakia, ceded to Hungary, was liberated at the end of 1944.

The battle for Slovakia continued in January 1945. The troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front and the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps advanced from the north east, the 4th Ukrainian Front from the east and the 2nd Ukrainian Front along with the Romanian army from the south east. Intense fighting occurred in the Veľká and Malá Fatra area and in Liptovský Mikuláš. The German army was pushed out of Bratislava on April 4, 1945, and thus most areas in Slovakia had been liberated. The border village of Makov was the last place to be liberated by the Red Army on May 3, 1945. The war in Slovakia had come to an end.



Red Army units advance in the south of Slovakia

August 29 is rightfully a public holiday in the Slovak Republic. The significance of the Slovak National Uprising lies in the fact that the Slovak nation took up arms against the occupation of its own historical lands and succeeded despite the uncertainty of the outcome. The Uprising was spontaneous. It had not even been officially declared when the soldiers garrisoned in Žilina rebelled against the enemy. Following mobilization, recruits flocked to join the insurgent army. The army, the partisans and the civil administration were all helped by people living at the insurgent territory. Breaking the yoke of cooperation with Nazi Germany was an inevitable historical step for the Slovak nation. We must be rightfully proud of all those who found the moral strength to join in the two-month-long heroic resistance against a more experienced and better-armed enemy. The victims of the Uprising should be revered and all those who participated deserve the respect of the people of the Slovak Republic.



The Museum of the Slovak National Uprising (SNU) in Banská Bystrica is a central, specialized, research institution operating nationwide. The museum contains a specialist archive. The collections contain more than 222 000 exhibits and archives. The Museum of the Slovak National Uprising was founded on May 8, 1955. Since 1969, it has been housed in the Memorial building of the SNU. Prof. Dušan Kuzma, CSc created the architectural design. The building consists of two concrete and steel sculptures, which hold the permanent exhibition entitled Slovakia in Europe's Anti-Fascist Resistance Movement in the Years 1939–1945.



Some of the toughest battles of the Slovak National Uprising took place in Strečno. Newly formed insurgent units, soldiers and partisans halted the advance of German units early on in the Uprising. It took several days for the German units to fight their way to Turiec. The defence of Strečno is one of the symbols of the military successes of the Uprising.



Kalište National Cultural Landmark was initially a charcoal settlement in the Baláže village area. It was the centre of the partisan movement – the Partisan Republic. The Smrť fašizmu and Pomstiteľ partisan brigades and Stalin partisan frontline unit were based here. Nazis attacked the village and murdered 13 inhabitants on March 18, 1945. They also murdered 15 Hungarian soldiers in nearby Moštenica. The village was not rebuilt after the war and it is a memorial to 102 villages burnt down in Slovakia between 1944 and 1945.



The Americans The Armenians The Australians
*The Austrians The Azerbaijanis **Nations** The Belgians The Belarusians*
*The British The Bulgarians **in the** The Croatians The Czechs*
*The Dutch The French **Slovak** The Georgians The Germans*
*The Greeks The Hungarians **National** The Italians The Jews*
*The Kazakhstanis The Kyrgyzstanis **Uprising** The Montenegrins The New Zealanders*
The Poles The Romanians The Russians The Serbs
The Slovenians The Spaniards The Tatars The Turkmen
The Ukrainians The Uzbeks

**MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AND EUROPEAN
AFFAIRS OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY**

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