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1968. A Retrospective Insight.

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**INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA — 1968  
A RETROSPECTIVE INSIGHT**

Published Under Authority of the  
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INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA-1968

A RETROSPECTIVE INSIGHT

1. The enclosed report is forwarded for your information and further use as appropriate. It is based on a recently produced Interview Report (ZSIW 102-2000-15-515/A, 1 Oct 85) which provided useful details concerning aspects of the subject Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia. Though dated, these personal observations provide an interesting view when compared to the recorded history of that operation.

2. Recipients are cautioned that this Report contains verbatim narrative from the Interview Report which may contain biased and/or exaggerated statements. Nevertheless, the general tone and content of the report can be taken as realistic and as accurate as memory will allow. Where considered appropriate, analyst comments are provided to add factual context to the personal remarks or introduce historical data drawn from published reports of the operations.

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THE SOVIET INVASION OF  
CZECHOSLOVAKIA - 1968

A RETROSPECTIVE INSIGHT

INTRODUCTION

1. (S) The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, though now a dated operation, is still often cited as a typical example of Soviet/Warsaw Pact military capabilities. Evidence derived from this operation is alternately used to support arguments for and against achievement of "norms" or operational criteria, and this action is frequently cited as an example of Warsaw Pact ability to implement operational plans against NATO.

2. (S) This report is based on the experiences of a Lithuanian seaman (employed with the fishing fleet) who jumped ship in Canada and was subsequently interviewed by Department of External Affairs staff. In 1968 he was called-up as a Soviet Army reservist and his unit took part in the invasion. His remarks, based on memory and tainted by disillusionment with the Soviet system, are repeated here verbatim, drawn from his Interview Report (ZSIW 102-2000-15-515/A, 1 Oct 85). Facts drawn from the published reports of the invasion are included to place his remarks in context and thus provide a unique insight into the day-to-day experience of a Soviet soldier in one unit involved in the operation. Whether typical of most units or not, these recollections provide useful evidence of some aspects of the Soviet system and relate closely to the historical record of the invasion.

BACKGROUND

3. (S) The invasion of Czechoslovakia was the culminating action in a series of manoeuvres carried out by the Soviet Politburo in its increasing attempts to reverse the rise of "political liberalization" in Czechoslovakia. As early as January 1968, political changes in Czechoslovakia were cause for serious concern in Moscow. This concern increased to military "sabre rattling" in early May. GSFG forces (at least) adopted an increased readiness status, and some divisions deployed to southern East Germany and Poland. A CPX/FTX was conducted near the Czech frontier, ostensibly as preparations for the planned Exercise SUMAVA in Czechoslovakia (late June), but probably also as a demonstration of Soviet resolve to employ military force if necessary.

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4. (S) The situation continued to deteriorate, but Exercise SUMAVA went ahead as planned between 20-23 Jun 68. For a time, it appeared that Soviet forces might not withdraw from Czechoslovakia after the exercise, but they eventually did (the last out by 3 Aug), although they remained in close proximity to the Czech frontier. By mid-Jul, the Czech government was issuing ultimatums to the Soviets and the Warsaw Pact, demanding sweeping political changes throughout the Pact. Clearly, Soviet "sabre rattling" had thus far failed to impress the Czech government. A third, and larger, military demonstration was conducted commencing 23 Jul 68. This final "warning" consisted of several elements and probably served multiple purposes:

- a. A CPX/FTX of 17 divisions (the ground invasion force) commenced 23 July and continued off-and-on until the invasion. This probably increased pressure on the Czech government as well as allowing fine-tuning of invasion plans.
- b. Exercise NEMAN, a rear service exercise 23 Jul-10 Aug. This enabled the creation of the necessary logistics support for the invasion, not only the supply network, but also mobilization of the reinforcing (second echelon) forces (eight divisions) to back-up the invasion as well as fill gaps opposite NATO created by invasion force deployments.
- c. A variety of Strategic Forces activities ensured maximum readiness in the event NATO should intervene in the Czech crisis, and also readied airborne troops and VTA resources which would play a crucial role in the operation.

5. (S) A series of political meetings between Czech, Soviet and Warsaw Pact leaders resulted in the issue of a joint communique on 4 Aug which "apparently" defused the crisis. In fact, it was probably at this point that Soviet leaders recognized that military intervention was irrevocable. On the night of 20 Aug the invasion was initiated, and by late on 22 Aug (less than 48 hours later) all of Czechoslovakia was under Soviet control.

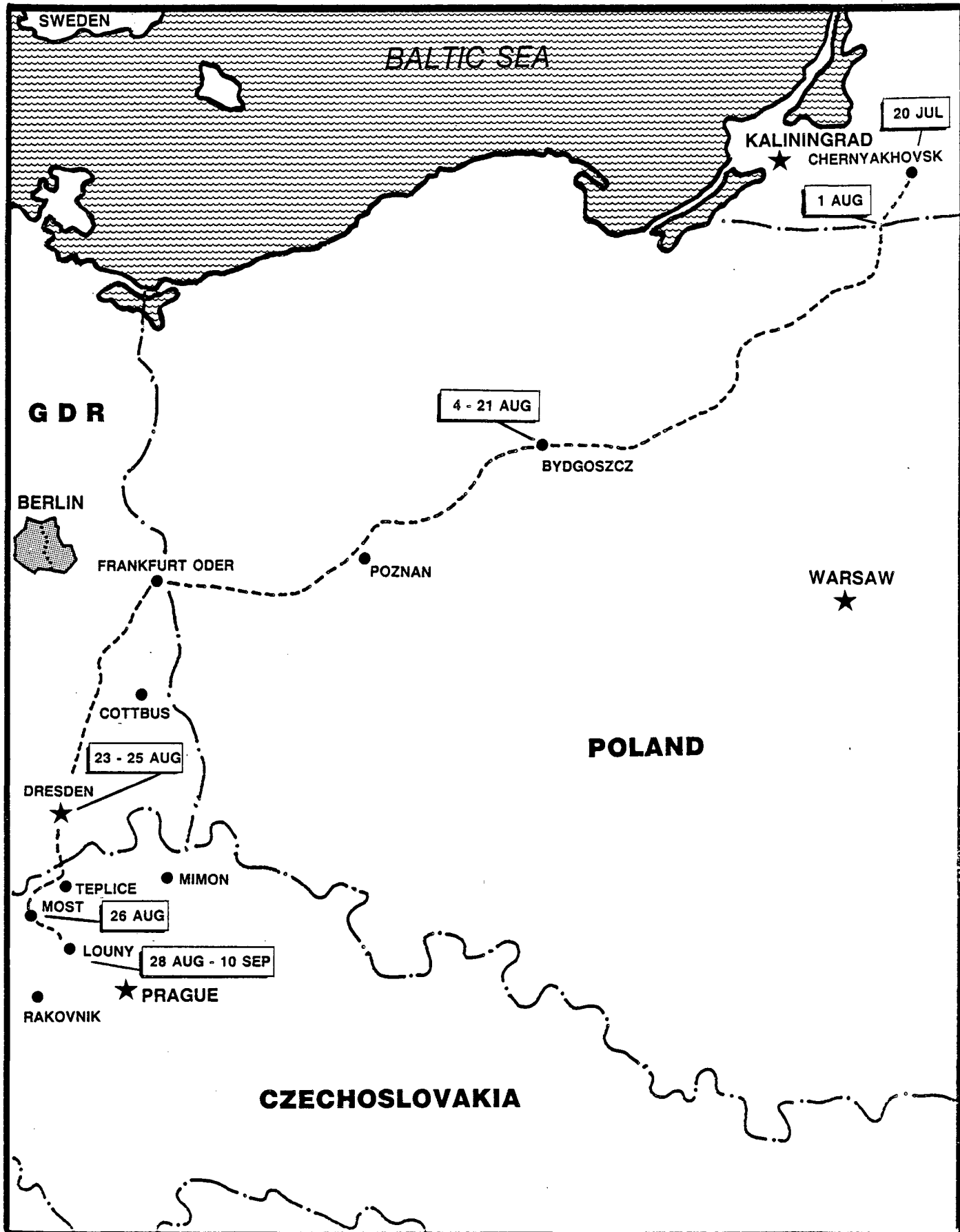
DETAIL

6. (S) Mobilization Phase. The interviewed subject was mobilized as part of Exercise NEMAN. His unit (the u/i Guards Motor Rifle Division Chernyakhovsk, Baltic MD) was one of five mobilized in late July in the Kaliningrad area. These five divisions, subordinated to 11 Guards Army, Kaliningrad, were mobilized and deployed into central Poland as part of the reinforcing echelon.

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CZECH INVASION — MOVEMENT OF U / I GMRD



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"Sometime around July 20, 1968, I left work some 15 minutes before the end of the working day. (I was working at the Chernyakhovsk/Kaliningrad Oblast/meat processing and packing factory). I had just reached home when the combine director's secretary came by with my call-up papers from the army. I was instructed to go to a certain military unit within the hour, because of a military alert. (It turned out that the director of the combine had been summoned to the military registration and enlistment office and had brought back the call-up papers for reservists working at this combine).

I was getting my things together when a soldier from "my" unit appeared with another notice, this one with a red band (the type that is issued when war is declared). Ten minutes later, a military trainee came by with a third notice. "It looks like something's up," I thought. I got my things together and said farewell to my family because I had no idea how long I would be away, where I was going and why I was going.

When I got to my unit they put me and some other "partisans" like me on an armoured troop carrier and drove us out of town to a small forest, where a supply point (punkt obespecheniya) had already been set up. Here I was given a gas-mask, weapon, uniform, etc. At age 32 I had become a full-fledged defender of the Motherland. All the locals, that is men from Chernyakhovsk and surrounding areas, continued to arrive late into the evening and into the night. They were dead drunk for the most part because they too had no idea how long they were going to be away and where they were going and, consequently, the majority of them had gotten well "greased" when they were saying their good-byes. "Partisans" from Lithuania and Latvia and from other regions of the Kaliningrad Oblast began to arrive the next day. Drivers from many collective farms and enterprises came in cars, taxis, milk-trucks.

The remanning and equipping of the division went on for a week. All the vehicles were camouflaged and issued military plates. We had a good laugh later over the fact that the milk-trucks had in this way become "shit-trucks". During this week, while the division was being brought up to strength, all the commissioned officers (shtatnye ofitseri) and the NCOs on extended service (sverkhsrochniki) frequently went home.

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They brought vodka back with them and held farewell drinking bouts because they, being in command, knew where we were going and why. Two men from the reconnaissance platoon got so plastered that they ran into a tree by the side of the road as they were returning from town. One of them was killed and the other was crippled for life."

7. (S) Several points are worthy of explanation. First, the general Soviet population was unaware of events in Czechoslovakia. At the time of mobilization, these reservists had no idea where or why they were going. Second, this reservist received three separate mobilization notices (one from the Voyenkomat via his employer, one from "his" division, and the third unidentified, but probably from the Voyenkomat direct to his residence). All three notices were received at his residence within (presumably) an hour. He was one of perhaps 25,000 reservists simultaneously mobilized in the Kaliningrad/Chernyakhovsk area. Some of the mobilization involved Autokolonny (personnel complete with military pattern vehicles employed in industry). Finally, within a week his unit (and apparently the other four divisions and army-level support units) was ready to deploy - note there is no mention of any individual or unit training during this mobilization phase.

8. (S) Deployment Phase. 11 Guards Army units left local assembly areas about 1 Aug, deploying to interim concentrations near BYDGOSZCZ (central Poland) by 11 Aug. Units followed various march routes utilizing unit transport and tank transporters over an average distance of 375 kms.

"One day around lunchtime, when everything was ready, the convoy set out for the city of Zheleznodorozhnyy and the Polish border. When the entire convoy closed up we would stop, or come to a halt, as they called it. Major Zabrodskiy, the battalion commander, walked along the entire convoy at one of these halts, carrying a guitar handle in his hand. He showed this handle to everyone, explaining that it used to make music but can't anymore. As we found out later, Zabrodskiy had gotten mad at a group of young soldiers who had been playing the guitar in one of the cars. He had smashed the guitar. Zabrodskiy had brought two cases of vodka, that's forty bottles, with him from home, and drank steadily throughout the entire trip until he had finished them all. At this same halt Zabrodskiy gave an order to one of the company commanders, who refused to carry it out. The drunken battalion commander didn't like this one bit. Things got so

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bad that the company commander drew his pistol crying, "I'll shoot!" (Officers kept their ammunition on them).

We crossed the Polish border sometime around 22:00. As we crossed through Poland, every Pole we met, from the youngest to the oldest, asked us, "Comrades, give us a smoke". At first, of course, the "comrades" would hand out entire packs of cigarettes, but then it turned out that they themselves had nothing to smoke because the supplies were so low. Things got so bad that they began to smoke grass.

The next day after lunch the battalion came to some lake in Poland, where we came to a halt in order to wash and rest up since we had been on the go non-stop without sleep. At this point Zabrodskiy decided to form up the battalion, in order to give us some valuable instructions. So he starts his speech completely, as I have said before, drunk out of his skull. It went something like this: "I don't know whether any of you bothered to bring a piece of earth from your native land with you or not, but I did". Here he reaches into his watch-pocket (piston), gets something out and shows it to us all. He goes on: "Great deeds await us. We will have to fight those bastards and destroy them". Of course, we guessed whom he had in mind, but since we were all afraid to talk to each other we all understood it in our own way and shut up. In this way Zabrodskiy and his instructions wasted about an hour of everyone's time.

Some men may have been able to rest for a few hours, but this turned out to be virtually impossible for the drivers, especially for those from the collective farms. They couldn't get any rest at all. This was because it was harvest time and the chairmen of the collective farms had provided their drivers with the most rickety vehicles in which to "defend the Motherland". After the campaign we had been through, these vehicles had really begun to fall apart. Instead of getting some shut-eye, these poor drivers had to repair their vehicles, replacing any broken parts. One driver from my own region was weeping bitter tears because he had had to drive without brakes for a long time and was completely exhausted."

9. (S) To this point, the unit has been moving for approximately 24 hours, apparently following Soviet norms

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for administrative moves, ie, short halts (30 mins) every 2-3 hours, longer halts (2-4 hrs) every 24 hours.

"After a few hours of "rest", we started on our way again, spending about a day passing through Poland. We made several brief halts in order to take on provisions. Finally we reached a forest, where we spent the night, and then we moved on again. At the end of that day we came to another forest, where we made camp. We stayed at this camp for almost a month. We had used our own vehicles to get to Poland, but our unit's tank battalion, indeed all the tank units, had been shipped in gondola cars by rail to the GDR, where they spent about a month defending the Motherland in some forest near Dresden. Later, we found out that during this month the "rear forces of the Warsaw Pact" had been involved in exercises on Polish territory."

10. (S) The u/i GMRD apparently conducted a road march of approximately 375 kms in about 60 hours, including halts. Their destination, the BYDGOSZCZ area, was obviously an interim position, as their armour had been transported direct to DRESDEN, GDR, the subsequent destination of the division. The exercise he refers to was Exercise NEMAN, 23 Jul - 10 Aug 68. The u/i GMRD remained in the BYDGOSZCZ area until after the actual invasion took place.

11. (S) The Waiting Period. 11 Guards Army units remained in the BYDGOSZCZ area until the night of 20 Aug (invasion date). At least 11 Guards Army Field HQ, and probably divisional staffs, conducted CPX activity during the invasion preparations.

"We had started to get newspapers at that time and I came across a photograph in one of them which I remember well. The caption under the photo read, "The Minister of Defence Grechko, with a group of generals holding exercises of the rear forces of the Warsaw Pact in the PPR". This is sort of how I figured out where I was. The exercises we were involved in went something like this: Every day after morning calisthenics, washing, and dressing, roll-call, our company of "Partisans" (ie, those who had been called-up from the reserve) would attend classes on equipment or regulations, etc. We would usually go deep into the forest, find a comfortable spot, set up a guard to warn us if someone from the unit or divisional headquarters was coming to check up on us, and then proceed to do exactly what we felt like. Some would read or play cards, tell jokes or just sleep.

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We did what we liked during our free-time as well. One guy, for example, would prepare "chefir", a tea brewed so strongly it has a narcotic effect. Others would sell whatever they could to the Poles or barter for alcohol. The drivers would sell gas or spare parts taken from their vehicles. In other words, the soldiers would sell anything they could get their hands on. Two young soldiers sold a transistor and got so drunk that they were caught and put under detention (I don't remember for how long). However, since we hadn't brought a guardhouse with us on the campaign, they had to dig a hole and then sit in it for the duration of their confinement. Many of the men got V.D. since the Polish women would often come to visit. The unit commander, whose name I don't remember, told us at one of the parades, "I've been in Austria, Hungary and the GDR, but I've never seen such "tame" girls as these. These Polish ladies keep on coming to our headquarters (ie, the regiment) which is located by the side of the road, even though a special order had been posted denying them entry.

All of the officers were paid in foreign currency (ie, in zlotys) because we had been abroad for a long time and this resulted in some serious drinking. The staff of Zabrodskiy's battalion organized a drinking bout. They sent a car into town to pick up some liquor and the boozing went on all night. Next morning, when it was just beginning to get light, Zabrodskiy decided to test his battalion's combat readiness. He had no problems in putting the young soldiers on the alert and in checking the sentries' vigilance. However, when he got to where the "partisan" company was positioned and tried to sound action stations dressed only in his undershirt and grasping onto a tree for support, he finally understood that he had made a mistake. The company roused itself somehow or other, of course, but the commander realized that if he wanted to remain safe and sound he would have to make a quick exit. So he never got to test our battle readiness.

Word of this fiasco went as far as the division commander. The battalion was called together late in the evening of that same day and Major Zabrodskiy, with tears in his eyes, begged our forgiveness in front of the entire battalion and the chief of the political department of the division. He said something along these lines, "I realize that I have made a terrible mistake. I

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beg those of you whom I have offended to forgive me. I will never do such a thing again. If you don't forgive me, I'll be transferred. Please remember that I have a family and children." To make matters worse Zabrodskiy was a communist. The matter, of course, was hushed up and Zabrodskiy remained in command of our battalion. He thus continued to carry out whatever duties were assigned to him by the command of the "exercises of the rear forces of the Warsaw Pact."

So this was how we continued our exercises. During all this time they had been compiling lists of all the men who were over 45 years old, were sick or who had been in jail. This was because all sorts of people had been rounded up in the heat of the moment and all had been sent to Poland. I remember that the Regional Executive Committee Chairman's driver had been called up, but was swiftly "demobilized" the next day after a phone call from the Chairman. However, no matter how many lists were drawn up, every last man who had crossed the Polish border ended up serving the full three months from the first day to the last."

12. (S) Now, several points of clarification. The u/i GMRD apparently spent about two weeks in the BYDGOSZCZ area. During this period, in spite of the fact that this division was subsequently to enter Czechoslovakia, no concerted effort was made to prepare the reservists for their mission, nor was there any battalion or higher manoeuvre practice. The reservists, apparently at least one company of the battalion, were left primarily to their own devices. Discipline was lax, perhaps because senior staffs were engaged in CPX and planning activities during the period. The age and quality of reservists called-up is understandable, given the scale of mobilization and the concurrent harvest support activity. The "full three months" cited denotes the maximum call-up period permitted under Soviet military law.

13. (S) The Invasion. In retrospect, the invasion of Czechoslovakia was a classic example of a Soviet intervention operation. At 2030 hrs (local time) on 20 August, two Soviet CUB aircraft (probably AEROFLOT) landed at Prague Airfield carrying about 80 "tourists". These probable SPETSNAZ troops in civilian clothing seized control of the airport and dispersed into the city to occupy key installations (including the HQ of the Czech General Staff) prior to the ground forces invasion. Three to four hours later (midnight 20-21 August) invasion forces crossed the Czech frontier on multiple axes, and a simultaneous airlift commenced. A total of 17 WP divisions conducted the ground

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invasion and some 350 air sorties lifted airborne troops to key locations, primarily Prague, over a period of 16 hours. Within 48 hours, all objectives had been secured and Czechoslovakia was totally under Soviet and WP control. There was no armed opposition from any quarter.

14. (S) As his unit was not involved, subject had only secondhand knowledge of the invasion.

"From what I could gather from people in the know, the plan went something like this: First of all, in accordance with an agreement, a Soviet airplane flew to the capitals of the socialist countries, testing radio communications or something like that. The plane landed in Warsaw, Berlin and then finally in Prague. At this point, a large number of "sportsmen" got off the plane and sat down on the benches in the Prague airport. When the time came, these "sportsmen" opened their rucksacks, pulled out machine guns and started to fight the "counter-revolution". They removed the airport officials and air traffic controllers from their posts and took their places. They began to bring in a steady stream of Soviet aircraft carrying assault landing forces, armoured troop carriers, tanks and other equipment. The entire Czech government was arrested right away and sent to Moscow. At the same time, the "Warsaw Pact" troops crossed the Czech border from all directions and penetrated deep into the country. Assault forces landed wherever Czech units were stationed. They carried out their assigned combat duties without any fuss, easily disarming the remaining units in the country. Western analysts probably still remember all the details and are more familiar with these events than I am. I know only what I was told and can't say if this is exactly what happened. So this was how we began to fight the counter-revolution."

15. (S) The ground rules for the invasion were dictated at the outset. Czech military forces were ordered to remain in location (whether in garrison or in training areas), and though they were to retain their weapons, no opposition to intervention forces would occur. Soviet and WP forces were to occupy key points, place Czech military forces under continuous observation, avoid provoking the civilian population, and threaten use of force only in self-defence. Though they undoubtedly experienced problems, the operation went off without a major hitch.

16. (S) The Reinforcing Echelon. "I don't know what kind of grade we were given for our "exercises", but on

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August 22, (the day when the Warsaw Pact troops marched into the CSSR after being invited by the Czechoslovak people) (note: actually 21 August), our units were called to action stations and moved ahead quickly towards the border with the GDR. We hadn't been travelling at any great speed when the convoy was closed up, but after we crossed the border between East Germany and Poland at Leben-Leiben, (sic), where the border follows the Oder River, the convoy spread out and at times we sped along at more than 80-90 km/hour. We went on like this for about a day.

Naturally, the drivers were in no fit state to continue driving in this way and so the command asked if there were any men in the companies who could drive instead. Replacements were found, of course. However, a driver with little experience was chosen to drive an armoured troop carrier filled with young soldiers. At one of the turns in the road he lost control and the seven-tonne vehicle went off the road and flipped over. The convoy came to a halt and a lot of soldiers ran out to see what had happened. Heads and legs were sticking out all over. The soldiers grabbed onto the "steel grave" and turned it over. We had to leave four seriously wounded soldiers behind in the hospital at Ottbus, as well as one body. It turned out that the carrier had fallen on top of a helmet, and correspondingly, a soldier's head, but no one had noticed. When the vehicle was uprighted, the helmet and head were turned into a pancake.

After this accident they reduced our speed and the "higher-ups" came to investigate, but nothing could be done. The "war" was to blame. We continued for another day and came to Dresden, where we met up with our tank crews. Later on we made camp in a forest and started to hold exercises again, but I don't know what they were called officially because no one spoke about them. All our attention was focused on events in Czechoslovakia, on how our courageous armed forces were helping the Czech people put down the "counter-revolution".

17. (S) The march from BYDGOSZCZ to DRESDEN (approximately 475 kms) was completed in about 48 hours, and the division was finally united with its armour. The move of 11 Guards Army to the DRESDEN area coincided with the departure from that area of invasion forces, and re-established the necessary posture facing NATO as well as positioned reinforcements for

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follow-up deployment into Czechoslovakia. 11 Guards Army HQ moved in bounds, leaving BYDGOSZCZ on the night of 20 Aug, opening at POZNAN 0900 on 21 Aug, closed morning of 22 Aug, and re-opened at DRESDEN on probably 23 Aug. By 24 Aug, 11 Guards Army, comprising five divisions, was concentrated around DRESDEN awaiting further orders.

"We stayed two days in the GDR. The regular officers were very happy, thinking that the units based in the GDR would stay in Czechoslovakia and that we would replace them here in Germany. Here we're thinking in terms of marks and roubles. You could bring enough stuff back to the USSR to last a lifetime.

"But this wasn't to be. On the evening of the second day (evening 24 Aug), the commanders were given maps of all of Czechoslovakia and were instructed to glue them all together overnight. Since I was serving as a platoon commander, I had to spend all night gluing as well. By morning everything was ready. In the morning we were all ordered to get munitions at the platoon and to load them onto our vehicles. Each platoon of 22 men had a vehicle. The soldiers had a lot to do at this point, particularly the grenade throwers, few of whom knew how to shoot. For this reason, training was organized en route, everyone was taught how to shoot and load his weapon. This had to be done then, because during the actual training sessions the soldiers had paid little attention to their studies, preferring to do what they felt like instead".

18. (S) Here we have evidence of final unit preparations prior to commencing operations. Note that at company level (at least) there was still no evidence of what lay ahead. Preparations included the issuing of maps and ammunition, and weapons training "en route". Although there was no armed opposition in Czechoslovakia, the troops had to be prepared to defend themselves.

19. (S) Commitment to Operations. Commitment of the reinforcing echelon occurred between 21 and 27 Aug. 11 Guards Army units began entering Czechoslovakia on 25 Aug. Only three of the five divisions in 11 Guards Army entered Czechoslovakia, two remained in the DRESDEN area as reinforcements facing NATO. This raised the occupying force strength to 25 divisions.

"Soon after this they sounded action stations and we moved closer to the Czech border. We came to a halt towards evening (note: evening

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25 Aug), ate lunch and supper together and were ordered to rest. Zabrodskiy gathered all his subordinates down to platoon commander together and showed us our position on the map. We were 1.5 km away from the border. He explained that after we crossed into Czechoslovakia each platoon commander, if necessary, had the right to open fire independently. We spent the night there and moved on in the morning (note: 26 Aug). We followed along the border for a long time, climbing up into the Sudeten Mountains. After lunch we left the GDR and crossed into Czechoslovakia. The German border-guards let us go right through and there was simply nobody at all on the Czech side. There were several bullet holes in the border post and in the red star hanging above the gates, but there was not a soul in sight.

Once we were on the other side of the border (ie, in Czechoslovakia), we began to descend. At this point the border followed a small stream along which, on the German side, there were children's camps. The children waved to us, accompanying the liberators. We had our first encounter with the people of Czechoslovakia about one hour after we crossed the border. The road turned to the left and headed deep inside the country. A group of ten to fifteen Czechs were gathered at this first turn, carrying placards written in Russian: "You are invaders," "Go home." They shouted, "Go home", in unison at each of the passing vehicles and waved us back to where we had come from.

It was then that I finally understood exactly what kind of truth our leaders had been telling us. I understood how the Czechs had asked for help, how needed we were in this land and how they had been waiting for us. Morale among all the soldiers and officers plummeted after this encounter. Personally, I felt as if I had been hit over the head with a heavy log. We were so discouraged that we were even afraid to get out of our vehicles when we stopped. As we penetrated deeper into the country, we were met by certain individuals who handed us pamphlets describing the true situation in the CSSR and asking us to influence our commanders to send us home. All the street signs and place names of settlements and towns had been taken down and various messages had been written on every fence, building and vehicle.

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There were signs written in every conceivable spot. The most common messages were, "1938 - Hitler, 1968 - Brezhnev", "What will you say to your mother, Ivan," "Theres's no vodka, Ivan" and "You are invaders". There were also lists of the members of the Dubcek-Svododa government, with the question, "What has happened to them?"

We frequently came across arrows on the roads pointing back to the USSR and indicating how any kilometres it was to Moscow, etc, etc. You couldn't possibly read them all because messages had been written literally everywhere. I remember one young man who had shaved his head in stripes and written something on his back. He was standing by the side of the road with his back turned to us, making his protest as the convoy passed by. I'm sure that a steady stream of vehicles had been passing him since August 22 (sic, Aug 21). It was now Sunday, August 26. Toward evening we came to the large town of Most. It's hard to describe what was happening there. As I've already mentioned, messages had been scrawled over everything. The streets were packed with people and our vehicles were literally plastered with various leaflets. They were yelling at us so loudly, "greeting" us so warmly that they drowned out the engines of our cars, armoured troop carriers and tanks. I was riding in an old car and the one thing I really dreaded was that it would break down and we would have to stop. It looked like we would be torn to pieces.

We passed through Most and halted at night. Zabrodskiy gathered all his commanders together and explained what our combat task was to be. He pointed to the city of Luoni (sic)/Louny/ on the map and explained that a Czech tank division was holed up there. We were to surround the barracks, disarm the regiment; if this wasn't successful, to destroy it. After we ate, we set out to accomplish our combat duty. By late evening we had formed up outside Luoni. This city is located on low-lying ground and we had a clear view of how the convoys of the liberating army were converging along every road, from every direction, since we had stopped on high ground. Although they said that troops from the Warsaw Pact countries were also there, I never saw anyone but Soviets. Thus, according to eyewitness accounts, a solid steel wall of tanks with gun barrels aimed directly at targets surrounded the barracks of the Czech tank

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groups. Our representatives left at dawn (morning 27 Aug) in order to negotiate with the Czechs and to outline the terms of surrender. Fortunately, however, the regiment was no longer in the barracks. When asked where the regiment was, the squad which had been left behind answered, "Holding exercises".

We stayed outside Luoni until late at night, since we had been unable to carry out our combat task. At exactly 09:00 all the factory whistles, church bells and car and truck horns sounded out. It didn't matter where they were. This is the way that the Czechs, who had so much wanted us to help them, protested against our occupation for exactly fifteen minutes, with ancient sirens.

That evening, or to be precise, that night, (night 27 Aug), we moved on again. We went through Luoni, which had been covered in graffiti again (they had been forced to wipe out the old messages). We moved on for about a day. It turned out that our reconnaissance had discovered the whereabouts of "our tank regiment". The Oder River branches out at a certain spot, forming an island, and this was where the Czech troops were carrying out their exercises. We were then given another combat assignment (night 28 Aug): to occupy a position in the forest, close to the road the tank regiment would have to take to return to its barracks. If the regiment were to act against us in any way, we were to open fire and destroy it. We stayed there for about three weeks, but saw neither hide nor hair of the regiment. The Czechs had apparently taken another route, leaving their munitions behind".

20. (S) Subject's recollection is probably a little clouded and exaggerated. As previously cited, Czech forces were to retain their arms and armed force was to be threatened only in self-defence. Thus, either subject misunderstood the battalion commander's orders, or the battalion commander misunderstood his. The Czech regiment which occupied this garrison, probably 3 MRR/1TD, was in the training area at the time of the invasion, and presumably followed orders by remaining there. Subject's division was probably ordered to place the Czech regiment under observation. Having established a cordon around the garrison, they discovered the regiment was actually in the training area, and redeployed there. Subject's position (a platoon commander guarding an access road) did not permit him to "see" the whole picture, thus whether the Czech regiment left the training area or not, he probably didn't know. The u/i GMRD

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remained in this vicinity between 28 Aug and approximately 10 Sep.

"While we were there, many of the men spoke angrily about our actions, but there were no unpleasant incidents because these conversations were all in private. However, I do remember one Lithuanian who voiced his dissatisfaction on more than one occasion. He was a student and, since it was already September, he was being kept away from his studies. A counter-intelligence officer from unit headquarters, a KGB-man to be precise, came to see him and they had several long talks. I don't know what they talked about, but I'm quite sure that the student was put on the list of "unreliables".

We broke camp after two weeks and moved on to another forest. We kept on the move in order to instill fear in the hearts of the populace. However, it turned out that the Czechs weren't all that afraid of us since wherever we went we found newer and newer messages and arrows on the road, indicating the number of kilometres to Moscow, etc.

That's how we passed the time in Czechoslovakia. Various political workers would visit us often, treating us with different bits of political information and with speeches about the "true" state of affairs in the CSSR. The regiment's Party organizer spoke to us once and said that while we were participating in "exercises of the Warsaw Pact rear forces", "exercises of the Warsaw Pact signal troops" were being held in the USSR. Thus, while we were abroad, units of Czech divisions were taking part in exercises at home, that is, in the USSR. That meant that while we were here as guests, they were visiting us as well. He went on to say that we had made a big mistake in that we had not treated these socialist countries in the same way as we had the Baltic republics in 1940. If we had been smarter then, we wouldn't have had to set things right today. He said that no matter how much the Czechs might want to separate from us, we would never let them because we had lost so many of our men liberating them and because separation would open up a corridor to the Soviet border, along which the NATO forces could march right up to us.

In this way, over the course of two months, we brought order to Czechoslovakia. When we entered the CSSR, we had been allotted reinforced

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rations, the kind issued in wartime. This basically consisted of sausage and smoked meat from the GDR. This was supplemented with butter and sugar. Pieces of sausage or fat were always left over after every meal because many of the soldiers could not eat it all. After a time, a command post, complete with a commandant and full company, was set up in each town. The company stationed in Teplice had nothing better to do, so they arranged a contest to see who could put his pistol in firing position the fastest. One soldier happened to press the trigger and shot and killed a sergeant from somewhere around Vilnius. At that time there was a standing order to return all bodies to the Motherland. The coffins were brought in from the GDR and then sent back with bodies to the USSR. The chief of staff of the battalion accompanied the Lithuanian's body back home and, when he returned, said that no matter how much he insisted that the man had been killed in an accident, no one believed him."

21. (S) Throughout this period of occupation, 11 Guards Army HQ was located at RAKOVNIK, while the three subordinate divisions were dispersed throughout the area north and northwest of PRAGUE. The units apparently received repeated "pep talks" from political officers to instill motivation, but the troops had little to do and the population remained opposed to their presence. From mid-September, all Soviet units found themselves on garrison-type routines with little to do.

"Many of the soldiers, again because of the lack of anything else to do, offered their services to the local state farms. The majority of the farms refused this offer, of course, but on several occasions we were sent to help harvest the straw and hay. Everybody tried hard to get this type of work because it helped pass the time and sometimes the volunteers would each be given a bottle of beer.

I remember a cattle inspector from a large feeding station, who had been called up. Back home he was always being "entertained" by cattle breeders, so that he would register their cattle as being of a higher grade. This, of course, didn't cost him a thing, but he was always in such a state of intoxication that his hands shook for a long time afterwards. But after these few months he was joking that, while previously he had been unable to pour liquor from the bottle into a glass, now he would be able to pour it from a barrel into a bottle. This was because there was nothing to drink.

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All our supplies came through or originated in East Germany, since the Czechs for a long time were unwilling to supply us even with water - at first the soldiers went in their armoured personnel carriers to load water into the "shit-trucks". One time, when the regular officers were given some money, ie, East German marks, the officers in the regiment decided to have a "get-together" and bring some schnapps in from the GDR. They commandeered a truck and sent the unit pay officer and a senior lieutenant from the tank battalion, who knew German. On their way back from their "business trip", the officers decided to stop to have some beer at a settlement along the way, even though they were already quite tipsy. A pro-Soviet Czech came to sit with them while they were drinking and they began to fraternize. Since a lot of beer had been consumed, the captain, that is the pay officer, wanted to go to relieve himself. He left and never came back again. When the senior lieutenant realized that it was time to go and that his friend hadn't come back, he raised the roof. He blamed the Czech communist for the captain's disappearance, called him a counter-revolutionary, dragged him out onto the street and emptied two cartridges into him at point-blank range. The captain didn't turn up, even after this.

As it turned out later, an armed soldier had deserted at about that time and under-cover agents had been sent out everywhere to try to capture him. One of these agents had caught sight of the drunken captain and, mistaking him for the deserter, had arrested him and sent him to the command post mentioned above. The senior lieutenant had to be arrested when he got back. They made one of the tents into a guardhouse, where he remained for several days. After this, there was an investigation, which implicated the senior officers. The upshot was that the next day all the officers were ordered to hand over their ammunition and weapons for safekeeping, so that this type of thing would never happen again.

At first, it was rumoured that the murderer-lieutenant would be tried in a Czech court, but then he was sent back to the Soviet Union. Sometime after I had returned from these "exercises" I ran into some fellow "invaders" who told me that this "humane soldier" had been tried somewhere in the region around Riga and that he had been sentenced to two years in all. It seems

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he had been given such a light sentence because the court had taken the "war situation" into account, etc.

Soviet soldiers were warned not to go into the city on the day of the funeral, in order to avoid any acts of retribution. The Czech people, it seems, were shocked that one of the soldier-liberators could have done such a thing. The Czechs had also issued some warnings. Thus, we spent two months in Czechoslovakia helping the people put down the counter-revolution."

22. (S) Force Withdrawal. By mid-October, negotiations between Moscow and Prague resulted in an agreement to permanently station Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia. The agreement was signed on 16 Oct and the Central Group of Forces, comprising five divisions, was created effective 1 Nov 68. Thus, while 20 of the occupying divisions would depart Czechoslovakia, five would redeploy and remain permanently. Subject's division (u/i GMRD, Chernyakhovsk) was one of those selected to remain. He and his "partisans" however, mobilized on 20 July, had to be returned home and released (90 day period would expire 20 Oct). They began withdrawing on 17 Oct.

"After much deliberation and a further "request" on the part of the Czech people and government, it was decided to leave a part of our forces in the CSSR. The majority of our unit was to stay behind. We were assigned barracks in the town of Teplice and the great moment finally arrived for us to leave the forest. Even though two months had passed, the counter-revolution was still in full swing. Various messages were visible on the houses and along the roads. Signposts told us which direction to follow and how many kilometres we would have to cover to get there. We often came across vehicles moving in the opposite direction and their drivers and passengers would wave their fists at us, indicating where we should go.

Our barracks were very small, of course, and we were stuffed inside like sardines in a tin. We slept right on the floor at first, but then we were given bunk beds.

However, we weren't fated to live in these barracks for long. The Czechs gave us a piece of bushland, which our battalion was to clear and

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level. We were to build a small-scale shooting range here, so that we wouldn't lose all our military know-how. At that time, I was transferred from the command of the shooting platoon to the command of the administrative platoon. I was in charge of procuring food products and of equipping the vehicles. The intention was that we would soon move on. However, the next day we were given a new order, calling for all the "partisans" to be sent home immediately. I gave the young sergeant who was replacing me everything that I had managed to procure and then got ready to leave.

We were given three days worth of dry rations for the road. When preparations had been completed, all the demobilized soldiers were gathered together at the club, where the chief of the political department and the unit commander thanked us for volunteering. Those of us who had particularly excelled were given certificates of merit and "thank you" letters. The unit commander told us "confidentially" that the history of our march into the CSSR was now being studied by all the armies of the world - after all, the country had been occupied in a single night, without any fighting or fatalities, etc. Whoever is working on similar plans can certainly learn a lot.

We were taken to the railway station (I don't remember its name) after the farewell ceremonies were over. Here we were loaded into passenger cars and sent on to Dresden. We stopped to attend a meeting held in honour of the "warrior-liberators", right after we crossed the border into the GDR. Quite a few of us managed to try some schnapps. There were speeches, toasts and good things to eat. I don't know whose idea this celebration was. In Dresden, however, there was just a special staff from which apples, cookies, tea and coffee, etc, were brought to the cars. An old German man, I remember, gave us our first basket of food. Of course, many of the men didn't get enough to eat, so that when the old man came back with the second basket he was almost crushed right there on the railway platform because all the men were trying to get as much as they could. The old German didn't come around with a third basket. We spent several hours in Dresden and then eleven more cars, filled with our brother soldiers, were added and the train moved on. We went through the GDR and Poland. We stopped when we got back to the USSR and the

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border-guards thoroughly checked each car inside and out, to make sure that we weren't bringing the counter-revolution back with us.

We got back to Chernyakhovsk, which is reached by a narrow-gauge railway line, on the third day of our trip. Here we were treated like true liberators who had fulfilled their international duty. The secretary of the regional committee personally greeted and congratulated us and gave a speech. The station is located outside the city limits and they had even brought out quite a few of the locals to greet us."

23. (S) The withdrawal of the 20 WP divisions was completed by 12 Nov. Subject's unit apparently had pre-knowledge of the creation of CGF and their assignment to it, since his recollection implies some days (possibly weeks) of activity prior to commencement of withdrawal on 17 Oct. The other possibility is that he has confused the timings in his recollection. His unit may well have occupied barracks at TEPLICE and his internal transfer accomplished in the period prior to his knowledge of the creation of CGF and force withdrawal. This latter possibility is more likely given the lack of information generally available at unit level in other phases of this operation. Following reservist withdrawal, the u/i GMRD redeployed from the MOST area to the MIMON area as part of CGF.

#### POSTSCRIPT

24. (S) In reading the preceding report, one might draw the conclusion that source's disillusionment with the Soviet system is based largely on his experiences during this invasion. Certainly he experienced hardship, observed poor discipline and drunkenness, and questioned the validity and integrity of the Soviet military/political actions. But lest one place too much emphasis on these events in determining the cause of his disillusionment, the following is provided as a sample of source's "roots".

25. (S) Presumably also in 1968, source complained of living conditions in his residence. A health inspection of his residence was conducted and a copy of the inspector's report follows:

#### STATEMENT

"I, L.A. Dement'eva, acting physician of the Moscow Regional (unreadable), conducted a health inspection of the living conditions of (source), who resides at 80B (unreadable) Ave, Apt. 1."

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### FINDINGS

"(Source) has a family of three. He lives in a building belonging to the Kaliningrad Meat Processing and Packing Combine. His room covers 35 m<sup>2</sup> and is located on the ground floor. The room is damp and cold. It is heated by a boiler, which is located in a neighbour's apartment and which is stoked by this same neighbour. The walls (partitions) around the lavatory are 1 metre high. They are damp and do not dry out, even when the electric heater is turned on. The walls in the kitchen are also damp and are covered with mould. The plaster is coming off. There is no source of natural light in the kitchen. The food is prepared on an ordinary, single-ring hot-plate. There is a sink, but the drain has not been installed properly--it leads to the toilet bowl in the lavatory. As a result of this, smells from the toilet get into the kitchen and the room. There is a shed outside the windows and, as a result, there is not enough light in the room.

The 35 m<sup>2</sup> room is lit by a single electric light bulb, which is installed on the wall where the light comes from (i.e. on the wall between the windows). There is no overhead light because the wiring is faulty. There is no toilet in the room. They use the building lavatory, which is located on the staircase right beside the kitchen and room. The fixtures and sanitary state of the lavatory are unsatisfactory.

### CONCLUSION

The room occupied by (Source) is not suitable for use as living accommodation. I recommend that either capital repairs be carried out or alternate accommodation found.

Signed

Acting Chief Physician of  
the Sanitary Inspection Office \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to add that the lavatory has only one toilet. The building is a large one, with fourteen families living in it, and therefore there is always a long line-up of people waiting in the hall to use the lavatory".

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