

CHAPTER XVIII

YUGOSLAVIA. 1941-1945

A. CROATIA

1. When the Germans overran Yugoslavia in 1941 they took advantage of the strong feelings between the Croats and Serbians and created the Independent State of Croatia in December, 1941. They brought in as the Quisling head of this Government Ante Pavelic who had been exiled to Italy because of his activities in pre-war Yugoslavia and who was head of the Ustashi Party. After the occupation by the Germans Serbia was partially dismembered, parts of it being given to the Independent State of Croatia as well as to Hungary, Bulgaria and Albania.

2. The armed forces of the Croat Quisling State had a General Headquarters which was not political in nature. Under this Headquarters were two military arms—the Ustas forces and the Domobranstvo (literally "Home Defence"). The Ustas forces which were analogous to the Italian Blackshirts consisted of:

(a) *PAVELIC'S BODYGUARD* (POGLAVNIKOV TIJELESNI ZDRUG, known as PTZ for short). This included many of PAVELIC's old supporters who had been in exile with him in Italy before the war. It was a high class field unit, of which one battalion (P. T. Bojna) was set aside as the personal bodyguard of Pavelic.

(b) *THE BLACK LEGION* (CRNA LEGIJA), which was commanded first by FRANCETIC and later by General BOBAN. This was a special detachment earmarked for the hardest operations. Its strength varied between 1500 and 2000.

(c) *THE USTAS MILITIA* (USTASKA ODBRANA), comprising the bulk of the Ustas troops and divided into mobile and static units. They were mostly employed in local punitive expeditions and worked in close contact with the U.M.S. (Ustasa Nadzorna Sluzba—the Ustasa Police).

(d) *RAILWAY BRIGADES* (ZELEZNICARSKI ZDRUG), which also had mobile and static elements, and whose job it was to protect installations and railway communications from Partisan attacks.

(e) *THE USTAS AIR FORCE*. Although the Croat Air Force was an Ustas Organisation there is definite evidence that in the technical fields men were conscripted.

3. The Ustas forces generally consisted of volunteers and there were few exceptions to this rule before 1944. After that date, however, the exigencies of war forced the Ustas military to conscript for their units and to take reinforcements from the DOMOBRANSTVO. All Ustas units had a bad record of excesses and atrocities. The BLACK LEGION and the BODYGUARD were regarded as corps d'élite both from the military and political point of view. In addition to their excesses, their concentration camps were as notorious as those of the Germans. A considerable number of these camps existed, the worst being at Jasenovad. The staff and guards of these camps were generally old Ustas party members who were not fit for frontline fighting.

4. It should be mentioned here that the end of the war and the expulsion of the Ustas did not curtail their activities in Yugoslavia. Ustas activity inside Yugoslavia today centres around the "Krizari" or "Crusaders" who are bands of marauders operating

in the forests and mountains. (Note this should not be confused with the pre-war Krizari or Hrvatski Katolicki Orso which was a Catholic youth movement and which was not political in character). After the end of the war, the Ustas made a serious attempt to organise widescale opposition to the Partisans and sent back from Italy for this purpose one of their leading officers, Colonel Lisak, who was, however, caught, tried and subsequently executed at Zagreb.

5. The Domobranstvo was perhaps a more active formation than its name implies. It was established in April 1941 and acted as the army of Independent Croatia. It was used as a field force to fight the Partisans as well as to protect areas from Partisan attacks. It was essentially a conscript force, of inferior quality to the Ustas units, had no political complex, and did not acquire a notably bad record. 35 was officially the maximum age for conscription, though many men over this age served in the force for a variety of reasons, such as to avoid conscription by the Partisans or German sponsored Croat units. Generally speaking a boy on reaching 20 years was automatically called up into the DOMOBRANSTVO unless he elected for the Ustas units. Broadly the Croat Domobranstvo was a militia which fought only in Croatia against the Partisans. In addition to this ground force there was a Croat navy composed almost entirely of former navy personnel who were recalled into service. This navy, outside of some work done in the Black Sea off Bulgaria, was not active.

6. In addition to the Croat armed forces discussed above, the Germans recruited from the Croat people several divisions which were integral parts of the WEHRMACHT. These were as follows :

(a) THE CROAT BLUE (PLAVA) DIVISION.

(b) THE DEVIL (VRAZA) DIVISION.

These divisions of conscripted Croats had with few exceptions German or Volksdeutsche Officers and NCO's, and German uniform was worn. It was frequently the case that a youth on being called up to the DOMOBRANSTVO was immediately transferred to one of these divisions and sent to Germany for training. The Devil Division was sent to fight on the Russian front from Germany.

(c) THE 13 SS/HANDZAR DIVISION.

This was composed of Moslems, mainly recruited from BOSNIA, who were nominally volunteers, but who in fact were subjected to considerable pressure by their religious leaders to join. The Germans exploited the massacre of Moslems by Serbs in order to encourage enlistment and although protection of their communities was a primary motive of recruits, revenge soon became the dominating spirit and this division indulged in excesses equal to those of any troops in the Balkans. The Germans had in mind the eventual use of this division as the nucleus of a larger Moslem force in the Middle East, but in fact, after training in Germany and France, it never moved further East than Yugoslavia. German uniforms were worn. Each sub-unit had a Moslem priest, or imam, who held SS rank and acted as a kind of religious commissar. The majority of officers and some NCO's were German or Volksdeutsche.

7. In addition to these three formations some CROAT Volksdeutsche entered the ranks of the SS Prinz Eugen Division which was, however, mainly composed of Volksdeutsche from the BANAT in Serbia. Added to the above groups were the CROAT POLICE. The pre-war Yugoslav Gendarmerie was reorganised in the CROAT State under the directorate of Public Order and Security. Apart from the regular civil police there was the Gendarmerie (ORUZNISTVO), under General PECNIKAR and the Specialist Political Police. The members of the ORUZNISTVO and Specialist Political police were volunteers and can be regarded as active Ustas supporters. The Quisling Croat Gendarmerie had a bad record. When General Pecnikar took over the Gendar-

merie, he made a clean sweep of personnel and kept only the former members who were trustworthy, bringing in at the same time a large number of Ustas proteges. All officers and NCO's of the Gendarmerie were in fact Ustas, and men, who joined the Gendarmerie during the war normally did so by voluntarily transferring from other Ustas units. They were regarded as civil servants, and in the spring of 1942 were transferred from the Ministry of Armed Forces to the Ministry of Interior.

## B. SLOVENIA

8. After the capitulation of Yugoslavia in 1941 SLOVENIA was dismembered by the Axis, the northern part of the country being incorporated in the German Reich and the southern including the old capital of Ljubljana, being occupied by Italy.

9. In the German part all young men were automatically conscripted into the WEHRMACHT. In the Italian part (Provincia Di Lubiana) a volunteer organisation known as the Village Guard (VASKA STRAZA) was formed in the summer of 1942 to counter Partisan activities. Armed and supplied by the Italians its members were mostly peasants, although officers were frequently drawn from the old Royal Yugoslav Army. This organisation was referred to by the Partisans as the "White Guard". Its units were employed statically in defence of villages. It was virtually wiped out by the Partisans after the Italian capitulation in September 1943. As in the German part of Slovenia, some Slovenes from Venezia Giulia were conscripted into Italian units.

10. At the Italian capitulation in 1943 the Germans occupied the Southern half of the country. An organisation known as the Slovene Homeguards (SLOVENSKI DOMOBRANCI) was set up in that Zone, and were instructed, armed and supplied by the Germans. The old Vaska Straza formed the nucleus of this new force, whose members, partly conscripts and partly volunteers, were again mostly peasants led by ex-officers of the Royal Yugoslav Army. There was also a puppet Quisling administration headed by General Rupnik, which was also established after the Italian collapse.

11. In addition to the above there were two small organisations, the CORENJSKI DOMOBRANCI and the PRIMORSKI DOMOBRANCI (who were formed in Venezia Giulia after the Italian collapse), but their history is too complicated for discussion here and it will be found that there are few if any ex-members now left. Throughout the war there was a small and ineffective Chetnik organisation covering the whole of SLOVENIA. It was under the supreme command of Mihailovic, and was largely inoperative and compromised to some extent with the Italians. In the very last days of the war it was redesignated "The Slovene Army of the Homeland". The records of all these Slovene formations were much milder than those of their CROAT and SERB counterparts. With the exception of senior officers of the DOMOBRANS their members should not seriously be regarded as active and wilful collaborators.

## C. SERBIA

12. On the collapse of Yugoslavia in April 1941, a Quisling Government was formed under General Nedic. This Government was merely the tool of the Germans and it had little scope both internally and externally. It was frequently the case that it was not informed by the various Occupation forces of developments in Serbia. It should be mentioned that it never declared war on the Allies as did the Croat Government, because the Germans did not trust the Serbs as much as they did the Ustashi.

13. This new State of Serbia was in need of an army and therefore Ljotic, who

was founder of the pre-war Zbor Party, inaugurated the Serbian Volunteer Corps (SRPSKI DOBROVOLJACKI KORPUS). This was raised primarily for the Germans and it operated at all times within the general strategic framework of the German High Command, and was armed and supplied by them. Though it never fought outside Yugoslavia it did fight alongside the Wehrmacht. As is obvious from the name, most of the Ljotic troops were volunteers, although a few Serbs were pressed into the service in 1944. The Corps had a very bad record of excesses and atrocities and was strongly nationalistic. The Corps was Royalist, but reactionary to such an extent that it transcended nationalism, and its excesses were indiscriminately directed against the right and left wings of the Serb resistance movements. Ljotic himself and some of the senior officers were pro-Germans. It may be mentioned here as a matter of interest that Ljotic was killed in a motor accident in Slovenia early in 1945 before the remnants of the Serbian Volunteer Corps surrendered to the Allied Armies in Italy.

14. One of the first acts of General Nedic was to call up the Gendarmerie which was a pre-war para-military organisation, in order to keep the peace. This group became known as the Serbian State Guards (SRPSKA DRZAVNA STRAZA) and it included existing town police and frontier customs guards as well as the Gendarmerie. A number of officers and non-commissioned officers who had formerly belonged to the Army or to the Chetniks were put into this organisation. Its members were pro-Mihailovic and pro-Ally and they at first assisted Mihailovic by informing him of German plans made against him, and by passing over arms. It was, however, a Quisling force masquerading under the guise of ordinary police. Although it was not essentially a military body, it was used as the war progressed more and more to fight the Partisans of Tito.

15. The CHETNIK MOVEMENT. (For the purposes of IRO the term CHETNIK denotes a follower of General Mihailovic who joined one of the groups under his supreme command). The literal meaning of the word CHETNIK, is a member of the CHETA, a company of armed men who started up in opposition to the Germans in April, 1941, under Mihailovic. It was at first called the "Royal Yugoslav Army in the woods" and was constituted of a cadre of ex-army personnel who had never surrendered, but who returned home at the time of the capitulation fully armed. Mihailovic was chosen by the legal Government of Yugoslavia, as their leader in Yugoslavia. It should be noted, however, that at the beginning there were two Chetnik movements: one, Mihailovic's and the other, that of Costa Pecanac, who was a hero of past wars. Mihailovic invited Pecanac to take the post of commander of his movement in South Serbia but Pecanac refused because he did not feel inclined to make the Chetnik Organisation a resistance movement against the Germans. Therefore, he went over with his men to the Quisling Government set up by General Nedic. His men were recognised by that Government and by the Germans as "legal Chetniks" while most of Mihailovic's men were known as "illegal Chetniks", although the line of distinction was not a clearly defined one. Later Pecanac's men were absorbed either into Mihailovic's units or formally incorporated into the Nedic forces. Thus the Chetnik organisation associated with Pecanac very early ceased to exist and the word "Chetnik" came to denote a follower of Mihailovic.

16. In June 1941, after Soviet Russia became an ally, another resistance movement to the Germans sprang up, namely the Partisans under Tito. Both movements co-operated at first, but in October, 1941, the growing dissension between them caused them to break apart. It is impossible to know who was most to blame, although both sides claimed that the other was responsible.

17. However that may be, from that time on the main immediate aim of the Chetniks was to fight the Partisans and not the Germans. Having once embarked on this course, they became more and more entangled with the Germans, until by the middle of 1944, the whole movement was committed to an active collaboration with them. In fact, some of Mihailovic's commanders began collaborating very early with the Italians and after the Italian collapse in 1943, with the Germans.

18. It is significant that nearly all the Chetniks in the Damjanovic Group were those commanded by DJUIC, JEVDJEVIC and DJURISIC who were all collaborating whole-heartedly before the end of 1941.

19. Although it is true to say that Mihailovic and the Chetnik Movement as a whole was basically anti-German, the fact remains that their obsession with the Communist menace and their belief that the Western Allies would liberate them when the time came, led them first to a policy of inactivity and then increasingly one of open and active co-operation with the Germans. They were officially disowned by the United States and British Governments in February 1944.

20. In 1944 General Nedic at Mihailovic's instigation persuaded the Germans to release General Damjanovic who had been a prisoner in what is now known as the British Zone of Germany, since the beginning of the war. Damjanovic after his release accepted the post of Chief de Cabinet (May 1944) in the Nedic Government with the additional liaison role between the two leaders.

21. By October 1944, prior to the Russian occupation of Belgrade and the flight of the Nedic Government to Austria, the Serb Volunteer Corps was moved, with German assistance, westwards to Slovenia to escape from the advance of the Russian armies. At the same time the Serb State Guard, which passed under the command of Mihailovic, was renamed the Serb Shock Corps (SRPSKI UDARNI KORPUS) and withdrew to Slovenia together with some of Mihailovic's Chetniks proper. There they were joined by the Serb Volunteer Corps and other Chetniks who had made their way up from Dalmatia. General DAMJANOVIC did not accompany NEDIC to Austria but joined MIHAILOVIC in Bosnia. Mihailovic himself, still expecting Allied landing in Yugoslavia, delayed his withdrawal until it was too late and he and a large part of his Chetniks remained in Yugoslavia after the end of the war. It had been decided, however, that DAMJANOVIC should take command of the Serb Volunteer Corps, the Shock Corps (late State Guards) and those Chetniks who had concentrated with them in Slovenia. Unhindered by the Germans, DAMJANOVIC therefore drove to Slovenia in the last weeks of the war (March 1945) and arrived in time to organise the final withdrawal into Italy and the surrender to the Allied Armies. It was in Slovenia that a few hundred CROAT and SLOVENE Domobran and a handful of Slovene Chetniks joined up with General DAMJANOVIC's group. The Croats, under General PARAC, called themselves the Croat Army and the Slovenes, under the Chetnik General PRESELJ (Alias ANDREJ) styled themselves the Slovene Army. For a period of time after capitulation the Damjanovic group was used as guards by the Allied Armies in Italy until their transfer to the British Zone of Germany in the summer and fall of 1947.

22. In addition to the above groups which will be encountered by Eligibility Officers, a large number of Volksdeutsche in Serbia volunteered for the Prinz Eugen Division (mentioned in Sub-Section A, 7 above). This Division was directly under the German Chief of Police in Serbia. It was a Waffen S.S. Division composed solely of Volksdeutsche soldiers and officers. In 1942 the Division numbered about 20,000 men, but this figure must have been considerably increased in view of the intensified mobilisation of Volksdeutsche in Serbia and the Banat.

23. Finally there was the Russki Corps (also known as the Autonomous Russian Corps, Russische Werkschutz Gruppe, Russian Grand Corps, Russian Schutz Korps and Rogozhin Group) which was composed of Nansen refugees who had become established in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Rumania. Registration of all Nansen refugees was begun shortly after the capitulation of Yugoslavia and they were issued white identity documents called "Ausweis Legitimacija". (See Chapter XXVII).

24. After the Germans occupied Yugoslavia, these Nansen refugees grouped together for protective purposes under General Skorodumoff (Skorodumov) who founded the Corps on 12 September 1941. It was named the "Autonomous Russian Corps" and its members were dressed in old Russian uniforms. However, Skorodumoff was arrested almost immediately and General Steifon took over command of the Corps and renamed

it the "Russische Werkschutz Gruppe". Its main purpose was to guard bridges, factories, etc. Later it fought against the Partisans.

25. At the end of 1942 the Germans took over the control of the group and changed the name to "Russische Schutz Korps". No German officers were assigned to it, although the uniform was changed to German.

26. When Steifon died at Agram in April 1945, Colonel Rogozhin took command of the group and today it is popularly known as the Rogozhin Group. As it became evident the end of the war was in sight, Rogozhin drove into Austria where he surrendered to the British on the 12 May, 1945, at Klagenfurt.

#### E. SPECIAL REFUGEE SCREENING COMMISSION (MACLEAN COMMISSION)

27. The Maclean Screening Commission was entrusted by the British Government with the task of sorting out those Yugoslavs surrendered enemy personnel who were found in Italy at the end of the recent war. It later performed the same task in respect of Yugoslavs in the British Zone of Austria. It began its work in January 1947 basing its judgement on the IRO Constitution and its main task was to discover whether each person fell within or not within the mandate of IRO on the basis of his war-time activities. For this purpose the criterion of "voluntary assistance to the enemy forces" was the one most frequently used, although the other criteria of Part II of the Definitions were in fact applied. The question of "valid objections" was not explored very thoroughly.

28. Persons who were considered to have fulfilled the criteria were classified as "White" while persons who were considered to fall outside the mandate were classified as "Grey". Persons suspected of being war criminals, traitors or Quislings, and who were demanded by the Yugoslav Government, were classified as "Black", and detained.

29. Screening sheets were made out for each person which gave information regarding his war-time activities. Each sheet was marked "Grey" or "White" as the situation required. These records have been made available to IRO through the courtesy of the British Foreign Office, and have been distributed to the British Zone of Germany and to Austria, where most of the Yugoslavs are now located. Doubtful cases may be checked by means of these records.

30. In addition to the screening sheets, a complete card index of every person screened by the Maclean Commission was made available to this Headquarters. The card index has been retained at IRO Headquarters, Geneva, for reference purposes in the event checking is necessary by the Review Board or the Administration.

31. While the Organisation does not accept the eligibility decisions of the Maclean Commission, since they are not its own, its records may be used by Field Eligibility personnel for checking or corroboration purposes. Thus a person found "Black" or "Grey" by the Maclean Commission probably belonged to one of the more reprehensible units such as the Ustas or the Specialist Political Police, etc., and this fact should be given serious consideration by the Eligibility Officer. On the other hand, the "White" classification of the Maclean Commission is not as stringent as the IRO criteria. For example, members of the Serbian Volunteer Corps were found "White" by the Commission while under IRO criteria all those who volunteered, especially before 1944, are outside the mandate.

## F. STATUS OF THE VARIOUS GROUPS OF YUGOSLAVS OUTLINED ABOVE

### 32. CROATIA.

#### (a) *Ustas.*

All Ustashi are *prima facie* excluded from IRO under the provisions of paragraph 2 of Part II of the Constitution. It will, however, be remembered that after 1943 and especially after 1944 some Ustas were conscripted. Conscripted members of the Railway Brigades who by the nature of their duties did not commit atrocities may—other factors being equal—be considered as falling within the mandate.

#### (b) *Domobrans.*

Generally speaking all its members were conscripted. However, senior officers (minimum rank : colonel) should be excluded under paragraph 2 (b) of Part II.

#### (c) *Blue and Devil Divisions.*

The officers of these Divisions were almost without exception Volksdeutsche and should be treated as such. The troops were mostly conscripted and no presumption that they fall outside the mandate should be made. It must, however, be recalled that a number of them were volunteers.

#### (d) *13 SS-Handzar Division.*

All members of this Division are *prima facie* excluded under paragraph 2 (a) of Part II of the Constitution.

#### (e) *Oruznistvo (Croatian Gendarmerie).*

Were in the main volunteers and therefore excluded under paragraph 2 (b) of Part II of the Constitution.

#### (f) *Specialist Political Police (Croatia).*

Were volunteers and therefore excluded under paragraph 2 (b) of Part II of the Constitution.

#### (g) *Krizari.*

Members of this Organisation are excluded from IRO under the terms of paragraph 6 of Part II of the Constitution.

### 33. SLOVENIA.

#### (a) *Slovene Domobrans.*

Those members of this group who volunteered and especially senior officers (minimum rank : colonel) are *prima facie* outside the mandate under paragraph 2 (b) of Part II. Those who make it plausible they did not assist the enemy are within the mandate, other factors being equal.

### 34. SERBIA.

#### (a) *Chetniks.*

Military leaders who after the spring of 1944 continued to fight on Mihailovic's side (minimum rank : colonel who was in active command) are to be considered as outside the mandate, as well as officers in command of independent Chetnik Units who continued to fight against Tito after the middle of 1944. Subordinate officers and other ranks who may not have had a clear conception of what was happening should be treated on their own merits, although no presumption as to their falling outside the mandate should be made.

#### (b) *Serbian Volunteer Corps.*

All members of the Corps who volunteered, and it is considered as fairly reliable that the overwhelming majority were volunteers, are to be excluded under paragraph 2

(b) of Part II. Those who joined it after 1944 will have to make it plausible that they were conscripted.

(c) *Serbian State Guards.*

The majority of this group was composed of persons who were already doing gendarmerie or similar work and therefore should not normally be considered as falling outside the mandate. However, officers who joined the group after its inauguration in 1941 are *prima facie* outside the mandate under paragraph 2 (b) of Part II of the Constitution, unless they can give a plausible story for joining after this date. Equally, commanders (minimum rank: colonel) who after 1944 fought against the Partisans are excluded under paragraph 2 (b). It will also be remembered that some Chetniks were ordered by Mihailovic to join in order to procure arms for him. These will be dealt with on their merits, and no presumption that they are outside the mandate should be made.

(d) *Rogozhin Corps.*

Members of the Rogozhin Corps will be regarded as *prima facie* outside the mandate of IRO under paragraph 2 (b) of Part II of the Definitions.

(e) *Prinz Eugen S.S. Division.*

Members of this Division who volunteered are outside the mandate of the Organisation under the terms of paragraph 2 (b) of Part II of the Constitution. The remainder (it will be remembered that this was a Volksdeutsche Division) are outside the mandate if they are in Germany or "in suspense" if they are in other countries.