YUGOSLAVIA (1941-1944)  

**by Earl Ziemke**

Although the insurgents of the Yugoslav resistance movement were bitterly divided between Communists and Četniks during World War II, neither the puppet governments set up in Croatia and Serbia nor the Axis occupation troops were able to destroy these threats to their own safety—despite a policy of repression seldom equalled in modern history.

**BACKGROUND**

Yugoslavia is the largest of the Balkan countries, covering 99,000 square miles or about the area of Wyoming. Half of the terrain is mountainous, the rest mostly rough and hilly. Only the Voivodina, a small triangle north of the Danube River between Hungary and Romania, is a true plain. The major mountain ranges are the Dinaric Alps in the northwest and the Balkans in the southeast. The climate is typical of continental middle Europe, with relatively hot summers and cold winters. A thin strip along the Dalmatian coast has a Mediterranean climate, but the mountains prevent the warming influence of the sea from extending more than a few miles inland.

The most distinctive feature in the physical geography of Yugoslavia is the Karst, an extensive limestone region in the Dinaric Alps. Here rain water has dissolved the limestone to produce unusual land forms. Drainage is mostly subterranean. The few streams and rivers run in steep-sided gorges, often plunging underground for long stretches. Desolate plateaus and blind, saucer-shaped depressions mark the landscape. Wild, inhospitable, partly desert-like, thinly populated, with few roads—the Karst is a natural stronghold for insurgents.

**Ethnic and Religious Diversity of the Peoples of Yugoslavia**

The population of Yugoslavia, according to the last prewar census in 1931, was slightly under 14 million. Population density is directly correlated with terrain elevation: in the Morava River valley between Belgrade and Niš there are 175 persons per square mile; on the other hand, the lower mountainous regions, with elevations of 3,500 to 4,500 feet, have only 60 to 100 persons per square mile, and the higher mountains, fewer than 40. Settlement is mainly in the river valleys.
Some 20 ethnic groups have been identified within the Yugoslav borders. The three largest are the Serbs (41 percent), the Croats (24 percent), and the Slovenes (9 percent). These three, together with Macedonians (5 percent), Montenegrins (3 percent), Muslims not classified as belonging to any ethnic group (5 percent), and a small number of Bulgarians, comprise the group known before World War II as the Serbo-Croats. Altogether, these groups account for 87 percent of the total population.\(^4\)

The chief religions are the Serbian Orthodox (49 percent), Roman Catholic (37 percent), and Muslim (11 percent).\(^5\) The religious divisions follow ethnic and geographic lines: Croats and Slovenes, living in the west, are nearly all Catholics; the Serbs, Montenegrins, and Macedonians, living in the east, are mostly Orthodox. Adherence to the Orthodox religion is considered one of the attributes of Serbian nationality—the many Muslims who live in Serbia are not considered Serbs.

The history of the South Slavs\(^*\) has accentuated their ethnic and religious differences. The Croats and Slovenes—Catholic, using the Roman alphabet, and associated through much of their recent history with the Austro-Hungarian Empire—have tended to identify with the West and to regard themselves as culturally more advanced than the other ethnic groups. On the other hand, the Serbs—Orthodox and using the Cyrillic alphabet—have regarded themselves as rightfully predominant on the grounds of number and their successful fight against the Turks for national independence after half a millennium of foreign rule.\(^6\)

The territory that became Yugoslavia in 1918-19 had, in fact, been for hundreds of years the frontier between the Slavic-Christian West and the Turkish-Muslim East. Until the mid-19th century, the country, except for Croatia and Slovenia, was under Turkish control and had suffered the effects of corruption, religious discrimination, oppression, and denial of political and personal rights. The result was to reinforce political turbulence and to impress on the area a tradition of violence in personal, ethnic, religious, and political conflicts. Justice tended to become a personal or familial responsibility and, in the blood feud, strictly a matter of vengeance. Cruelty, outlawry, and sudden death became the commonplaces of everyday life, with the mountains offering protection for political dissidents, outlaws, and insurgents.

**Economic Problems of the Interwar Years**

Although Yugoslavia did not lack natural resources of coal and metals, the country skirted the edge of economic disaster during the period of its independence after World War I. Its economic problems stemmed mainly from its heavy dependence on agriculture, which, according to the 1931 census, engaged 76 percent of the population. Various land reforms had reduced most peasant holdings far below the 25 acres estimated to be the minimum needed to sustain a family.

\(^*\)The name "Yugoslav," also spelled Jugoslav, means South Slav.
The farm labor supply greatly exceeded the demand, and the birth rate, in the interwar years consistently the highest in Europe outside the Soviet Union, aggravated the problem. Lack of capital and fragmentation of holdings made agriculture more primitive and less productive than it had been before World War I.

The economy just before the German invasion in 1941 was marked by persistent unemployment, low wages, high prices, and heavy expenditures for armaments, nearly all of which had to be bought from foreign manufacturers. Remittances from emigrants to the United States and South America formed a substantial part of the national income. Depression and unemployment were causing rumblings of discontent even before the occupation occurred.

**Nazi Germany Attacks and Overcomes Yugoslavia in April 1941**

Although there was political disaffection as well as economic discontent—the Serbs controlled the government and the army, with concomitant dissatisfaction on the part of the large Croat and Slovene minorities—the ultimate downfall of the Yugoslav monarchy came, not through internal weakness, but through German force. On March 25, 1941, Yugoslav ministers signed the Tripartite Pact, and by so doing linked Yugoslavia to the Axis powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan. A surge of popular protest greeted the news of the signing and two days later, on March 27, a military coup replaced the regent, Prince Paul, and his government with the young King Peter II.

The Yugoslav reaction enraged the German dictator Adolf Hitler, who was seeking freedom of movement to invade the U.S.S.R.; and he ordered the immediate destruction of Yugoslavia, stating that "the blow should be carried out with unmerciful harshness and the military destruction done in lightning-like fashion." The German invasion began on April 6, 1941, and ended in unconditional surrender 11 days later, forcing King Peter II and the royal government to flee first to Cairo, later to London. The Yugoslav army never had a chance. Some Croat forces refused to fight, and many Croats even greeted the Germans as liberators.

**The Axis Divides Yugoslav Territory**

After the surrender Hitler implemented his decision "to destroy Yugoslavia as a military power and a sovereign state." Hungary, allied with the Axis powers, was given two slices of Yugoslav territory north of the Danube and west of the Tisza. Italy was allowed to annex southern Slovenia and most of the Dalmatian coast and to occupy Montenegro and parts of Croatia and Macedonia. Montenegro became a nominally independent principality in personal union with the Italian Crown, ostensibly because the Italian queen had been a Montenegrin princess. Bulgaria, another Axis ally, was given Macedonia, except for the western region, which was incorporated into Albania, then under Italian control. Germany annexed northern Slovenia, took over direct administration of the Voivodina east of the Tisza River, and occupied all of a much smaller
Serbia. Shorn of the Voivodina, Montenegro, and Macedonia, Serbia was reduced to approximately its size before the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 and was given an ineffectual puppet government under Gen. Milan Nedić. 13

Croatia, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, became a nominally independent kingdom under Tomislav II, the Italian Duke of Spoletto, who wisely never entered the country to claim his throne. The government of Croatia was taken over by the Poglavnik (Leader) Ante Pavelić and his Ustaši, an émigré Fascist group which had little genuine support in the country. 14 The population of Croatia included a large Serbian minority, and Pavelić reportedly declared that a third of this group would have to leave the country and another third would be killed. 15 At carrying out the latter part of the statement he was to be better than his word. The Germans and Italians divided Croatia into spheres of influence, the Germans moving into the northeastern half. Thus after 11 days of war, Yugoslavia was politically fragmented and subjected to military occupation by its neighbors.

INSURGENCY

In the sudden and complete Yugoslav collapse, thousands of Yugoslav soldiers found it relatively easy to avoid the inconvenience of surrendering themselves and their weapons to the Germans. Most, no doubt, wanted nothing more than to go home, but some refused to recognize the surrender as final. Indeed, the quickness of the defeat was such that the country was psychologically unconquered; the spirit of rebellion was especially widespread and spontaneous among Serbs. Eventually, two major resistance groups were formed—one Serb nationalist and one Communist. Cooperating at first against the occupiers, they were soon split by political differences.

Col. Draža Mihailović Organizes First Resistance Against the Axis Occupiers

The earliest Yugoslav resistance force was formed by Col. Draža Mihailović, a senior officer of the royal army. Withdrawing to the mountains of western Serbia, by mid-1941 he had organized the nucleus of an insurgent force, with headquarters at Čačak.

Mihailović had been a brilliant staff officer; but, 48 years old at the time of the invasion, he was unknown outside the army and was not popular with his fellow officers. Like de Gaulle in France,* he had been an importunate critic of national strategy and policy. He had opposed the accepted strategy of defending Yugoslavia on the borders and had argued instead for a rapid withdrawal to a mountainous redoubt in Bosnia and western Serbia. He had been arrested for openly criticizing the government's policy of appeasement of the German minority in Slovenia. In February 1941, at the height of the government effort to preserve strict neutrality, he had

---

* See Chapter Five, "France (1940-1945)."
attended a party given by the British Military Attaché. For that he was placed under arrest for several weeks and then assigned as chief of staff in an unimportant command on the southern Adriatic coast. When war broke out, he was made chief of staff of the Sarajevo garrison.

Mihailović’s decision not to obey the surrender order was primarily another manifestation of his independent spirit. The springing up at the same time of other Serbian nationalist groups, known as Četniks, was wholly spontaneous, and in the first months the units of both Mihailović and the Četniks were for the most part out of touch with each other and with the outside world. Mihailović only began to emerge as the recognized Četnik leader in September 1941 after he succeeded in transmitting a radio message to the royal government-in-exile in London via the British naval station on Malta. A month later the British Middle East Command sent a liaison party. In January 1942 the exile government appointed Mihailović its minister of war and commander in chief of the Royal Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland. He was promoted rapidly through the ranks from colonel to army general.16

From the first, Mihailović did not regard his mission in Yugoslavia simply as resistance to the occupying power. He was at least equally intent on preserving his country from the occupiers’ ravages, on seeing the monarchy restored at the end of the war, and on re-establishing Serbian political predominance within Yugoslavia. Mihailović succeeded in making himself a popular hero but failed to extend his control sufficiently to create a true national resistance movement. He was not a completely successful leader of his own organization. In a multinational state, he fought for Serbian supremacy and for an exile government of doubtful popularity.17 With a loose, 19th-century-type, peasant militia organization, he attempted to make headway against a highly organized, tightly controlled rival movement.

**Yugoslav Communists Under Tito Organise Partisans Following German Attack on U.S.S.R.**

The other group, which came to be known popularly as the Partisans, had its roots in the Yugoslav Communist Party, which had been outlawed in 1921, and was led by the party’s Secretary General, Josip Broz, who had adopted the party name of "Tito" (The Hammer). The party’s role from the German invasion of Yugoslavia to the German attack on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, is unclear. Some say that it remained passive; the party, however, claims to have been laying the groundwork for future activity. In any event, on July 4, the Central Committee completed plans for an insurrection and creation of partisan units.18 Tito set up headquarters in Serbia in Užice and sent lieutenants to organize the resistance in other provinces.

The prospects of a successful Communist-led resistance were not good. The Communists had a small underground organization in being; they had a cadre of Spanish Civil War veterans; and they had a party membership, by their own count, of 12,000 members and 15,000 Young Communists.19 Their greatest handicap was their communism, which possessed no attraction for their best source of potential recruits, the religious and conservative peasantry.
On the other hand, the Partisans, unlike Mihailović, were not committed to an exclusive-nationality policy. Also, since (unlike the Četniks) they were not the trustees of an established order, they stood to benefit from any trend toward increased disorder. And in Tito they had an experienced and gifted organizer.

Born in Kumrovec, Croatia, in 1892, the son of a peasant blacksmith, Tito had early gone to work in factories in Croatia and in Vienna. Drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army in World War I, he had been captured by—according to some reports, he had deserted to—the Russians. He became a Bolshevik. Escaping from a prison camp in central Asia in 1917, he made his way to St. Petersburg to join the Russian revolutionists. Three years later, after attending the Comintern Institute in Moscow, he returned to Yugoslavia.

Tito’s subsequent life, until World War II, was that of a professional Comintern agent. During the early years he was a factory organizer and made frequent trips to Moscow to keep out of the hands of the Yugoslav police. In 1927 he became secretary general of the Croat branch of the Communist party. The next year he was arrested and sentenced to five years’ imprisonment. After his release, he left the country and set about systematically obliterating his former identity. Under various aliases such as Babitch and Walter, he worked mostly in Vienna and Paris. Achieving almost complete personal anonymity, he was remembered later by those who knew him then only as a short, dapper man who liked good living. During the Spanish Civil War, he handled Balkan recruiting for the International Brigade, staying in Paris while the men who were to become his closest associates in the Partisan command, the so-called Spanish nobility, acquired their fighting experience in the civil war.

In 1939 Tito took over underground direction of the Yugoslav Communist Party, first from Zagreb, later from the home of a wealthy supporter in Belgrade. During the invasion and early months of occupation, he held the party strictly to the Moscow line, and the Partisans were initially organized in the pattern that the Soviet government had established for its own occupied territories. Until well into the war, Tito revealed nothing about himself other than his strange nickname. Mihailović, when he met Tito, believed he was a Russian because he spoke Serbo-Croat with an accent. In Cairo, as late as 1943, British Intelligence officers were uncertain "whether Tito existed at all and if so whether he was a man or a woman." As Insurgent Operations Begin, Tito and Mihailović Promise Mutual Support—But Their Forces Clash

The first overt acts of insurrection recognized as such by the Germans came in the third week in July 1941 when a German general’s car was attacked and an ammunition dump at Semendria was blown up. Whether these acts were accomplished by Partisans or Četniks apparently could not be determined.
In the early period of insurgency, Tito's headquarters at Užice and Mihailović's near Čačak were only 25 miles apart; and by the fall of 1941, the two insurgent groups faced the problem of settling their relations with each other. Mihailović appeared to have the greater potential. He had the established Četnik organization, which provided a recruitment and supply system of sorts; and he had ties with the puppet government in Belgrade. He was supported by the royal Yugoslav government-in-exile, which had appointed him minister of war and argued his case in London. Furthermore, his policies in Yugoslavia coincided, at least during the first two years, with those stated by the British in August 1941: "to prepare a widespread underground organization ready to strike hard later on, when we give the signal." Meanwhile, guerrilla operations were to be limited to those which would "cause constant embarrassment to the occupying forces, and prevent any reduction in their numbers." After this, some supplies began trickling in, and for more than a year, in fact, the British supported only Mihailović.

The Partisans, on the other hand, were still quite weak in 1941. Tito's most likely source of aid and support, the Soviet Union, was suffering a series of crushing defeats and had more than enough troubles of its own. Lacking a support organization, he was in fact attempting to abolish the traditional village communes and to substitute people's liberation committees to be responsible for local administration, as well as for Partisan recruitment and supplies.

During September and October 1941, Mihailović and Tito met several times to seek a basis for collaboration; but the ideological gulf between Mihailović, the monarchist and Serbian nationalist, and Tito, the Communist and Croat, was unbridgeable. Tito's main object in the negotiations appears to have been to undermine Mihailović's sources of support. On October 21, he demanded that the village communes be abolished and replaced by people's liberation committees and that service in both the Četniks and Partisans be voluntary rather than obligatory. Five days later, Tito and Mihailović met once more and, without reaching any agreement in substance, promised each other general support. But on November 2, open fighting broke out between the Četniks and the Partisans. Henceforth the Yugoslav insurgency had the additional aspect of a civil war.

Forced Out of Serbia. Partisans Reorganize

Driven out of his Serbian headquarters at Užice in the late fall of 1941 by German attacks, Tito retreated first into eastern Montenegro and then into northwestern Bosnia, where Ustaši excesses had created favorable conditions for the insurgents. In late 1941, the Partisans claimed an effective strength of 91,000; their actual effective strength was undoubtedly very much less. In 1942 Communist insurgent activity shifted still further westward into Italian-occupied Croatia and Montenegro.

The forced movement out of Serbia produced a significant change in the Partisan organization. Until then the Partisans had intended, like the Četniks, to base their organization on the
territorial principle so that units would be formed and would operate in their local areas, from which they would also draw recruits and supplies. By early 1942, however, the Partisan command decided that it needed a force that could operate anywhere instead of being tied to a local area. Without entirely abandoning the territorial principle, it also began to form “proletarian brigades,” using, at least at first, people from cities and towns without local ties, giving them a strong military organization. The Partisan reorganization and development into a mobile military-type force were greatly aided by the Italian occupation forces, which focused on establishing control of the Dalmatian coast and ignored the Croatian interior.

Italian policy also deliberately strengthened the Četniks. In a game that the Germans regarded with great misgivings, the Italians attempted to play off the Četniks against both the Partisans and—surprisingly enough—the Ustaše. By late 1942 the Italians had reportedly armed and supplied 19,000 Četniks in Croatia and were using them as a major anti-Partisan force.

**Tito Adopts a National Front Strategy**

In the matter of securing Soviet support, the Partisans—or the People’s Army of Liberation, as they were then calling themselves—had little success during 1942. The Russians, still preoccupied with their own troubles and very dependent on the good will of the Western Powers, apparently urged Tito to play down communism and work toward establishing a national front. In September, to Tito’s huge dismay, the Russians elevated the royal Yugoslav ministry in Moscow to the rank of an embassy. Grudgingly, Tito took the hint. He created the People’s Liberation Anti-Fascist Front, of which the elected representative body, the Anti-Fascist Council of the People’s Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ), met in Bihac on November 26, 1942. AVNOJ, which claimed to represent all the national groups and a broad spectrum of political opinion, appointed an executive committee which assumed the functions of a government but avoided claiming actually to be a government.

As a national-front movement, the Partisans had considerable appeal. They adopted a federalist approach which avoided the old conflicts between ethnic groups and was viewed favorably even by numbers of anti-monarchist Serbs. The scarcity of Communist recruits forced them to seek and tolerate non-Communists in the rank and file. Partisan propaganda during this period carefully avoided any attack on King Peter in London. The Partisan leadership remained under tight Communist control; but Tito, besides being an unshakable Communist, was also an exceptionally capable leader who exerted wide personal attraction.

**Partisans Find Two Major Sources of Supply—the Allies and the Italians**

Successful counterinsurgency operations made the first eight months of 1943 a period of deepening crises for the Partisans, except in one important respect. The exception was the
awakening of British interest, which by spring prompted London to send a small British mission under Capt. F. W. Deakin to Tito. The British were dissatisfied with Mihailović's passivity and angered by evidence of Četnik collaboration with the Italians and the Nedić puppet government of Serbia.38 Tito, whatever his politics, appeared to be actively committed against the occupation powers.

The tide turned definitely for the Partisans on September 9, 1943, when the Italians surrendered. The Italian military collapse was sudden and complete. It opened to the Partisans not only the mountains of Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Montenegro, but the whole Dalmatian coast and offshore islands. In addition, they secured the weapons and equipment of six Italian divisions and enlisted the support of approximately two more.39 In a few weeks they obtained control, if only temporarily, of the whole Yugoslav coast and a sizable part of the interior.

**Partisans Create an Underground Government and Gain Increasing Allied Support**

On November 29, 1943, in Jajce, the AVNOJ met for the second time and declared itself the supreme legislative and executive body of Yugoslavia and "deprived" the royal government-in-exile of the right to represent Yugoslavia "anywhere." It named the National Committee of Liberation as the future government and elected Tito as premier, at the same time creating for him the rank of Marshal of Yugoslavia.39

More important for the immediate future was the upsurge in outside recognition and support. The British were considering establishing a beachhead on the Balkan peninsula, and Tito had an effective military force. Estimates of his strength by British and American observers placed it between 150,000 and 220,000 men, a substantial force in any case.40 At the Tehran Conference in early December 1943, the British urged full recognition and support for Tito; and at Cairo, on December 5, the Combined Chiefs of Staff directed Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Commander in Chief, Allied Forces, North Africa, to support "The Patriots in the Balkans to the greatest practicable extent." 41

**Četnik and Partisan Strength Compared**

As Tito's fortunes rose, Mihailović's declined. To compete with the Partisans, Mihailović created an elaborate military structure with a general staff, corps, and brigades. But his 70,000 to 80,000 Četniks remained scattered and only nominally subordinate to him.42 By the

---

*Parish was killed in Yugoslavia. When a full-scale American mission was later sent to Tito, the MacLean mission reverted to its original status.*
fall of 1943, nearly all of the Četnik detachment commanders had negotiated truces with the Germans. Mihailović denounced them as traitors, but he himself clearly regarded the Communist Partisans as the main enemy. 43

During the first half of 1944, the Partisans were in trouble again, though less seriously than in the previous year. By late 1943 the Germans had occupied the coast and most of the islands, and in the winter they began pressing in on the Partisans' mountain strongholds. The Partisans had 11 corps, 31 divisions, and 50 territorial detachments, but the corps numbered at most 10,000 to 15,000 men each and the divisions had the strength of regular regiments. The German estimate, in contrast to much higher Allied figures, placed Partisan strength at no more than 110,000 men. 44

**Tito's Fortunes Rise—British End Aid to Mihailović and Russians Send Mission to Partisans**

Whatever his military fortunes, Tito's political prospects had continued on the upswing. Early in 1944 the British decided to break with Mihailović and shift their full support to the Partisans. In January 1944 Churchill initiated a personal exchange of letters with Tito. In March the United States sent a mission to him, although, in accordance with the Tehran and Cairo discussions which had envisioned support for both insurgent movements, the United States also sent a mission to Mihailović. During this period the British mission was being withdrawn. By mid-May the British had persuaded King Peter II to dismiss his prime minister and to appoint, under Dr. Ivan Šubašić, a government committed to achieving an agreement with Tito. 45

In late February 1944 a Soviet military mission arrived, but officially the Russians showed only lukewarm interest in Tito. Their mission, on its arrival in Italy in January, had seemed to have no more than a vague idea of what it was to do, and it was prepared to deal with both Mihailović and Tito. 46 The first sign that the Russians' interest might be greater than it appeared came in March, when Tito, apparently on their advice, attempted an offensive into Serbia. At the end of May the Germans staged a successful raid on Tito's headquarters in Drvar, almost capturing him. As the situation deteriorated, Tito was forced to ask the Allies to evacuate him and his staff, and on June 3 he was taken by air to Bari. It was possibly a coincidence that one of the few Soviet crews flying support missions for the Partisans in a lend-lense Dakota managed to be the one that evacuated Tito. Later in the month he moved with his headquarters to the Allied-held island of Vis. 47

**A Summary of the Allied Effort To Aid the Yugoslav Guerrillas**

By mid-1944, Tito's prestige stood so high that he could command a major Allied support effort. Between June 1941 and June 1943, total supply deliveries, mostly British, to the Partisans had amounted to no more than 6.5 tons, while the Četniks had received 23 tons. Between June 1943 and June 1944, deliveries to the Partisans rose to 3,564 tons by air and 14,030 tons
by sea; almost two-thirds of this tonnage was delivered between January and June 1944. In the fall of 1943, the Allies had taken Vis as a commando and transshipment base, and during the first half of 1944 the Allies began operating aircraft from bases at Bari and Brindisi in Italy. At Brindisi, Partisans who had been brought out for medical treatment packed the supplies, which consisted mainly of small arms, ammunition, dynamite, rations, clothing, and medical supplies, but also included gasoline, oil, jeeps, and occasionally mules.

On June 4, 1944, the Allies established the Balkan Air Force (BAF), with two offensive fighter wings, a light bomber wing, and a Special Operations Wing. Operating mostly with RAF units, although several U.S. Army Air Force elements were included, BAF had major responsibility for supporting the Partisans. The Balkan Air Terminal Service (BATS) was activated to maintain and operate the 36 landing strips used in Yugoslavia. Allied planes had begun bringing out Partisan wounded in early April and during the next 13 months they evacuated, all told, 19,000 persons. By the end of April 1945 the Balkan Air Force had flown 9,211 successful sorties out of 12,305 attempts and delivered 18,150 short tons of supplies. Eighteen aircraft had been lost. The Soviet Union furnished crews to fly six leased U.S. aircraft.

Final Operations Secure Tito's Control Over Yugoslavia

The late summer of 1944 brought victory into sight for Tito. In the fourth week of August, the Soviet Second and Third Ukrainian Fronts smashed German Army Group South Ukraine on the lower Dnestr. Rumania surrendered on August 23, Bulgaria on September 8. On September 6, a Soviet armored spearhead reached the Danube at the Iron Gate, 100 miles east of Belgrade.

The first week of September the Mediterranean Allied Strategic Air Force joined the Partisans in RATWEEK, a series of intensive raids on German communications lines out of Greece through Yugoslavia. Allied heavy bombers flew 1,373 sorties and dropped 3,000 tons of bombs. For the first time in the war the Partisans were able to operate successfully in Serbia.

On September 21, Tito disappeared from his headquarters on Vis. He was not heard from again until he reappeared in Yugoslavia as the Partisans were moving from the west into Serbia to meet the Russians advancing on Belgrade. In Moscow in the meantime, he and Stalin apparently had agreed that the Russians would participate in the attack on Belgrade but leave the reconquest of the rest of Yugoslavia to the Partisans. When Belgrade fell on October 20, the war still had some months to go; but for Tito and the Partisans, the major effort was over.

COUNTERINSURGENCY

During the period of partition and occupation, Dr. Ante Pavelić, installed by the Germans as head of the Croatian government, was the sole indigenous political figure to attain any kind of
stature, and that entirely as the most vicious of all Axis collaborationist leaders. Born in 1889, Pavilić began his career as a Croat separatist shortly after World War I. In 1928 he had founded a secret terrorist organization, the Ustaši (rebellion); and a year later he had been forced to flee abroad, first to Bulgaria and then to Italy.

In Italy and at a center near the Yugoslav border in Hungary, he organized his followers in the Ustaši along military lines and worked at various plots and plans against the royal Yugoslav government. The assassination of Yugoslav King Alexander at Marseilles in 1934, in which Pavilić was implicated, made him to some degree a Croat national hero. But the numbers of his outright supporters remained small, and the years in exile gave his movement the appearance of a foreign conspiracy. After 1937, as a result of a warming trend in Italian–Yugoslav relations, the Italian government forced him to disband his organization. In early 1941, when it appeared that Yugoslavia would join the Tripartite Pact, the Italians demanded that he cease even the minor political activity he was then conducting in Florence.

The Nazis Use Pavilić To Create a Reign of Terror in Croatia

Pavilić's opportunity came as the result of an interview between a German Foreign Ministry representative and the Ustaši underground chief in Croatia, the former Col. Slavko Kvaternik. On the basis of that interview, Hitler decided to make use of Pavilić and the Ustaši in Croatia. Although an upwelling of separatist sentiment was to have been expected in Croatia in any case, Kvaternik's proclamation of Croatian independence on April 10, 1941, several hours before the German troops arrived may have hastened the Yugoslav collapse. Probably more important to the Germans, it gave the Nazi invasion the appearance of not being entirely naked German aggression.

Having returned to Croatia and declared himself the Poglavnik (Leader), Pavilić failed from the start to attract any genuine popular support. The Croat nationalists who had stayed at home regarded him and his fellow émigrés as interlopers. The nation at large was dismayed when it learned that he had ceded Dalmatia to Italy.

Most damaging was Pavilić's unleashing of the Ustaši in the summer of 1941 on a wave of repression and murder, particularly aimed at the large Serbian minority of Croatia. As the head of a nation in anything like the normal sense, Pavilić was a disastrous failure. In their sphere, the Italians practically excluded the Pavilić regime from any share in the administration even though Pavilić had originally been an Italian protégé. His German advisers would gladly have seen him removed. Even Kvaternik, whom he had promoted to field marshal, became involved in a planned coup before being dismissed in 1942. The hard core of the Ustaši, fearing the consequences of a change, stayed loyal; but that Pavilić held power throughout the war must, in the end, be credited entirely to Hitler, who regarded the ruthless police state as the most suitable form of government for the German satellite countries.
In Serbia Nedić Attempts To Play an Ameliorative Role

To Serbia, the potential nucleus of a resurgent Yugoslavia, Hitler denied even the dubious comfort of a homegrown tyranny. That Milorad Nedić, head of the puppet Serbian government, lasted out the war is attributable not to any support, either internal or external, but only to the utter insignificance of the administration he headed. Nedić, 59 years old at the time of the invasion, had been a famous and popular general. A hero of the Balkan Wars and World War I, he had been minister of war and the navy until November 1940, when he was removed as a result of a policy dispute in which he apparently argued for an agreement with the Axis. During the invasion he held a troop command in southern Serbia.

Nedić was Yugoslavia's Pétain. He knew when he agreed to head a government that he would be powerless, but he hoped that his personal prestige would be enough to keep the Serbs from acts that would provoke the Germans to more severe measures than they already intended. Had he wanted to, he would not have been able to conduct a coherent policy; both the Germans and his own appointees ignored him. His officials cultivated ties with Mihailović's organization, but did it in such a manner that neither the Germans nor the Allies could determine whose interests, if any, were served thereby. Had he been allowed to, Nedić might have presented a better defense than the postwar Yugoslav government cared to hear. Unlike Pavelić, who escaped into a comfortable retirement abroad, Nedić accompanied the retreating Germans and was extradited to Yugoslavia by the Allies in September 1945. Shortly thereafter, before he could be brought to trial, he allegedly committed suicide by jumping from a window in the state prison in Belgrade.

Axis Troop Deployment, Organization, and Strength

In German eyes Yugoslavia was, throughout World War II, both an occupied country and, together with Albania and Greece, part of a potentially active theater of operations. As a consequence, the foreign troops in the country, except the Hungarians and the Bulgarians, always performed two functions, the one territorial (occupation), the other operational. It is, therefore, not possible to state—as both the Partisan and the Allied commands were in the habit of doing during the war—that at any given time a specific number of Axis divisions were being tied down by the insurgents. The operational requirements of the theater weighed at least as heavily as the insurgency in determining the deployment of forces and, in fact, strongly influenced the response to the insurgency.

From April 1941 to September 1943 the main operational responsibility in Yugoslavia fell to the Italians, because they held the coast. The operational command was the Italian Second Army under Gens. Vittorio Ambrosio (April 1941-January 1942), Mario Roatta (January 1942-January 1943), and Lorenzo Dalmazzo (January 1943-September 8, 1943). The Second Army, for a time redesignated General Headquarters Slovenia-Dalmatia, apparently also executed the territorial functions in the Italian-occupied areas.
The German operational command during the same period (from April 1941-September 1943) was the Twelfth Army, redesignated Army Group E in January 1943. The commanding generals—who, until a reorganization of German forces in the Balkans in the fall of 1943, were also the Armed Forces (Wehrmacht) Commanders, Southeast—were Field Marshal Wilhelm List (April-October 1941), Gen. Walter Kuntze (October 1941-August 1942), and Gen. Alexander Loehr (from August 1942). The German Twelfth Army and Army Group E headquarters were located in Salonika and were mainly concerned with the defense of Greece and the Aegean islands.

Territorial responsibility in Yugoslavia, so far as the Germans exercised it, was in the hands of the Military Commander, Serbia, who was for the greater part of the period (November 1941-August 1943) Gen. Paul Bader. The Military Commander, Serbia, was subordinate to the Armed Forces Commander, Southeast (who was in the Armed Forces High Command channel) but received his directives through the Army High Command. In Croatia, the German Plenipotentiary General, Gen. Edmund von Glaisco-Horstenau (May 1941-August 1944), exercised primarily advisory and liaison functions.54

The strengths of the Axis forces in Yugoslavia up to the Italian surrender in September 1943 can be estimated only roughly. The Germans apparently had in the neighborhood of 100,000 men, fewer in 1941, more in 1942 and after; the Italians, about 200,000; the Bulgarians, less than 100,000. The highest annual strengths in divisions55 were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1941</th>
<th>1942</th>
<th>To September 1943</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgarian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some Yugoslav Forces Also Serve the Axis

Indigenous military forces supporting the occupation powers varied widely in strength and effectiveness, and they were slow in coming into being. The most effective were the 369th, 373d, and 392d Infantry Divisions, which were formed of Croatian recruits with Volksdeutsche (ethnic German) officers and trained in Germany as part of the German army. Less satisfactory was the SS-recruited 13th SS "Handschar" Division of Balkan Muslims. None of the four divisions was specifically intended or trained for counterinsurgency operations, and none was in action before the spring of 1943.56

The largest of the indigenous forces was the Croatian army. It was composed of the regular army—a drafted militia of very low quality—and the "elite" Ustaši units. Together the two reached a peak strength of about 150,000 in 1943. The Ustaši units, originally the Poglavlji's bodyguard, eventually expanded to form one division and fifteen weak brigades. They were the
chief instrument for the liquidation of the Serbian minority in Croatia, and of all the counterinsurgency forces they were by far the most ruthless.

Because German policy aimed at preventing a resurgence of Serbian nationalism, the Serbian forces remained weak, fragmented, and ineffective. The only armed forces the Nedić government controlled were the Serbian National Guard, which had an authorized strength of 15,000 (never attained), and some Četnik detachments not affiliated with Mihailović. In Serbia the Germans formed, under army command, the Serbian Volunteer Corps (9,000 men in 1943) and, under the SS and Police Commander in Serbia, ten auxiliary police battalions. The most effective of the German-controlled units in Serbia was the so-called Russian Serbia Corps, five under-strength regiments recruited from survivors of the White Russian Wrangel Army who had emigrated to Yugoslavia after the Russian Civil War and of Russian refugees from Rumanian-occupied Bessarabia. 57

Initial Nazi Policy Is Terrorization

In their first reaction to the insurgency, the Germans resorted to their by-then standard initial approach of punitive deterrence, or Abschreckung. On September 16, 1941, the Armed Forces High Command ordered the execution of hostages at the rate of 50 to 100 for each German soldier killed, the executions to be accomplished in such a manner as to "increase the deterrent effect." 58

The executions were in fact carried out on approximately the prescribed scale—20,140 hostages were shot between September 1, 1941, and February 12, 1942—and they did partially achieve the desired deterrent effect. Mihailović, whose overriding interest was in preserving Serbian hegemony in a restored Yugoslavia, became more cautious in his operations, in order to forestall a blood bath that could decimate the Serbs. 59

Germans Drive Partisans Out of Serbia

The Partisans, too, were vulnerable. Although they had started early to establish a broad base similar to that of the Četniks, it is doubtful whether in 1941 they had any significant strength outside their core area. In November 1941, the Germans, employing one full division and elements of three others, combed the mountains and closed in on the Partisan centers of Užice and Čačak. At the end of the month the Partisans broke up and retreated piecemeal into eastern Bosnia. By their own reckoning they suffered heavily in that operation, which the Yugoslavs later designated as the "first enemy offensive" (of seven). Out of a 20,000-man force their casualties amounted to 4,180 killed, 3,800 missing, and 6,700 wounded. 60 Politically and strategically, the defeat was equally serious. The Partisans had lost their foothold in Serbia, which with Belgrade was the key to political control of Yugoslavia. For the next three years, the return to Serbia would be the Partisans’ ultimate and, much of the time, remote goal.
The German success, however, was less than complete, and its shortcomings established the pattern that assured the Partisans' survival and eventual victory. The anti-Partisan operation showed that in the mountains it was all but impossible to draw an encirclement tight enough to prevent the escape of every guerrilla. Add to that a primitive communications network that prevented rapid troop movements, insufficient troops, and a division of responsibility between two occupying powers—and full suppression of the insurgency became a will-o’-the-wisp pursuit. Tito drew the proper conclusions and began organizing accordingly. 61

Axis Offensives of 1942 Drive Partisans Into Favorable Territory

The official Yugoslav division of Counterinsurgency operations into seven offensives provides a useful framework within which to describe an otherwise largely incomprehensible series of events; it is, however, a framework invented and imposed on the events after they had occurred. The "second offensive" is an example. The Germans planned it, apparently, as a small operation by three German regiments and several Croat battalions, with the modest objective of clearing the Partisans out of the mountains between Sarajevo and Višegrad after their retreat from Serbia. Conducted between January 3 and February 5, 1942, in deep snow and bitter cold, it caught the Partisans in a moment of weakness and, consequently, dealt them an unexpectedly severe blow. Their losses, according to the Yugoslav figures, were 2,750 killed, 1,120 missing, and 5,800 wounded, out of possibly not much more than 10,000 men.6

Tito, his headquarters staff, and the survivors of this second German offensive escaped south to Foča on the border of Bosnia and Montenegro.62 The Partisans were badly weakened, but fortune worked toward their survival. In withdrawing south past Sarajevo, they had crossed into the Italian occupation zone, and the Italians were much less inclined toward strenuous counterinsurgency operations than the Germans.

In the "third offensive," the Partisans lumped together all the counterinsurgency actions against them between March and September 1942. Actually, the counterinsurgency forces undertook only one significant operation during that time. In the spring the Military Commander, Serbia, enlisted the Italians' reluctant assistance in an operation against the Partisan center at Foča. With three German divisions, three highly unenthusiastic Italian divisions, and a collection of Četnik detachments in the Italian service, the attack began on April 20. The Germans moved out from the north, the Italians closed in on the east and west, and the Četniki

*Although it is difficult to appreciate why a military force should want to inflate its own losses, the Partisan figure, as given in postwar Yugoslav publications, consistently seems high. One reason might be, since exact-strength figures are seldom given, to give the impression that the force engaged was larger than in fact it was. In general, the losses in killed and missing correspond to the German estimates. The greatest apparent discrepancy is in the numbers of wounded. The total figures of 399,680 wounded and 31,200 dead of wounds, for instance, would, if correct, give the Partisans a better recovery rate than most regular armies with full medical establishments.
completed the ring on the south. In the wild mountains around the headwaters of the Drina a tight encirclement would have been impossible to maintain even if the Italians had been more determined. By mid-June the Partisans had broken out and begun to retreat north.\(^4\)

The Partisans' march north took them deep into the Italian sphere of interest in Croatia. Again Tito had made a fortunate choice. The area was one which had experienced the depredations of the Ustaši. The Croat army and the Četniks were not strong enough to put up serious opposition, and the Italians were willing to tolerate anything that would weaken the Croat puppet government. During the summer the Partisans moved north and west through the mountains. In the communities along the route of march, which also were the chief sources of Partisan supplies, numbers of men volunteered or were drafted. In Croatia the Ustaši reign of terror drove in more volunteers. Early in November, having covered 180 miles, the Partisans stopped at Bihać in northern Bosnia.\(^5\)

**Germans Almost Smash Partisans and Četniks in Two Major Operations of 1943**

By fall 1942, the Germans had begun to worry about possible Allied landings on the Yugoslav coast. They believed that in such an event the Četniks and the Partisans would abandon their own quarrels and turn completely against the occupation powers. In October the Germans began to plan and negotiate with the Italians for Operation WEISS (White) to smash the Partisans in the Bihać area and for Operation SCHWARZ (Black) against the concentration of Četnik detachments in Montenegro.

The Partisans' turn came first. Operation WEISS—the "fourth offensive"—began on January 20, 1943, with Germans, Italians, Croats, and Četniks advancing to encircle the Bihać center. While a mobile German unit drove straight through from northwest to southeast, the rest closed in from the sides. On January 24, the Germans took Bihać, but the Italians had failed to close the circle on the south, and the Partisans escaped through the gap. In the second half of February the Germans and Italians pursued the Partisans as they headed south toward Montenegro, a march made difficult by the winter weather. Pursuing German and Italian forces drove Tito to make crossings of the Neretva and Drina Rivers against Četnik and Italian blocking detachments. In Montenegro, they pushed Tito south past his former center at Foča to the Durmitor Mountains, where he arrived greatly hampered by many wounded and an outbreak of typhus. Tito's luck appeared to be running out. Sick and near starvation, his men, then numbering about 20,000 in the Durmitor, needed a long rest, but their retreat had taken them into exactly the area in which the Germans had planned their offensive against the Četniks.

With heavy reinforcements of 40,000 Italian troops and 10,000 Bulgarian and quisling Croat formations added to their own augmented strength of 50,000, the Germans began Operation SCHWARZ—the "fifth offensive"—on May 15. The Partisans in the area had no choice but to break out and get on the move again. Their first intention, to break out to the southeast into
Albania, proved impossible. At the end of May, two attempts, one to cross the Drina and another to cross the Šutjeska, failed. Finally, between June 5 and 9 they forced a crossing of the Šutjeska and began a retreat north into eastern Bosnia.\textsuperscript{64}

The Germans claimed to have killed 5,600 Četniks in SCHWARZ.\textsuperscript{66} In the summer the Germans, in a raid on Čačak, captured part of Mihailović's headquarters staff; and police raids throughout Serbia, reaching even into the puppet government, threatened the Četnik organization.\textsuperscript{67} Individual Četnik leaders began truce negotiations with the Germans. Thus mid-summer 1943 was a time of crisis for the Četniks as well as the Partisans.

**Italian Surrender Creates Crisis for German Organization and Operation**

Suddenly, in September 1943, the German situation in Yugoslavia changed completely. The Italian capitulation at that time forced the Germans to assume operational responsibility for the coastal defense and territorial responsibility for the former Italian occupation areas. On the coast and in the whole former Italian occupation zone, the Partisans, having fallen heir to substantial stocks of Italian weapons and equipment, were there ahead of them.

To cope with the Germans' vastly increased military and administrative responsibilities, Hitler appointed Field Marshal Maximilian Freiherr von Weichs as Commander in Chief of the Southeast Theater and at the same time made him his own subordinate by naming him also Commanding General, Army Group F, with operational command in Yugoslavia and Albania. To oversee the coastal defenses on the Adriatic, von Weichs was given the Headquarters, Second Panzer Army, under Gen. Lothar Rendulic. Below the theater command but not directly subordinate to it, the Wehrmacht appointed Gen. Hans Felber, Military Commander, Southeast, giving him territorial command in Serbia, Croatia, and Montenegro.\textsuperscript{68} For the first time, Hitler also undertook to approach the Balkan problem politically, appointing Ambassador Hermann Neubacher as Special Plenipotentiary of the Foreign Ministry in Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece.\textsuperscript{69}

For the Germans the first essential was to restore the seaward defenses. That they did, if not with ease at least with notable dispatch, considering the Partisans' initial advantage and their own relative weakness. Army Group F had about 300,000 troops, less than half of them German and of those a good part neither fully trained nor equipped for combat.\textsuperscript{70} By November 1943, in a series of offensive moves which the Partisan Yugoslavs have lumped together as the first phase of the "sixth offensive," the Second Panzer Army succeeded in occupying the coast and the islands except Vis, which was occupied by several battalions of British Commandos and which, lying as far offshore as it did, would have required a full-scale amphibious assault.
Some Germans Recognize Problems Inherent in Policy of Terrorism

German agencies in Yugoslavia also proposed, in the fall of 1943, several palliative measures, but all encountered Hitler's opposition and therefore were not tried. As early as December 1942 the Army Group E chief of staff (later Army Group F chief of staff) had argued that the Partisans should be recognized as legal belligerents, in the hope, first, that they might then operate according to the rules of land warfare and so remove some of the terror of the guerrilla war and, second, that the German troops fighting the guerrillas "would be esteemed higher in our own OKW... with respect to decorations and assignments mentioned in OKW reports, etc..."

Ambassador Neubacher proposed to strengthen Serbia by returning Montenegro to it and giving the puppet government more power. He hoped in that way to create an indigenous counterweight to the Partisans and to the vicious but ineffectual Ustaši government in Croatia. Neubacher and the Armed Forces Operations Staff also urged an attempt to get a full-fledged truce with the Četniks by negotiations with Mihailović.

Only two new approaches were given trials, and both were so limited in scope that they had no practical effect. By personal intervention in specific cases Neubacher managed to reduce somewhat the shooting of hostages. And in the late fall he secured the release of the captured Četnik leader "Pape" Djurišić and secured permission for him to organize a small anti-Partisan unit that later fought effectively in Montenegro.

Germans Hold Partisans Out of Serbia

Intelligence against both the Partisans and Četniks was not difficult, because both Tito and Mihailović had to depend heavily on radio in exercising command, and the Germans had reduced breaking their codes to a routine. In October and November 1943, the Germans observed a movement of strong Partisan units westward into eastern Bosnia. The Partisans marched by day and hid off the roads at night. Radio intelligence, confirmed by a captured order, revealed that Tito was preparing an offensive into Serbia. By early December Tito had assembled his II and III Corps, which the Germans estimated to number 30,000 men, east of Sarajevo and south of Višegrad.

Knowing where the Partisans would be, General Rendulic was able, by an ostensibly random series of troop movements, to set a trap. In three operations—KUCEBLITZ (Ball Lightning), SCHNEE-STURM (Snow Storm), and WALDRAUSCH (Forest Rustle)—running from early December 1943 to late January 1944, the Germans put a disastrous end to the Partisans' first attempt to break into Serbia. The Germans placed Partisan losses in December and January at over 27,000.
In March 1944, Tito staged a second attempt to break into Serbia. The time was well chosen. Nearly all of the German troops that normally conducted counterinsurgency operations had been withdrawn for the occupation of Hungary. All the Military Commander, Southeast, had left were some Bulgarian occupation troops, Serbian detachments, and a detachment of the Brandenburg Division. The latter were German special forces troops, mostly Volksdeutsche who had lived in the country in which they were to operate and had been trained to fight as regulars or in Tarnung (i.e., in enemy uniform) as sabotage and covert reconnaissance units. The "division" existed only as a cover name. By mid-March Tito had deployed an estimated 17,000 Partisans south of Víšegrad. On March 21 they crossed the Lim River into Serbia. A week later they reached the Studenica and Reca Rivers and on March 31 they broke a line the Military Commander, Southeast, had established in the Ibar valley. In the meantime, von Weihs had ordered some of the forces back from Hungary. But by the time the Partisans reached the Ibar it was clear that their offensive had run out of momentum. They did not have the command capacity for lengthy offensive operations, and, forced as they were to live off the land, they had constantly to spread out in all directions. By April 2, the Military Commander, Southeast, was able to begin the counterattack without waiting for the troops from Hungary.

Germans Use New Shock Tactics in Attempts To Destroy Partisans

In the spring of 1944, the Germans changed their tactics. Instead of the conventional encirclements, which required more troops than they could spare, they decided to form shock detachments, which would drive into the Partisan centers from all directions, split them apart, and then attempt to run down or wear out the survivors. The new tactics were tried for the first time in late April in Operation MAIBAUM (Maypole) against Tito’s force retreating from Serbia. The operation fell short of the desired success, but it apparently forced Tito, who at first seemed intent on staying close to the Serbian border, to change his mind and withdraw his main force into northwestern Bosnia.

The new tactics were used again a month later in Operation ROESSELSPRUNG (Knight's Move) against the Partisans in the whole area between Bihac and Banja Luka. The intention was to drive into insurgent territory along all the roads, take the airstrips and fixed supply dumps, smash the command apparatus, split the Partisans into small groups, hunt them down, and wear them out or destroy them. An added feature was an attempt to capture Tito and his staff by dropping as SS parachute battalion on his headquarters at Drvar. The deployment was kept under elaborate and tight security.

The operation began on May 25, 1944, with the parachute drop on Drvar. Although Tito, his headquarters staff, and the Allied and Soviet missions escaped, the operation was a substantial

---

"According to the Germans, there is evidence that the Russians had a hand in planning this.
success. Tito had to ask the Allies to evacuate him and his staff by air. When Partisan radio traffic declined by half, the Germans correctly deduced that Tito’s command system had been badly damaged. Tito announced losses of 29,460 dead, 1,800 missing, and 38,600 wounded in this “seventh offensive,” which included both MAIBAUM and ROESSELSPRUNG. In the raid on Drvar, the Germans counted 20 British and Americans dead. German losses were also high, though probably not so high as the 48,960 killed and 7,840 captured that the Partisans claimed. The Germans were bothered particularly by the strong Allied air support for the Partisans. For the period of ROESSELSPRUNG (May–June 1944) they completely lost control of the air over Croatia, and their own air movements had to be made at night.77

**With Troops Withdrawn To Parry Russians, Germans Manage To Hold and Then Retreat**

By late July, the Germans found that the Partisans had recovered and were deploying for still another attempt to break into Serbia. Tito’s III Corps was assembled in eastern Bosnia and his I and II Corps were deployed near the Montenegrin-Albanian border. The Germans intended to hold the north group and planned Operation RUEBEZAHL (Mountain Sprite) against the stronger southern group. Before it could be organized, the Partisans attacked. On August 4, the Partisans’ I and II Corps crossed the Lim River and the next day they reached the Ibar valley. RUEBEZAHL began on the 12th and in a few days the Partisans were driven back across the Lim. In the fourth week of August, however, Soviet forces broke through the German Eastern Front and Rumania surrendered. Three German divisions, including the crack 1st Mountain Division, had to be taken out to build a front against the Russians. On August 30, RUEBEZAHL had to be stopped for lack of forces. The Partisans had again been driven out of Serbia, but at the end of the month the German commander was forced to evacuate Drvar, Jajce, and several towns in Bosnia taken during the spring and summer.78 RUEBEZAHL was the last concerted counterinsurgency operation the Germans conducted in Yugoslavia.

In early September 1944, the Germans managed again to keep Tito from gaining a firm foothold in Serbia during Operation RATWEEK. But the Russians were closing in on Belgrade from the east and, by the end of the month, the Partisans were in position in advance on the capital from the west.79 On October 20, 1944, Belgrade fell to Russia and Partisan forces, and the Germans withdrew from southern Yugoslavia. Although Partisans continued to operate behind German lines, the period of insurgency was at an end. In the capital, Tito met with representatives of the government-in-exile and signed with Dr. Subašić an agreement concerning formation of a regency council preliminary to creating a new government. Meanwhile, the Russians turned over to Tito the Yugoslav front—a fortunate circumstance for the Second Panzer Army, since the uncertain performance of the Partisans-turned-regulars enabled the Germans to stage a phased withdrawal to the Drina after the defeat at Belgrade.80
German Casualties as Compared With Yugoslav

The losses of the insurgent and counterinsurgent forces are difficult to calculate. The postwar Yugoslav government listed total Partisan and Yugoslav losses to May 1945 as 245,549 persons dead, 399,880 wounded, 31,200 died of wounds, and 28,923 missing. They lumped all "enemy" casualties together and claimed 447,000 killed and 559,434 captured (including 150,000 Army Group F troops taken prisoner after May 1945). They set the total losses inflicted on the enemy in the seven offensives alone at 132,000 killed and 25,025 captured. 81 The only German casualty figures available, not including indigenous and other foreign troops, give for the entire southeastern theater, from April 1941 to November 30, 1944, the totals of 24,267 dead and 13,060 wounded and missing. 82

OUTCOME AND CONCLUSIONS

After Belgrade was taken, Tito and the Partisans were in unchallenged control of liberated Yugoslavia. The Germans were primarily concerned with getting Army Group E out of Greece and Albania. As those troops came north, they raised the German strength in Croatia, but by then the southeastern theater was completely on the defensive. Mihailović, his forces shattered, had withdrawn into the Bosnian mountains. Tito was in the capital, and he had a political, military, and administrative organization capable of taking over the key positions in the government. With the war still on, a policy of tight state control in the Communist style was easy to justify. The introduction of conscription gave him a hold on the country's manpower; and, in any case, he had the armed strength to enforce his decisions. Moreover, his assumption of power was not merely a military coup: he enjoyed substantial genuine popular support; whatever internal opposition may have existed was totally disarmed and helpless. The Germans, although they still held nearly half of the country, hardly counted; and Tito had the favor and support of both the Western Powers and the Soviet Union. The Soviet armies across the Danube in Hungary were less than a day's march away. 83

After the takeover, Tito's popularity continued to rise. Appreciating the strength of monarchist sentiment in Serbia, he abolished the clenched-fist salute in the armed forces and by various other means short of substantive concessions continued to cultivate an image of himself as flexible enough politically to be able to cooperate with the monarchists. 8 To the Četniks and collaborator troops he offered an amnesty and an opportunity to "redeem" themselves by service in the National Army of Liberation. The Germans contributed to the success of the amnesty by allowing Pavelić to launch another wave of repression against the Serbs in Croatia.

--

81With Tito's forces ascendant, Mihailović, abandoned even by the exile government, went into hiding. On March 13, 1946, he was apprehended and subsequently tried for treason. On July 17, he died in Belgrade before a Communist firing squad.
Hitler believed he had to give the Poglavnik a free hand in order to keep him as an ally. In the
reaction, Četniks and Croat soldiers began to desert to the Tito forces in large numbers. 84

**Tito Moves To Achieve His Political Objectives**

On the larger political questions affecting the settlement, Tito quickly showed himself much
less accommodating. In a June 1944 meeting with Dr. Šubašić, Tito had agreed in secret to
recognize the royal government and had in return been appointed Supreme Commander of the
Yugoslav Armed Forces. On August 21, 1944, he and Šubašić had issued declarations of mutual
amity and tolerance. 85 Meeting with Šubašić again in late October, this time in Moscow, Tito
showed that he was determined to have by far the better of the bargain. He demanded an over­
whelming majority of the posts in the new government for the Communists, a Regency Council
to represent the King pending complete liberation of the country, and a plebiscite to determine
the final form of government. The King, meanwhile, was not to set foot in the country. Šubašić
had no choice but to agree. 86

The Western Powers became aware of a pronounced change in Tito's attitude after he be­
came established in Belgrade. In November, British field artillerymen operating guns for the
Partisans were suddenly ordered out of the country with the curt explanation that no agreement—
"such as has been signed between Yugoslav and U.S.S.R. forces"—existed to permit American
or British troops on Yugoslav soil. The hint was broad and clear: Tito would not tolerate
Allied ground operations on any scale in the Balkans. 87 On the other hand, the Partisans still
needed and received Allied supplies and air support. From October 1944 to the end of the war
Allied aircraft continued flying supply and support missions for the Partisans out of Italy. 88

As the months passed, Tito displayed no inclination to put into effect his agreement with
Šubašić. Finally, in February 1945, the Great Powers—meeting at Yalta, where Churchill and
Stalin agreed to share influence in Yugoslavia "50/50"—sharply urged Tito and Šubašić to get on
with the business of forming a government. 89 On March 7, the Regency Council and interim
government were formed. Tito became the Minister President and Šubašić, Foreign Minister.
Of 28 ministries, the Communists held 20, members of the former exile government held 3,
and representatives of other parties held 5. 90

On March 20, 1945, with Allied equipment and supplies shipped in through Dalmatian ports,
the Partisans began their final offensive against the Germans. The attack was aimed northwest
from the vicinity of Bihac toward Venezia Giulia, the district around Trieste that had been in
dispute between Yugoslavia and Italy since World War I. Across the Adriatic, the Allied armies
began advancing through Italy on April 1. Territorial acquisitions were contrary to Allied pol­
cy, and Tito had agreed in February that operations in Venezia Giulia would come under the
Allied Supreme Commander. On May 1 and 2, the Partisans occupied Venezia Giulia and Trieste
just a step ahead of the Allies. In June Tito agreed to evacuate Trieste and Pola but retained the
military government of the rest of the province. 91
The Postwar Government of Yugoslavia Is Communist

After the German surrender, Tito set about adjusting the political settlement in Yugoslavia to his own taste. On August 7, at the third meeting of the Anti-Fascist Council of the People's Liberation, the AVNOJ became the People's Provisional Assembly and assumed the task of preparing elections for a constituent assembly. The People's Provisional Assembly included among its 211 members of minority of "undiscredited" members of the last prewar parliament. The elections were held on November 11 and on the 29th the Constituent Assembly met and proclaimed the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. By the turn of the year Šubašić and the other "bourgeois" representatives had been forced out of the government. The constitution ratified on January 31, 1946, committed the country to a Communist dictatorship in the Soviet style.

The settlement proved viable. The dislocation and suffering caused by the guerrilla warfare had created conditions conducive to communism. Tito was not only a doctrinaire Communist but a capable national leader, and the country was so situated geographically that it could turn either to the East or to the West. One of the new government's greatest accomplishments was the apparent solution of the nationalities problem by adoption of the federal principle. Furthermore, Tito was able to begin immediately with the rebuilding of the country. The war had been tremendously costly in both human and economic terms: civilian casualties amounted to nearly 11 percent of the population, roads and railroads were almost completely destroyed, and agriculture and manufacturing suffered heavily. But the population loss was at least economically endurable in a country that suffered from a chronic oversupply of labor; and the spirit of optimism and national purpose that prevailed immediately after the war, plus substantial foreign aid via the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, were sufficient to accomplish the most essential reconstruction in about two years.

Yugoslavia's most serious postwar liabilities were the inherent weaknesses of Marxist economic theory when put into practice and the Stalinist drive in the late 1940's to subjugate the country politically and economically to the Soviet Union. In the two years after it was summarily read out of the Cominform in 1948, the Yugoslav regime successfully withstood the greatest threat to its existence by finding economic and political support in the West. In the 1950's the government's partial abandonment of rigid centralized planning achieved some improvements in industry and agriculture. Vulnerabilities still continue to exist, however, in the economy, particularly in agriculture, which has not made significant progress beyond the low state of the 1930's, and in the cohesion of the system itself. As the cases of Milovan Đilas and Vladimir Dedijer, dedicated wartime Partisans who later criticized the government openly, seem to indicate, there may be a lack of political unity within even the inner circle of old-time Communists.
The Counterinsurgency Campaign in Review

Militarily and politically, the Yugoslav Partisans were the most successful of the World War II resistance movements. They evaded destruction by the occupation forces, contributed to the German defeat, and outmaneuvered and outfought their indigenous rivals and opponents. Their principal asset was a capable, flexible, and aggressive leadership. They had the advantage of nearly ideal conditions for a successful insurgency: rugged terrain, a population inured to hardship and willing to accept guerrilla activity as an almost normal pursuit, indigenous opposition that was both unpopular and inept, and occupation forces that for various reasons could not carry out a thoroughgoing campaign of repression but at the same time were unwilling to adopt other, more conciliatory counterinsurgency methods. Moreover, the Partisans were affiliated with the winning side in the war and enjoyed the support of both the Western Allies and the Soviet Union—and they were favored by a large measure of luck.

The Yugoslav experience illustrates three major difficulties of organizing a successful counterinsurgency campaign: the cost, the tactical problems, and the persistence of outside influences on the outcome. It seems likely that, had the Germans been willing to pay the price in terms of troops and materiel, they could have eliminated the insurgency at any time before the summer of 1944. But in doing so they would not have gained a proportionate advantage in terms of their total situation, and the strength they would have needed to employ against the insurgents could always have been employed to better purpose elsewhere. Consequently, the counterinsurgency operations had to be conducted within the limits of a tactical duel in which neither side could secure decisive superiority.

The Germans developed two tactical forms: the encirclement with convergence, which required relatively large forces and a degree of precision difficult to achieve in rough terrain; and the direct thrust, which required surprise, speed, and accurate intelligence. Both were effective, but both fell short of full effectiveness against a determined and skillful opponent. In isolation the insurgency might have ultimately withered and died as the result of the military operations against it, but with the other forces that came increasingly into play, survival alone became for the insurgents the guarantee of eventual success. By political repression the Germans themselves nourished the insurgency. More important, the moral and physical support the Partisans drew from outside the country—the expectation that Germany would lose the war and the political and military assistance from the Allies—tied the success of the insurgency to the result of the whole war and reduced the counterinsurgency operations, so far as any permanent effect was concerned, to exercises in futility.
NOTES

5. Ibid., Table 4, opposite p. 16.
20. Ibid., pp. 10-43.
22. Ibid., p. 9.
28 Dr. Hugh Dalton, Minister in charge of Special Operations Executive, statement of August 1941, quoted in Ehrman, Grand Strategy, V, 77.

29 Ibid., V, 78.

30 See Markert, Osteuropa, pp. 110 and 114ff, and Grujić (ed.), The Liberation Struggle, pp. 31-33.

31 Markert, Osteuropa, p. 115.

32 Vojno-Istoriski Institut, The War Effort of Yugoslavia, 1941-1945 (Belgrade: Vojno-Istoriski Institut, no date) p. 34.

33 Ibid.


35 Markert, Osteuropa, p. 116.


38 Ibid., V, 78; Maclean, Eastern Approaches, p. 279.


40 Grujić (ed.), The Liberation Struggle, pp. 50ff.

41 Ehrman, Grand Strategy, V, 80.


43 Ibid., p. 794.

44 Goerlitz, Der Zweite Weltkrieg, II, 141; Schramm (ed.), Kriegstagebuch, IV, 637.

45 Schramm (ed.), Kriegstagebuch, IV, 637.


47 Ibid., V, 278.

48 Maclean, Eastern Approaches, p. 454.


50 Craven and Cate, Europe, p. 473.

51 Markert, Osteuropa, pp. 102, 106, 206, 317, Neubacher, Sonderauftrag, p. 30.

52 Grujić (ed.), The Liberation Struggle, p. 19; Markert, Osteuropa, pp. 102-105.


[63] Goerlitz, Der Zweite Weltkrieg, II, 139; Historical Atlas.

[64] Goerlitz, Der Zweite Weltkrieg, II, 141.

[65] Schramm (ed.), Kriegstagebuch, p. 834; Goerlitz, Der Zweite Weltkrieg, II, 144ff; Historical Atlas.


[71] Gen. der Infanterie Hermann Foertsch, testimony of October 20–21, 1947, tr. and extracted in Trials of the War Criminals, XI, 1043–1044; also Markert, Osteuropa, p. 117.


[73] Neubacher, Sonderauftrag, p. 151.

[74] Schramm (ed.), Kriegstagebuch, IV, 638.


[77] Ibid., pp. 660–64; Rendulic, Gekämpft, Gesiegt, Geschlagen, pp. 224–28; Vojno-Istoriski Institut, The War Effort, p. 29; Historical Atlas.


[79] Ibid., p. 698.


115
SELECTED READING


