IVAN MATOVIĆ

ARSO JOVANOVIĆ

COMMANDER OF ALL YUGOSLAVIA AND MARTYR OF THE REVOLUTION

SAVA PRESS

"Arso Jovanović remains a true figure from legend — he came among the people, helped them when they were in their darkest hour, and then returned to his star, forever carrying the charisma of an heroic martyr that has always been greatly valued in this region, and which haunted his killers for decades, tormenting them and reminding them of their crime."

Ivan Matović

ARSO JOVANOVIĆ

Gold Medal for Diligent Service, 1931
Order of the Yugoslav Crown, 5th Class, 1940
Order of the Partisan Star, 1st Class, 1944 and 1945
Order of Bravery, 1944 and 1945
Order of Merit for the People, 1st Class, 1945
Order of Brotherhood and Unity, 1st Class, 1947
Order of the Yugoslav Flag, 1st Class, 1947
1941 Commemorative Medal
Albanian Order of the Partisan Star
Czechoslovak Order of the White Lion
Polish Order of Grunwald
Order of Suvorov, 1st Class
Order of Kutuzov, 1st Class

"The great liberation war saved our peoples from nazi extermination. This struggle erased the shame of betrayal brought upon us by the traitors and eliminated the danger of the Ustaše and Chetniks holding a bloody knife to the people's throat. Through our long and difficult struggle, the brotherhood of our peoples was realized — the greatest achievement of this fight. Through bold and heroic resistance, we have gained an international reputation greater than ever before in our history."

Arso Jovanović, 1946.

Publisher's Note

This edition of *Arso Jovanović: Commander of All Yugoslavia and Martyr of the Revolution* is translated from three Serbo-Croatian original articles, with the source denoted at the end of each. It serves as a short biography, a companion to the author's extensive book *Commander with a Halo of a Martyr.*

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ARSO R. JOVANOVIĆ (1907-1948)

He was born on March 24, 1907, as the epic poem says, "in evil times and years of hunger." Along with his mother Zorka and sisters, Arso spent the four years of war in his native Zavala (10 kilometres from Podgorica), listening to the ominous echoes of cannons and longing for the return of his father Radivoje from the battles for the liberation of Pljevlja (1912), the conquest of Skadar and from the Bregalnica (1913), from Glasinac (1914) and from Mojkovac, only to greet him blinded by the explosion of an Austro-Hungarian shell during the assault on the trenches at Bojna Njiva on Christmas Eve 1916, under the command of Serdar Janko Vukotić. Beside him, permanently deprived of his sight, Arso spent those years at the family hearth, years in which — under the influence of his father as an irreplaceable guide — he absorbed his deepest impressions about life, people and ethics.

Life was cruel beyond measure: the Austro-Hungarians plundered everything that could be carried away and burned whatever could burn, mercilessly humiliating Radivoje because of Mojkovac and demanding the head of his only son, so Arso's relatives persistently hid him in damp caves, from which he would forever carry a heavy migraine. He lived on *kačamak* made from "flour" obtained by grinding beech bark or hazel catkins and corncobs, and he watched how the densely sown cemeteries — due to mass deaths from hunger, typhus and the

Arso Jovanović with his mother Zorka, Belgrade, 1945.

Spanish flu, scourges sung about even to the accompaniment of the *gusle* — became overcrowded. The responsible and hard-working Zorka was left to care for her blind husband and raise their only son for some future Bojna Njiva, fulfilling her husband's wish that Arso finish higher education and their daughters Raka, Draga and Miljuša at least complete elementary school — "so they would not remain blind while still having their eyes."

He attended gymnasium in Podgorica, sustained by the "thin flour cakes" prepared by the caring Zorka, with a pronounced talent for his mother tongue and history, but inclined to study mathematics. Poverty, as well as the views he had absorbed at home, took their toll — along with nine schoolmates, he chose the military profession.*

The schooling of 358 cadets of the 53rd Class of the Lower School of the Military Academy began on October 1, 1925.** The first publication he encountered — apart from literature for the study of professional and general subjects — was *Vojni vesnik*, under whose masthead it was stated that it was "a journal for the military and literature," a well-written and rationally composed reading that he would continue to read regularly and contribute to throughout his cadet and officer years. In his free time he read Russian classics, Serbian patriotic poetry and French love poetry, diligently learning French and, under the guidance of a part-time "singing teacher," acquiring musical education and perfecting his "true God-given gift" — an exceptionally beautiful tenor voice. The first

* Memory of his "classmate" Milutin Šušović, colonel of the Yugoslav People's Army.

** The usual "commemorative booklet" of the 53rd class was, allegedly, printed after the Second World War in London, but the author was unable to obtain it.

book he brought home from Belgrade on leave was a newly published biography of Napoleon I, written by General Staff Colonel Dragomir D. Pavlović.* He also subscribed to the *Great War of Serbia* edition published by the Main General Staff,** which was considered a cultural work in the education of officer corps.

The cadets of the 53rd Class graduated on April 1, 1928. On the list of 243 "infantrymen" Second Lieutenant Jovanović ranked twelfth. His first post was as a platoon leader in the renowned 10th Infantry Regiment — the Takovo Regiment, based in the prestigious Sarajevo garrison.*** For exemplary service in that post, as a second lieutenant he was awarded the Gold Medal for Diligent Service,**** and in 1940 — as commander of the School Battalion in Kalinovik and author of the notable book *Tactics of the Infantry Battalion* — he received the Order of the Yugoslav Crown, Fifth Class. His free time was spent reading books on military skills and history, improving his French and training his voice, always aware — as his close friend Colonel Mar-

* Memory of his relative, history professor Jagoš Jovanović.

** The first book described the Battle of Cer in 1914, and the last (1934) the breakthrough of the Salonika Front.

*** Order of the Minister of the Army and Navy no. 9680, Official Military Gazette of April 1, 1928.

**** General ranking list of active officers for 1937, p. 413, serial no. 900.

ko Prelević of the Yugoslav People's Army recalled — "that he had to know, want and be able to do everything twice as well as the others to be equal to the 'blue-bloods,' the sons of generals, the grandsons of senators."*

He was promoted to lieutenant on April 1, 1932, and by October 1 — after rigorous medical examinations and tests in seven subjects, including French — he had taken second place on the list of those admitted to the 34th Class of the Higher School of the Military Academy. On October 1, 1934, after intensive study of military skills, he was appointed commander of the 23rd Company of the Reserve Infantry Officer School, in a battalion detached to Sarajevo.** He began diligent, patient, expert and responsible work with these young, curious men, eager and motivated to learn the "craft" of defending the homeland.*** Two of his cadets — lawyer Vladisav Ilić and General Milutin Morača — remembered him as a dignified officer, close to young people, devoted to his profession, always serious, well-dressed

* Statement by Marko's son, Colonel Dr. Milorad Prelević of the Yugoslav People's Army, Belgrade, 1996.

** Decree no. 21206 — His Majesty King Aleksandar signed it only 9 days before his assassination (Marseille, April 9, 1934).

*** Training of the first generation under his command ended on October 15, 1935; in the entire School (battalions in Bileća, Goražde, Sarajevo and Maribor) there were 1,908 cadets.

and proper, always ready — unlike others — to protect his trainees from rough treatment during drills, humiliating inspections, belittlement and especially from having their reading material policed; he never did that, nor allowed anyone else to do it in his company.*

He was angry about the deep divisions in the officer corps along political, national and religious lines, seeing in them a danger to the security of the homeland, while remaining an exemplary professional soldier and patriot, resentful of the destructive policies that had a perilous effect on the state of the army.** The only political sympathy he had — mainly under the influence of his close relative and communist, lawyer Blažo — was for the policy of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, due to its program, radical social reforms and determination to resist fascism.***

In the autumn of 1938 he was transferred to the Infantry School for Active Officers, where he was soon appointed, as Captain First Class, to the

* Conversation held in June 1995 in Belgrade.

** Statement by journalist and publicist Jovan Šćekić, son of Colonel Mihailo, with whom Arso was a family friend, Belgrade 1996. About his deep dissatisfaction with the composition of the officer corps at that time, Arso would write in February 1943, in a bunker in the Dolomites (Slovenia), in the article "Our Military Schools," which was printed in October of the same year in Jajce.

*** Memory of Colonel Dukljan Vukotić of the Yugoslav People's Army, Zavala 1986.

prestigious post of commander of the School Battalion in Kalinovik. With this unit he carried out exemplary demonstration exercises, often using live ammunition and in cooperation with artillery and aviation.* In 1939, in that same position, two more good things happened to him — hardly by chance. First, he was accepted, through a competition, into the one-year Supplementary Course of the Higher School of the Military Academy, which was the highest level of military education.** Second, "with the approval of the Minister for All Military Forces," General Milan Đ. Nedić, he published the professional work *Tactics of the Infantry Battalion*.*** Comprising 30 tactical problems from all forms of combat, developed over 300 pages and illustrated with 28 diagrams, it would in that year and the next — serving both "as a basis for planning and conducting war games" and, above all, as a manual for preparing for exams and conducting military training — go through two editions.****

* Memory of General Rade Hamović, Belgrade 1985.

** Replacing the earlier General Staff War School, Official Military Gazette of June 16, 1939.

*** "Literary Notices" column in the Official Military Gazette of June 24, 1939, with a recommendation from the Adjutant Department that it was a "useful, modern and instructive book."

**** In the Banja Luka garrison, 36 artillery officers bought the book. From the royalties and a loan from the Officers' Cooperative, he bought, on credit, a small house at 7

In the Supplementary Course (1939-40 school year) the most important innovations in armament and military technology were studied, as well as the experiences from the wars in Ethiopia, Spain and Finland, the Wehrmacht's aggression against the countries of Western and Central Europe, and fascist Italy's campaigns in Albania and Greece.

In the Main General Staff on November 10, 1940, under the direction of the head of the Operations Department, Divisional General Radivoje Janković, preparations began for 27 officers to train for the General Staff branch — which, had it not been interrupted by the war, would have lasted 14 months, with the final two spent working in the commands of military districts. On the list of those sent for training, Arso ranked fourth. He began the program intensively and completed both the theoretical and practical preparation for the most prestigious and elite branch. The focus was on solving problems at all three levels of military art, participating in the reconnaissance for war games and in General Staff field trips, attending manoeuvres and larger exercises, visiting training centres for all branches of the armed forces, and practical work in specific departments of the Main General Staff. Results were graded from 10 (excellent) to 1, with "six" being the passing mark. All of Arso's grades, according to M. Šušović's recollection, were excellent, and these were tallied to make up the ranking list.* In that group were also slightly older officers who would become well-known figures in the Second World War: Zaharije Ostojić, Mirko Lalatović, Đorđija Lašić, Radoslav Đ. Đurić and Mihajlo M. Mitić.** They were promoted to the rank of General Staff major on the eve of the April War,*** whereas he would receive it on April 1, 1942 — when, at the age of 34, he would become the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the Armed Forces of the National Liberation Movement, and a year later, on May 1, 1943, the first Major General of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NOV-J).****

In the wartime deployment — by his own request — he remained in Sarajevo, but in the Main General Staff, by decision of the deputy chief

Stiška Street (now Golsfortijeva) in Belgrade.

* From the traces of his work there remained a fully completed plan for the defence of Belgrade from positions on Torlak. Occasionally "borrowed" by the Counterintelligence Service (KOS), this plan was, in the 1960s, according to the recollection of General Milisav Nikić, secretly shown to leading General Staff operatives of the Yugoslav People's Army "as a model and a lesson."

** During the National Liberation War he "renamed himself" to Apostolski.

*** Decree of His Majesty King Petar II, Official Military Gazette of April 3, 1941.

**** Savo Orović, *War Diary*, Belgrade, 1972, p. 397.

of staff of the Supreme Command, Divisional General Milutin Nikolić, he was kept until the evening of April 4. He was engaged in working out the details of the *R-41* wartime plan in the Transport Department — Stage Section for Land Transport, connected with the concentration of troops, which was the most complex, extensive and important operational task. He arrived in Sarajevo on the evening of April 5 and, unable to locate the School Battalion, reported to Brigadier General Petar Lazić, commander of the Reserve Infantry Officer School, insisting on going to the front — anywhere and in any capacity. At the headquarters of the 2nd Army District he was assigned to lead a "patched-together" unit to guard trains with armed escorts to protect them from Ustaša attacks. From April 14, under the Command of the Defence of Sarajevo, he marched with a student battalion towards Travnik to aid the remnants of the shattered troops of Army General Petar Nedeljković. He displayed personal and command bravery, the students held their ground in the fight against the Ustaša, but it was all too late — on the afternoon of April 15 the German 16th Motorized Division entered Sarajevo from Zvornik, and that evening the 14th Armoured Division arrived from Doboj.*

* V. Terzić, *The Collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia 1941*, 2nd ed., Belgrade 1984, vol. 2, p. 450.

Armed with a rifle, a pistol and two grenades, with *Wartime Service* and detailed maps of Montenegro and Herzegovina in his officer's bag, he returned to his homeland, which by April 17 had already been occupied — by the advance of the German 8th Armoured Division from Prijepolje towards Podgorica and the 60th Motorized Division from Peć towards Andrijevica, while on April 21 in Cetinje the command of the 17th Corps of the Italian 9th Army, with three divisions and a legion of "blackshirts," was "enthroned."*

Commander of the uprising army of Montenegro

After settling his wife and daughters at the family home,** he soon joined those who, refusing to accept the occupation, were preparing for an uprising. The communist leadership in Montenegro accepted without prejudice the professional assistance of patriotic officers who had returned from the war armed. A man with bitter memories of occupation, well-versed in national history and respectful of traditions, raised in the spirit of Montenegrin and Serbian commanders — Arso, as a professional soldier with the high-

* V. Terzić, Ibid., vol. 2, p. 585.

** With the approval of the Minister of the Army and Navy, in 1934 he married Miss Ksenija — Senka Vujica, a clerk from Sarajevo; daughters Ubavka and Zoja were born in 1936 and 1940.

est education, a fervent patriot and Russophile, became involved in gathering and safeguarding weapons, connecting officers and training preparatory groups. He then, together with Major Vašo Vukčević and Captain First Class Velimir Terzić, joined the work of the Military Commission of the Provincial Committee, heading the professional group. Based on a careful analysis of the military situation in Montenegro, it proposed the idea of armed struggle, which involved more thorough preparations and more time for the formation, training, equipping and activation of larger units of the people's army.* The Party, however, was in a hurry to begin armed struggle (according to a unified concept for the whole country), so on July 13 a mass uprising broke out. Earlier (on June 22) the Provincial Committee had formed a Military Revolutionary Committee, in which General Staff officer A. Jovanović was also involved.** Then, during the first attacks of the uprising, the Provisional Supreme Command of the National Liberation Troops of Montenegro, Boka and the Sandžak was formed. M. Đilas and B. Jovanović, for the position of commander, envisioned a professional soldier and first offered it to

* M. Đilas, *Revolutionary War*, Belgrade, 1990.

** According to data from OVRA and SIM, published in the work by Đ. Skoti and L. Vijazi, *Eagles of the Red Mountains*, Milan 1987, translated by Professor Gracijela Čufić.

Colonel Bajo Stanišić — an unquestionably proven patriot, respected commander and brave man — but he, citing his advanced years and health condition while promising cooperation as an adviser, recommended General Staff officer Arso, "a young and educated officer, a respected and accomplished commander." Thus, the Politburo member M. Đilas, as "the person for contact with the people" (commissar), and Captain First Class Arso Jovanović, as commander, took charge of an uprising force of about 32,000 patriots (including about 1,800 communists and 5,000 members of the League of Communist Youth),* which — as Milija Stanišić assessed — was "the equivalent of 25-30 partisan brigades." Among the insurgents was the overwhelming majority of about 400 officers and non-commissioned officers of the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia who had returned armed to their native homes and were now, in the insurgent headquarters, platoon leaders and commanders, advisers and instructors.**

In the first days of the uprising fighting, Arso operated in the Podgorica sector, organizing the attack to liberate the city of his youth. Under pressure from the Italian July offensive — which, with the engagement of six reinforced divisions,

* R. Pajović, *Pavle Đurišić*, Zagreb 1987, p. 19.

** Of the 28 wartime generals born in Montenegro, 15 were "former royal officers."

or more than 100,000 soldiers, led to the collapse of the uprising fronts — he moved to the Vasojevići region, judging that the focus of military events was shifting there. Together with Đilas he worked to halt the advance of Italian assault columns that were brutally punishing the population, but over the issue of continued resistance to the occupiers he broke permanently with Đ. Lašić, P. Đurišić and several other respected officers who had until then been involved in the uprising's command.* The fronts collapsed in that area as well, so he returned to his native Piperi, where, in Radovče,** the headquarters of the uprising leadership was located. There, the Provincial Military-Political Council (on August 8) proposed him for membership in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, and he was soon admitted — which, as he confided to Blažo Jovanović, did not make him "exactly enthusiastic," but he was aware that under communist leadership he had voluntarily joined the uprising, in the fight "for the establishment of Soviet power and the final showdown with the capitalist system," and that anyone in front of a distinctly political, more pre-

* As a second lieutenant, he was very close friends with Đurišić in the Takovo Regiment, and he was bound to Lašić through godparenthood.

** A mountain plateau about 17 kilometres (in a straight line) north of Podgorica, which served as an Allied airfield during the National Liberation War.

cisely communist, army "simply had to be in the Party." To his colleague V. Terzić, who accepted the same status, he admitted that he was troubled by the question of whether this meant breaking the military oath, which is sworn only once in life. He had sworn loyalty to the king and the homeland, but found justification in the fact that the king had abandoned the state and the people and thereby, in effect, released the officers from any obligation towards him.*

In the newly appointed Headquarters of the National Liberation Guerrilla (Partisan) Detachments (from October 25, the Main Staff), where the commander and commissar were M. Đilas and B. Jovanović, Arso was chief of staff. Bearing the greatest responsibility for reorganizing the units that would continue the liberation war, he worked on mobilization and organization, conducting combat training, strengthening reconnaissance and intelligence services, consolidating guerrilla detachments from which battalions would soon emerge, and he planned the formation of nine brigades with staff units. At the same time, aware that inactivity in combat was a greater enemy to the units than any occupier, he insisted on organized life in the detachments and battalions and on carrying out "smaller" actions. In the midst of planning and preparing a large

* Memory of General V. Terzić, Miločer 1986.

sabotage operation on the Podgorica-Kolašin route, at Jelino Dubo,* he travelled with Mitar Bakić to report to the Supreme Headquarters in Užice. With them also went British Captain Bill Hudson and Major Zaharije Ostojić, while Major Mirko Lalatović and Sergeant Veljko Dragićević followed two days later. This was the "Bullseye" intelligence group, which had arrived by the submarine *Triumph* at Perazića Dol on September 20 and from there, through partisan contacts, reached the provincial leadership headquarters in Radovče. Already on September 26 they reported to Malta that they had met with a local detachment of about a hundred men conducting actions against the occupiers, led by Captain Arso Jovanović and "a certain professor," which was the first announcement to the world of the full name and surname of one of the leading figures of the National Liberation Movement, stressing that he was a captain of the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia — something that, at least in the eyes of the Western Allies, gave the resistance a certain legality and legitimacy. In the next report (October 13), along with repeating Arso's name, they gave the name of "university professor" Milovan

* The action — the largest of its kind on the 1941 battlefield — was carried out by the Zeta Partisan Detachment on October 18; an entire motor convoy of 43 trucks was completely destroyed, 150 were killed or wounded, and 64 soldiers were captured.

Đilas.*

Travelling with the new commander of the Main Staff, Politburo member Ivan Milutinović, and a group of escorts, he worked the whole time on preparing to carry out the task assigned in Užice: with troops from Montenegro, "clear the Sandžak area" (eight districts, about 8,500 km² with around 250,000 inhabitants), which — it was believed in the town on the Đetinja — would be easy to liberate and even easier to defend. In the context of expected developments, and especially of receiving aid from the Red Army, including paratroopers, as well as the possible need to shift the focus of operations from central Serbia, this was seen as being of strategic significance. Emphasis was placed on the liberation of Pljevlja as the centre of a strong Communist Party of Yugoslavia organization, a geographical corridor, a transportation hub and an economic source, the key on the route for transferring aid to Montenegro. After that Priboj and Rudo would be liberated, and — according to an earlier request from the Supreme Headquarters — 1,500 to 2,000 Montenegrins would be sent to Serbia to form larger units.** The new commander and the for-

* The name Tito was first heard in the West on November 5, in a telegram from D. Mihailović; see F.W.D. Deakin, *The Warrior's Mountain*, Belgrade 1973, p. 236.

** Radivoje Jovanović Bradonja, in the publication *Introduction to a Critical Analysis of the Strategy of the National*

mer chief of the Main Staff, during their journey through the Sandžak, carried out reconnaissance of the terrain, tasked Party and military leaderships with gathering intelligence on the enemy and securing food for the troops, and prepared the units to cooperate with forces soon to arrive, especially in the attack on Pljevlja.

At the very end of November, in the wider Pljevlja area, the Montenegrin Detachment for operations in the Sandžak arrived under the command of Arso Jovanović, consisting of nine battalions, or thirty-four companies, with 3,690 fighters. The attack, organized according to all the principles of military science, was carried out decisively on the night of December 1, but the headquarters of the 5th Alpine Division "Pusteria," under Divisional General Giovanni Esposito* — with a complete infantry regiment, an engineering battalion, strong artillery (twelve guns and twenty-seven mortars), an effective searchlight unit and a multi-channel communications system, about 2,000 soldiers and officers well entrenched and even better armed — proved too hard a target for attackers lacking the necessary number of skilled officers, their own artillery and certain key intelligence on the enemy. The town on the Ćehotina was not taken, and the Detachment suffered 238 dead and 262 wounded.*

From then on, the Battle of Pljevlja became one of the most frequently analysed events of the National Liberation War, with Arso himself leaving behind two more detailed analyses: the first dictated to V. Dedijer on June 2, 1942, and the second published in January 1946 in his own work. In both — aware of a commander's responsibility for the lives of his subordinates and the outcome of an operation — he was sufficiently self-critical, avoiding a direct answer to the possible question: would he, if he had been able to choose, have refused this task? Until his death in 1948, no one, according to Đilas in *The Revolutionary War*, blamed him for the failure at Pljevlja. On the contrary, in the *Supreme Headquarters Bulletin* for January 1942 it was called "one of the most glorious battles in the history

Liberation War 1941-1945, Belgrade 1998, notes that at the end of October in Užice, Broz ordered him to prepare a proposal for the formation of an operational unit of 5,000 men, Montenegrins and Serbs.

* Born in 1882 in Pescara, for wartime merits in Cyrenaica he was awarded the Gold Medal for Bravery, and on the Greek-Albanian front the Military Order of Savoy. In a letter dated February 15, 1942, addressed to each of his Alpini, he urged them to write in golden letters into the book of their lives the date December 1, adding: "On that day we truly fought for life or death, and it is only to your bravery, Alpini, that we owe the fact that we are not all — both general and soldiers — in the grave today..."

* Š. Lagator and Đ. Batrićević, *The Battle of Pljevlja*, Belgrade 1990, pp. 281-293.

of the Montenegrin people," with the reason for the failure cited as "the great numerical and technical superiority of the enemy." Only later was his name — despite it being well known that the decision had been political and that three senior Party leaders were with him in the innermost part of the Headquarters* — subjected to words of condemnation. By the 1970s, leading figures of the National Liberation Movement, followed by some historians, "remembered" that Pljevlja was not only defeat and losses, but also proof of command ability: to form a unit of operational significance, to carry out a successful march-manoeuvre of over 250 kilometres, to attack a fortified town, to put 480 enemy soldiers and officers out of action, to cause the abolition of six (out of nine) garrisons in the Sandžak, to lend a helping hand to units that had crossed from Serbia into the Sandžak via the Uvac and the Lim, to liberate Rudo and enable the formation of the 1st Proletarian Brigade. Thus, in 1972, Broz said in his inaugural speech upon being named "first doctor of military sciences" that the great success of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was that it could, "when all of Europe was enslaved and the German armies were at the approaches to Moscow and Leningrad, gather nearly 4,000 volunteers and with them attack such a strong occupier's garrison."* Five years later, E. Kardelj wrote that "the insistence of historians on Pljevlja as a military-tactical defeat is less than half the truth," because one must add "that it was one of the greatest and bravest battles of our National Liberation Uprising, with far-reaching positive consequences for its development." In any case, in a letter dated December 22, 1941, Broz named the commander of the Main Staff, I. Milutinović,** as the main culprit for the failure at Pljevlja, and on December 12 had already appointed Arso Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, reporting this on December 30 from Podromanija to the Executive Committee of the Comintern,*** thereby informing the world for the third time in three months of his important position in the armed forces of the National Liberation Movement. The units under his command liberated Rudo, where, with Pero Ćetković, he defined and developed the organization and formation of the 1st Proletarian Brigade, seeing in it the nucleus of the operational army of the National Liberation Movement.

Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the National Liberation Movement and Volunteer

* Commissar Bajo Sekulić and the deputy commanders and commissars Radovan Vukanović and Boško Đuričković.

* Tito, *Military Works*, Belgrade, 1977, Vol. V, p. 293.

** Archives VII, box 1978, reg. no. 15/1.

*** J. Broz, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, p. 154.

In the "Foča period" (January 25-May 10, 1942) he worked on drafting the statute and plan for forming new brigades, strengthening volunteer units, organizing regional headquarters (Herzegovina, Bosnian Krajina, eastern Bosnia, etc.) under unified command, defending the free territory, preparing legal regulations on military justice, supplying units with provisions and caring for the wounded, establishing military rear organs and units, defining the military obligations of organs of people's government and so forth. From March 1942, in correspondence with the Operational Staff for Herzegovina — especially concerning the destruction of the dangerous Ustaša stronghold of Borač, which he personally commanded on behalf of the Supreme Headquarters — he stressed the importance of maintaining the route over the Neretva and the Sarajevo-Mostar communications, hinting at the possibility of the main forces of the Supreme Headquarters advancing along this route towards western Bosnia to avoid encirclement and shift the focus of operations to the western part of the theatre. In June, after losing free territory in the Axis-quisling "Trio" operation, he proposed an offensive by a group of four Proletarian Brigades (3,800 fighters) into Bosnian Krajina, keeping to the central

From left to right: Milovan Đilas, Koča Popović, Arso Jovanović, Aleksandar Ranković and Mijalko Todorović.

Dinaric range. He developed the adopted decision for a 250 kilometre deep advance and on June 22 issued the order for the start of the forward march in a zone 60-90 kilometres wide, planning frequent and varied combat actions.* With Đilas he commanded the Northern Group (2nd and 4th Brigades), which overcame the railway and road to Mostar on the very outskirts of Sarajevo, then, in a rush, captured Fojnica and Gornji Vakuf. At the insistence of the Supreme Commander, they attacked Donji Vakuf and Bugojno, but due to the enemy's strength — as well as hesitations in decision-making, delays in orders, uncoordinated

* S. Orović, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

cooperation and disunited command, and above all the lack of artillery — the effort ended in failure, for which, as commander of the operational formation, he bore part of the responsibility.

Taught by the experience from the fighting for Pljevlja, Donji Vakuf and Bugojno, and aware of the consequences of an unfavourable balance of forces and the lack of his own artillery, before the attack on Livno and Kupres he proposed to the Supreme Commander that these fortified towns should not be attacked but instead kept isolated by weaker forces and demonstrative attacks, and that "the Supreme Headquarters, with the Proletarian Brigades, should leave the current territory and continue the advance through Dalmatia and Lika and further to the northwest."* Broz did not agree with this proposal and — citing in a letter of July 30 arguments that, in more favourable circumstances, would have been worthy of consideration — ordered an attack on Livno and then on "the Ustaša Alcatraz" (Kupres), emphasizing that "they must fall." Accepting the order with discipline, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters commanded an operational force of eight battalions which, in the attack of August 4-5, thanks also to some key fortunate coincidences, liberated Livno. This was an important victory and a turning point, especially in terms of replenishing the units. Having information on the strength of the forces defending fortified Kupres, he again proposed isolating it, but Broz stuck to his decision, appointing him commander of the Kupres Operational Group of twelve battalions. In the night attack of August 11-12, the effort failed, with fifty-one put out of action. Precisely because of this he was even more firmly against a second attack on Kupres (ordered for the next night) — even at the risk of being dismissed. Broz did not dismiss the only General Staff officer because he had no replacement for him, but instead sent him, as delegate of the Supreme Headquarters, to the units attacking the town from the west, while giving command of the Group (now sixteen battalions) to Supreme Headquarters members Colonel Savo Orović and Major Vojislav Đokić. They carried out reconnaissance with the commanders, coordinated cooperation and issued orders, but in the repeated attack of August 13-14 — vigorously advocated by the Supreme Headquarters' delegates at the headquarters of the 2nd and 4th Brigades, S. Žujović and P. Ilić — there was another failure, with 188 put out of action, meaning in both attacks there were 98 killed and 141 wounded.*

* Notes no. 260 to the text of Broz's letter, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, p. 138.

* Out of 188 taken out of action in the second attack on Kupres from the 4th Montenegrin Proletarian Brigade, there were 64 killed and 51 wounded; from Hodžić to here — so, in 40 days of combat — according to the report of its commissar

Only under the pressure of such heavy losses did Broz agree that this strategically truly important fortified town should be isolated and bypassed, and it would take him another five months of fighting to learn that without ensuring a proper balance of forces and, especially, without artillery, fortified towns could not be taken.*

Still the only professional soldier in the Supreme Headquarters with knowledge of the organization and formation of operational and strategic formations, as well as of the armed forces as a whole, on November 1 he became the architect of the NOVJ as a regular armed force, while retaining the partisan detachments.

With the opening (November 4) of the Military School of the NOVJ and Volunteer Army of Yugoslavia, together with Colonel Savo Orović, he established a military education system which, throughout the rest of the National Liberation War and in all parts of the theatre, through various forms, would train 28,034 NOVJ officers.

Victim of Kardelj's narrow-mindedness, selfishness and vanity

Driven by the momentum of the National

Mitar Bakić, there had been 115 killed and 115 wounded.

* Contribution by Boško Matić in the collection *The Second Proletarian*, Belgrade, 1998, pp. 4, 11.

Liberation Movement in the central part of the theatre, by the creation of the NOVJ and the (favourable) prospects for an advance towards Kordun and the northwest of the country, and especially by the intention to respond to Kardelj's constant pleading from bunkers in Ljubljana, in Kočevski Rog and in the Dolomites to send him personnel help to improve the "extremely critical military situation" that had arisen at the end of the "Great Offensive" of the significantly reinforced Italian 11th Corps (whose dramatic outcome had also been reported by Valdes, S. Krajačić and L. Ribar from Zagreb) — the Supreme Commander decided to send the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters to Slovenia with a group of officers. Kardelj had written that F. Leskošek, due to incompetence and unsuccessful work, had been "removed" from his post as commander of the Main Staff, and in his place — as far as command was concerned — was appointed the even less competent I. Maček, a carpenter by trade and a Communist University of the National Minorities of the West graduate by education, without experience in commanding even a platoon. A professional and responsible man, Arso prepared thoroughly for a longer stay "on the sunny side of the Alps," after being told (on November 8) that he was being sent "to Comrade Bevc, to sort out military matters," in other words, "to turn the re-

sistance movement into the NOVJ and from partisan detachments create a part of the NOVJ."*

As part of the preparations for departure to Slovenia, he requested from the commander of the first five Proletarian Brigades a certain number of officers for this task, mentioning by name only Milovan Šaranović and Zdravko Jovanović. The criterion was that they be "loyal, fearless, disciplined — in a word, exemplary commanders in every respect," officers "who have all the qualities to develop into brigade commanders."

On November 17, from Oštrelj, along with the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, set out eleven military officers, two Slovenes, and the escorts of Captain Jovanović and Lieutenant Šaranović.** In his officer's bag Arso carried Broz's

* Two days earlier, Broz told R. Vukanović and M. Bakić that Arso, despite being "indispensable in the new operations," had to be sent temporarily "to save Slovenia for Yugoslavia" and "straighten out the situation in the military organization," and that he felt "as if with him my right hand is leaving"; at their parting, according to Đilas, he gave him his new woollen socks.

** The senior officers were: Milovan Šaranović, Zdravko Jovanović, Predrag Jeftić, Aleksandar "Leka" Marjanović, Milo Kilibarda, Rajko Tanasković, Petar S. Brajović, Radomir Božović, Danilo Šorović, Pero Popivoda and Mile Čubrić; five of them had earlier been officers of the Royal Yugoslav Army, two would later become corps commanders and chiefs of the General Staff, six were killed on duty in Slovenia, and as many were proclaimed People's Heroes.

The escorts, Boško Dedeić Pop and Svetolik "Mito" M.

letter to Kardelj, which also served as a kind of authorization for the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters — the contents of which were persistently hidden from the public for a full four decades, so that this mission was talked and written about arbitrarily and irresponsibly, all to Arso's detriment.* Emphasizing that "under no circumstances" could he agree "with the new appointment of I. Maček," Broz added his assessment that Maček "has no qualifications whatsoever to be a commander, for he has neither been a soldier nor passed through any unit during this struggle as a platoon leader, much less as a commander." He required that his assessments "be taken very seri-

Jovanović, remained in Slovenia for the whole war, where they rose to become brigade commanders and were killed in action; Dedeić was proclaimed a People's Hero.

* This letter from Broz to Kardelj was first published in 1982 in Vol. 13 of the Collected Works, but even then with 23 footnotes over 206 lines, focusing on the "explanation" that this authorization to Arso was unknown to the public because the data it was based on allegedly soon proved to be inaccurate, so certain parts were not implemented — above all the decision that Arso Jovanović would "temporarily take command of the Main Staff of Slovenia, and M. Šaranić would be his deputy." During all that time, Kardelj's letters full of falsehoods, insinuations and slanders against the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters were widely published, trying to prove that he had exceeded the powers given to him, that he did not understand Slovenian particularities, that he was meddling in politics, that he behaved "like some kind of Yugoslav inspector," etc., and that this was allegedly why he was withdrawn from Slovenia — which is untrue.

ously" and that "with the arrival of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, Arso Jovanović, you immediately proceed with changing your command staff. You should also carry out this change among the other members of the Liberation Front, because this change is necessary as a prerequisite for creating in Slovenia a truly national army that will be able to carry out, in a planned way, all the tasks set before it. The Supreme Headquarters considers it necessary — and this is essentially my view — that the command and reorganization of your units be temporarily taken over by the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, Arso Jovanović, and that his deputy be Šaranović (Milovan), who could later take over command should Arso Jovanović return, if needed, to our Supreme Headquarters. Together with Arso Jovanović we are sending twelve other comrades, whom we have parted with only with great difficulty from our brigades, where they have proven themselves as exceptionally good commanders and platoon leaders. These men have gained great experience over the past eighteen months, for you know yourself that we do not conduct accidental skirmishes but planned major operations." He demanded, among other things, that they be "merciless" towards the White Guard, and promised that, if things "continue to develop well here," he would send them a division "so you can liquidate

that gang around Krško and other places."

In the first ten days of December, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, in line with his unambiguous authorizations and in agreement with the commander and commissar of the Main Staff, I. Maček and B. Kidrič, carried out his tasks decisively: he established operational zones, reorganized and enlarged the existing four brigades, activated partisan detachments, assigned areas of responsibility to units, formed area commands with points for carrying out sabotage operations, established operational links between Slovenian and Croatian units, and appointed to (mostly staff) posts the officers he had brought with him. Using courier channels he had set up, he regularly informed the Supreme Commander, so that by December 12 he had sent at least three more detailed reports, one of them undated, written on six A4 pages, still unpublished to this day. The section on Slovenia begins:

"The White Guard is an utter misery. It has no combat ability or value whatsoever. If I had the First Proletarian Brigade, the whole question not only of the White Guard but of all the small Italian garrisons would be resolved at the pace of movement of that brigade. Still, I will try to resolve this issue quickly..."* He wrote about the reasons for his deep dissatisfaction with the

* Archives VII, box 3, file 4, reg. no. 38.

situation he found: the strength of the National Liberation Movement was around 2,500 fighters; "the lower command cadre is quite brave, but has no tactical orientation"; "the brigades have about 250 to 300 fighters"; the detachments are "without any combat value, for they have not carried out any combat tasks"; the units in Slovenia "have no mortars or guns at all"; "the combat material is excellent, but without any combat experience"; they do not dare to sing "so that the enemy would not discover them"; relations in the higher staffs are quite undeveloped — but he left that for discussion with Kardelj, as well as the agreement on the reorganization and composition of the Main Staff, which was the most sensitive issue, the one on which Arso would "fall" in Kardelj's bunker in the Dolomites. Incidentally, he wrote that "Comrade Bevc has retained no function in the Main Staff," but "left everything to others, burying himself in the Ljubljana 'bunker,' as these comrades call their shelters in Ljubljana."

Self-sufficient and hypersensitive, sitting on at least four "chairs" at once, watching what was happening or being planned in London, Moscow and the Vatican — particularly regarding the fate of Yugoslavia and the creation of a "Central European Catholic Federation" — and seeking in all this some advantage for Slovenia, Kardelj saw in Tito's letter and in what Arso, invoking it, was doing, saying and especially planning, a sign of

danger from "Serbian hegemony," belittlement and even disregard for "Slovenian specificities and national sensitivities," the narrowing of national freedoms, violations of the right to self-determination, a repetition of "Yugoslav practices" and so forth. In his eyes, this meant the danger of turning the resistance movement into a war and Slovenian territory into a battlefield where relentless offensive battles would be fought against Italian and German occupiers, the White Guard and all other guards; that the incoming "group of Tito's officers" would take over command of the Slovenian partisan army, abolishing the Main Staff. Therefore he saw in Arso's work and intentions the behaviour of a "Yugoslav inspector" — a leader "of the old breed of Serbian officers" and so on. Thus he interpreted "the southerners' mission" and, according to I. Maček, decisively turned "against Arso's command,"* condemning him to three months' isolation in the bunker, preventing him from "visiting all the other units and areas in Slovenia" or from moving the Main Staff to the Dolenjska region. In letters to Tito of January 12 (twenty-one pages) and January 17, 1943, he attacked him sharply, making liberal use of insinuations, half-truths and slanders. These letters, along with one of Arso's and his professionally prepared analysis of the military situation in Slovenia and its approaches, he sent to the Supreme Headquarters via I. Maček. Un-

* I. Maček, *Memoirs*, Zagreb, 1983.

able because of Operation "Weiss" (January 20) to deliver the letters personally to Broz, Maček gave them to I.L. Ribar, who had arrived in Dolenjska to prepare "a wide-ranging Party conference." Tito could have received these letters — as "the whole truth about the situation in Slovenia" and about Arso's alleged mistakes — no earlier than July 5, when Lola returned to the Supreme Headquarters along with its Chief. This means all claims about siding with Kardelj and withdrawing or dismissing Arso from Slovenia belong to the realm of political gossip. In any case, the more thorough historians of the National Liberation War in their studies,* and key eyewitnesses in their memoirs,** state that Arso was sent to Slovenia to carry out important military tasks, that he began to handle them responsibly, professionally and effectively, but that he was obstructed by Kardelj, who was surrounded by people unwilling to give up their positions and privileges. Finally, just two more documents: on March 28, 1944, in Drvar (in the presence of E. Kardelj), Broz wrote in the supplement *The Struggle of the Peoples of Enslaved Yugoslavia*, intended for the foreign public, that the Supreme Headquarters

* For example, Prof. Dr. B. Petranović in *Serbia in the Second World War 1939-1945*, Belgrade, 1982, and Colonel Z. Klanjšček in *The National Liberation War in Slovenia 1941-1945*, Belgrade, 1984.

** For instance, M. Đilas in *The Revolutionary War* (Belgrade, 1990), P. Jakšić in *Over Memories* (Belgrade, 1990), Lj. Đurić in *Memories of People and Events* (Belgrade, 1989).

"sent its Chief and ten officers to Slovenia to organize regular units from the partisan detachments"*; and in a letter from the Supreme Headquarters of January 10, 1943, Arso was confirmed to have been right in regard to "the measures for organizing our military formations that you undertook in Slovenia," was promised assistance in heavy weaponry, and was encouraged "with all Slovenian forces to undertake offensive actions, primarily against the enemy's communications."

That it is also true, as both historians and memoirists state — that in the battles on the Neretva and the Sutjeska he was sorely missed in the position of Chief of the Supreme Headquarters — is confirmed by the fact that from April 7, when in Govza near Kalinovik Broz was informed that Arso, with L. Ribar, had set out from Slovenia for the headquarters of the Main Staff of Croatia, until July 5, when he arrived at the Supreme Headquarters, Broz sent seventeen telegrams urging him, with a group of leaders and Krajina fighters, to hurry to meet the Operational Group of Divisions of the Supreme Headquarters. During that time Arso, on his own initiative and signing himself either "Chief of the Supreme Headquarters" or (with Lola) "for the Supreme Headquarters," reorganized Croatian and Bosnian operational units, assigned them zones of responsibility and gave them the task of operationally receiving the units from the Sutjeska,

* Archives VII, box 1, reg. no. 11/1.

led the Staff of the 3rd Corps and the 5th Krajina Division to meet the Supreme Headquarters, captured with the Krajina fighters the mining centre of Kladanj, where a valuable haul was seized, and on April 25, in a report he signed with Lola, warned the Supreme Commander about the concentration and movements of Italian, German and quisling units — which is considered the first serious warning about preparations for the offensive operation "Schwarz" (May 15) against the Operational Group of Divisions. And never did anyone — neither orally nor in writing, neither at leadership meetings nor in private — mention to him any alleged mistakes committed in Slovenia. So it remained until his death. Soon he experienced satisfaction: during Operation "Schwarz" four Slovenian brigades operated in an explicitly offensive manner from the Dolenjska operational zone under the command of Milovan Šaranović; there was extensive combat cooperation with Croatian units; the formation of the first two Slovenian divisions was prepared, and so forth — all issues on which Arso had insisted. Also, the commander of the Main Staff, I. Maček, was "removed" and replaced by Major General Franc Rozman.*

* The basis for the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters' assessment of the insufficient activity of partisan units in Slovenia is confirmed — with understandable bias and one-sidedness — by the statement of Italian historian Salvatore Loi in the book *The Operations of Italian Units in Yugoslavia 1941-1945* that in the entire Province of Ljubljana, throughout the war, only 304 soldiers were killed, 520 wounded and 69 went missing. (Taken from the master's thesis of Dragan Nenezić, defended at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade.)

First Major General of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia

With part of the units and Allied officers, the Supreme Headquarters, after an operational pause at Petrovo polje,* arrived (on August 25) in Jajce, from where he re-established the disrupted command links with the headquarters of operational units and, in connection with the capitulation of Italy (September 9), directed their actions against the nineteen Italian divisions caught in the wider Adriatic area. The 2nd Shock Corps was sent to the Sandžak and Montenegro, while the 3rd, with Vojvodina units, was engaged in eastern Bosnia. The result of the efforts to disarm the Italian divisions was also 80,000 new fighters of the NOVJ, well armed, who formed the basis for creating another ten divisions, or four corps.

During the period when the Supreme Headquarters operated from Jajce (August 25, 1943-January 6, 1944), prominent officers of the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia — until then collabo-

* At Petrovo polje, as the leading figure among the first 10 major generals of the NOVJ, he "sewed on" the general's insignia; in the "first wave" of promotions — as Broz reported on September 1, 1943 to *Slobodna Yugoslavia* in Moscow — "about 5,000 officers were commissioned" (*Collected Works*, Vol. 16, p. 155).

rators with the National Liberation Movement — arrived at NOVJ headquarters: France Pire, Josip Černi, Vjekoslav Klišanić, Zdenko Ulepič, Karel Levičnik, Petar Tomac and others, who, engaged in staff and command positions, and soon also in diplomatic duties, became invaluable collaborators of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters. Dozens of officers arrived from camps in Italy, and mass escapes from Germany began; they immediately joined the NOVJ. This was the period of his daily operational cooperation with the leading figures of Allied military missions: Brigadier F. Maclean, Colonel V. Street, Majors L. Farrish and W. Deakin and others. Here he fought — openly and not always with sufficient diplomatic restraint, but always professionally and with arguments, sincerely and patriotically — against lies and deception in Allied propaganda about who was who on the Yugoslav battlefield; for the care of thousands of wounded and sick; for the delivery, by ship and aircraft, of weapons and food for the NOVJ; for the training of personnel for technical branches; insisting on the view that this was not a question of aid or charity, but of allied cooperation in the fight against the common enemy, of support for the NOVJ, which at that time, on its own battlefield, was tying down 600,000 enemy and 300,000 quisling troops. Recalling those not always pleasant conversations, Brigadier F. Maclean wrote that here was an officer "who had graduated from the Belgrade General Staff Academy under General Mihailović," and that

he was "rigid, inflexible, stubborn, aloof; he stuck strictly to current tasks, without imagination, but was highly capable and supported his arguments with facts and figures, often looking at a captured German map. During Tito's outbursts of anger or satisfaction he would remain silent. Then, when Tito calmed down, he would try to present his accurate and conscientious assessment of the situation."* Major W. Deakin also had a high opinion of "the Supreme Commander's chief military adviser," noting occasional moments of ill-humour,** while Colonel V. Street, a general staff officer serving as chief of staff to Brigadier Maclean, praised his professionalism and courage as "his colleague" in the Supreme Headquarters, though adding the remark that "although a brave man, he is easily excitable and does not inspire much confidence."*** The head of the Soviet military mission and his deputy, Generals N.V. Korneyev and A.P. Gorshkov, in their intensive cooperation with the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, valued highly his expertise and responsibility, persistence and courtesy in dealing with others, and in their published documents and memoirs they had no serious criticism of him.**** They are considered "the main culprits" for Arso

* F. Maclean, *Eastern Approaches*, Belgrade, 1980.

** F.W.D. Deakin, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

*** Series "For Victory and Freedom", collection *The Drvar Operation*, Belgrade, 1986, p. 691.

**** Contribution by A. Gorshkov in the collection *Tito in Vršac 1944*, edited by M. Dželebdžić, Vršac, 1984.

being decorated, for wartime merit and inter-Allied cooperation, with the Orders of Suvorov and Kutuzov, First Class.

In Jajce he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant general and, as a delegate of the Supreme Headquarters, spoke at the session of the State Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Mrkonjić Grad. At the 2nd Session of the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ), as one of 142 councillors, he greeted the historic assembly on behalf of the armed forces of the National Liberation Movement — 8 corps, 29 divisions, 109 national liberation detachments, 8 main staffs, amounting to about 300,000 fighters.

In the assessments of the Operations Department of the Supreme Headquarters, which he directly headed, the focus was on the situation in Serbia, where the formation of new brigades and the first five divisions was planned. This implied preparations for shifting the main effort of the NOVJ to the eastern theatre, towards which a strategic grouping of two corps (the 2nd and 3rd) was directed, with the Supreme Headquarters and the 1st Proletarian Corps to be transferred there soon afterward.

In the midst of the Supreme Headquarters' preparations for operations in the eastern theatre, at the beginning of December a cycle of two-month winter offensive operations by the German 2nd Armoured Army under General L. Rendulić began,

employing two reinforced mountain corps (the 5th and 15th), that is, nine German divisions, one Bulgarian occupation division and three legionary divisions. The aim was initially to strike NOVJ forces in the central part of Yugoslavia and prevent its operational-strategic formations from breaking into Serbia and the Adriatic coast, in connection with the forthcoming (and very likely) Allied landing in the Balkans. The operations in the Sandžak and Dalmatia began strongly and unexpectedly, which was the result both of the underdevelopment of the intelligence service and of the efficient German control of all NOVJ radio communications at the operational–strategic level* — something that was paid for with heavy losses.** On the basis of the first reports from the corps and division headquarters exposed to the offensives at both ends of the theatre, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters assessed that these were coordinated offensive operations, and that the loss of manpower and territory was the result of surprise and enemy strength, but also of shortcomings in the performance of his own command. Urgent measures were therefore taken

* Interception and decryption had been systematically carried out since September 7, 1943 by two radio reconnaissance battalions with headquarters in Belgrade, which then delivered the documents, marked "from reliable sources," to Generals von Weichs and Rendulić.

** S. Urošević, in the monograph *The Second Proletarian Brigade* (Belgrade, 1988), states that the two Serbian brigades in Prijepolje had 339 killed and missing, and about 200 wounded.

to restore order in the headquarters.* Orders were given for the dispersal of units, for stretching the enemy's attack columns and countering them with active defence, and — in favourable situations — with counterattacks. A directive was issued to all operational units to intensify their actions, and at Broz's request (on December 10) to General H.M. Wilson, the Allied supreme commander for the Middle East, a period of more extensive Allied bombing across the theatre began.

During these twelve enemy, two-month-long and synchronized operations, the Supreme Headquarters — from Jajce, then Potok and Drvar** — directed the defensive battles and operations of six corps on the main German lines of advance, while in areas of "free" forces — in order to tie down stronger enemy forces and ease the pressure on the most endangered formations — it encouraged offensive actions. The most direct example was the

* Among other actions, the commander of the 8th Corps, P. Ilić, was urgently dismissed; the commander and commissar of the 2nd Shock Corps were given a "military reprimand"; and the staff of the 2nd Proletarian Division (Lj. Đurić, S. Penezić, S. Soldatović and R. Babič) were "removed from their posts."

** The Supreme Headquarters, under pressure from a German offensive operation and after 133 days of operating from Jajce, left it on January 6, 1944 and, after a stop in Potoci, arrived in Drvar on January 27, where — at the centre of an area held by three NOVJ corps (1st, 5th and 8th) — it remained until May 25, directing operations across the entire theatre.

Banja Luka Operation (carried out in the first two days of 1944 with eight brigades, five national liberation detachments and two artillery battalions under Colonel Slavko Rodić), and in the wider context, the advance of the 14th Slovenian Division from Dolenjska through Croatia into Styria, the February march in Macedonia, stubborn fighting to hold the island of Vis and so forth. In addition to shifting the focus of combat operations at the operational level, a success of the Supreme Headquarters — achieved precisely during the suppression of these enemy offensives (Kugelblitz, Schneesturm, Citadel, Panther, Jajce and others) — was the formation of new units, so that at the beginning of February there were eleven NOVJ corps.

The German command, however, under the most difficult operational, terrain and climatic conditions, achieved two strategic goals: first — the Adriatic coast (except for fortified Vis), where an invasion by the Western Allies was expected, was firmly occupied; second — the concentration of existing and incoming NOVJ units on a broad operational base from eastern Bosnia, through the Sandžak, to northern Montenegro, from which they could advance into Serbia on several axes, was disrupted. This was delayed for half a year by the cycle of offensive operations.

Preparing the troops for the breakthrough into Serbia

From his assessment of the deteriorated situation and the balance of forces on the eastern theatre, Arso held firmly to the view that Serbia could be entered only by a strategically strong formation of at least five to six divisions — numerically large, organizationally solid, well equipped and rested — advancing on the Lim and Drina wings, with secure replenishment of manpower and war materiel.* Broz, however, was in a hurry and, not accepting the assessment of the balance of forces and not consulting at least A. Jovanović and S. Žujović as the only people in the Supreme Headquarters who understood the art of war, sent as early as the beginning of March into Serbia — across flooded rivers, snow-covered mountains and occupied roads — a Shock Group of two divisions (the 2nd Proletarian and the 5th Krajina) with only 5,000 fighters, insufficiently equipped and without the possibility of being supplied en route from Allied aid. He wanted, perhaps, to prove wrong the assessments of leading Allied figures, Marshal Stalin (interpreted by General N. Korneyev) and Prime Minister Winston Churchill,** playing also on the desire of

* At that time, there were at least 110,000 occupation and quisling troops in Serbia, whose command was prepared to defend the area decisively — to ensure supply lines for Wehrmacht forces in southeastern Europe and to repel the expected Anglo-American landing in the Balkans.

** The first believed that "the situation in Serbia was not ripe for broader acceptance of the National Liberation Movement," while the second claimed that in Serbia there were "200,000 householders ready for the anti-fascist struggle, but

Serbs to return to Serbia, on the attitude of Bulgarian occupation troops not to fight against partisans, and on the willingness of Serbs in Serbia to give the proletarians their sons and bread. What happened, however, was the worst-case scenario: the Group advanced to the Ibar River and there encountered an impenetrable defence; then, constantly evading the enemy, reached Mount Tara, and from there — unable to penetrate into Šumadija and deprived of the promised cooperation from the Drina axis — turned towards Zlatar and, crossing the Lim on May 20, arrived in Vasojevići for rest, replenishment and preparations for the next breakthrough into Serbia.

Near the end of the Shock Group's ordeal, on May 8, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters wrote a letter to the Supreme Commander — even though they worked and slept in the same cramped cave. Seeing more and more of the political manoeuvring over Serbia, he offered to go, perhaps with General Gorshkov, by Allied aircraft to the Shock Group of Divisions to convey to its headquarters directives and orders, since "this cannot be successfully resolved by telegrams, all the more because they may be intercepted by the enemy," and his stay in that territory would depend on Broz's "intentions and decisions." In the meantime, he would be replaced by General K. Popović, who was

not under communist leadership."

then reporting in Drvar, or by Colonel Klišanić.* Broz — clearly informed of and involved in the manoeuvres over Serbia — did not accept the proposals, and soon it would all be too late.** True, on May 10 and again on May 21, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters also took it upon himself to land at the Šekovići airfield and, with Generals K. Nađ and D. Lekić and Colonels J. Vukotić and G. Mandić, determine operational procedures for the next, believed to be successful, breakthrough of a group "of at least four divisions" across the Drina into western Serbia. This marked the start of a deliberate and systematic two-month period — organized according to established staff procedures — of work by the Supreme Headquarters to prepare two operational groups of divisions, under General P. Dapčević via the Ibar and D. Lekić via the Drina, which would enter Serbia as the vanguard of stronger forces and to establish cooperation with the Serbian divisions. The units were reorganized, regrouped, moved and supplied with war needs, politically and militarily prepared to accomplish that strategic objective. In this effort, military missions in Moscow and London* and the bases in Bari — of the NOVJ and (from June) the Red Army — were also engaged. The Operations Hall was a constant hive of activity: the situation on all fronts was tracked on maps, analyses and assessments were carried out, directives and orders were issued, briefings and consultations were held, and the Supreme Headquarters Radio Centre, with its seven powerful radio stations — through no fault of its own that its telegrams were being deciphered — worked very intensively and professionally. Questions raised by the war were taken up and resolved mainly through the missions of Brigadier F. Maclean and Lieutenant General N.V. Korneyev (who arrived in Drvar on March 23 with 20 associates): caring for thousands of severely wounded in Allied hospitals in Italy; determining the quantities and schedules of Allied military aid deliveries; training airmen, artillerymen and tank crews as the nucleus for creating future branches and arms; forming the first NOVJ squadrons within the RAF; cooperating in the bombing of German military targets on the Yugoslav front. In all this, Broz, occupied with strategic and political

* That same day, General S. Žujović made a similar offer to the Supreme Commander. Both letters were discovered in 1997 by Mr. Milan Terzić and partially quoted in an article published the same year in *VIG*; they are kept in Archives VII, box 2215, file 4, documents 8 and 9.

** In the great power games over Serbia, the "players" included Generals Simović, Mirković and Glišić, and Ž. Topalović also offered his services.

* The NOVJ military mission, headed by General V. Terzić, arrived in Moscow on April 12, while the earlier NOVJ mission to the Allied Supreme Command in the Mediterranean was "transferred" to London, with General V. Velebit remaining as its head. At the same time, General S. Orović was preparing to head the mission in Washington, studying English intensively, but due to political manoeuvring, nothing came of his wartime diplomatic posting.

Arso Jovanović and Tito before the raid on Drvar in 1944.

matters — especially regarding the recognition of the National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia as the legitimate government and building the most favourable positions with the Allies — left the resolution of military problems to the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, giving him the broadest authority. The only exception was the sending of the Shock Group of Divisions into Serbia (March 15-May 20), which he decided entirely on his own, certainly without consulting the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters.

When the airborne assault on Drvar began — as the striking element of the German corps operation "Rosselsprung" carried out over a wide area — Arso was the first, armed and together with Supreme Headquarters members A. Ranković and S.

Žujović, to leap from the cave and, with parts of the Escort Battalion and the Officers' School, organize its defence, sending, via couriers, orders to the corps and division commanders, writing reports to Broz like Ranković did, and urging him to finally leave the cave with the members and staff of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the Supreme Headquarters — something Broz agreed to only after five hours, when he allowed the organization of his evacuation.* The Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, as military custom dictates, was the last to leave Drvar** after doing everything possible to organize the defence and protect the people and institutions, confirming his adherence to the principle: first in the charge, with the call "Follow me!" — last in the withdrawal.

During the ten or so days of wandering by the highest leadership of the National Liberation Movement through the mountains of Klekovača, Šator and Vitorog, he was present at the decision-making. When the question arose of where to go from this wilderness, still under constant German attack, he proposed three options: to be flown to the operational area of the 2nd Shock Corps towards Serbia; to be flown, also by aircraft, to a territory under Allied protection and from there transferred "to Peko

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* D. Brajušković, in the collection *The Drvar Operation*, p. 98.

** Recollections of Drago Božović, commissar of the Supreme Headquarters' Escort Battalion, Belgrade, 1996.

and Mitar"*; or to remain in that area and share the fate of the units caught in the offensive operation. In deciding, he firmly supported the first option, providing a list of "airstrips" from which it was still possible to take off.** Broz, however, chose: from Kupreško polje to Vis, via Bari, in a Soviet aircraft.

The first task on Vis,*** in the first days of Rome's liberation and the initial phase of the Allied operation "Overlord," was to restore disrupted direct and indirect radio links with the corps headquarters and the main staffs, focusing on establishing stronger connections with the leadership of the National Liberation Movement in Serbia, where five Serbian divisions were already in action. There followed even more intensive cooperation with the Allied missions, especially concerning the evacuation and care of the wounded, the training of personnel in Allied centres, the formation of technical units and five overseas brigades, and the continuation of bombing German military targets — intensified in May — carried out according to proposals from the main staffs and corps headquarters, confirmed by the Supreme Headquarters and, with the supreme commander's signature, forwarded to the head-

* Recollections of A. Ranković in Broz's *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, p. 315.

** He wrote: "At Blagaj, on Kupreško polje, at Vukovsko and, probably, at the village of Ravno."

*** From June 7 to October 18, 1944, the Supreme Headquarters of the NOVJ operated from the island of Vis.

quarters of the U.S. 15th Air Force.* Bombing of large cities (according to V. Terzić) Arso regarded as "an inevitability and a misfortune, part of the great and inescapable war drama and the fate of the people," which made him all the more insistent on introducing strict order and the exact observance of mutual obligations. In carrying out bombing requests, the headquarters of the Western Allies were very diligent — which could not be said for other areas of cooperation, especially as NOVJ strategic formations approached Serbia, where that help was most needed. In July, the Germans undertook the "Andrijevica Operation" against the Operational Group of three divisions (the 2nd Proletarian, 5th and 17th) prepared to advance via Pešter and the Ibar, and in August the "Durmitor Operation" against three corps (the 1st Proletarian, 2nd Shock and 12th Vojvodina), aiming to prevent or at least delay their advance over Zlatibor and the Drina. This imposed increased obligations on the Supreme Headquarters, especially in relieving those units of their severely wounded and supplying them with

* The procedure applied to strategically important targets, especially in larger cities, while requests for bombing tactical targets — proposed by the Supreme Headquarters and corps headquarters — were sent through liaison officers to the command of the Balkan Air Force. From April to October 1944, 25 Serbian cities were bombed (Niš 15 times, Belgrade 11 times, Kragujevac 6 times, etc.), and Podgorica more than 70 times (completely levelled to the ground). At the same time, Broz and Kardelj openly spared Zagreb, Ljubljana and Maribor from such destruction.

weapons and food. When, at the airfield near Donji Brezani in Piva,* the lives of over 1,000 of the most severely wounded were at stake, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters went there on August 22, into the very centre of the drama, to Generals R. Vukanović and D. Lekić. But despite a firm agreement with Vice Marshal V. Elliot, he could not overcome British administrative barriers, and so he directed the evacuation (ahead of German assaults) from Bari.**

Successful diplomatic mission in Caserta

It was inevitable that the question of coordinating NOVJ operations with the summer campaign of the Red Army and the offensive of the 15th Group of Anglo-American Armies would come onto the agenda. In Broz's letter to Stalin of July 5, the Supreme Headquarters declared that the most effective military assistance to the armed forces of the National Liberation Movement would be a Red Army advance over the Carpathians into Romania and southward, while talks with General H.M. Wilson, the Allied supreme commander for the Mediterranean, would begin on August 6 in Caserta. In its own theatre, operational plans — at conferences, analyses and briefings — were coordinated with the headquarters of twelve corps and eight main staffs, and especially with the commands of three operational groupings prepared to advance into Serbia. Arso would summon commanders and chiefs of staff to him, or go to them himself, to finalize the plans and courses of operations, as well as the arrangements for caring for the wounded and feeding and clothing the troops — matters he considered operational problems of the first order. Such contacts were made possible by the Liaison Squadron of the Supreme Headquarters, obtained from the State Defence Committee of the USSR. One of the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters' most important tasks in this period was the assessment of the military situation in Serbia, with possible axes of advance and their capacities, focusing on the strategic ridge from Rudnik to Cer, the Šumadija and Belgrade operational zones, the great bend of the Danube, and Banat and Bačka, which would serve as a "guide" for carrying out the forthcoming operations for the liberation of Serbia.

For the talks with General H.M. Wilson, Broz was accompanied by S. Žujović and A. Jovanović, and from the Operations Department of the Supreme Headquarters by Generals I. Rukavina and G. Nikoliš, Colonels V. Klišanić and K. Levičnik, and Lieutenant Colonel Z. Ulepič. The group of operational officers was both large and, by its composition, impressive, because Broz, according to

* At that time, evacuation of seriously wounded and sick was carried out from 52 (mostly) improvised airfields across the theatre.

** On August 22, from D. Brezan, 36 transport planes, escorted by 50 fighters, transferred 1,059 wounded in several "runs."

the recollections of key participants, had not had time for a thorough preparation to conduct military discussions with Wilson, his chief of staff Gamel and other associates.* Already at the first meeting, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters raised a number of questions from the domain of mutual cooperation, supporting them with data prepared for this meeting: cooperation in possible joint operations on the Adriatic front, RAF air support across the theatre, requests for Allied military aid in food and weaponry, and especially the care of the wounded;** placing the royal navy and merchant fleet under the operational command of the NOVJ Navy headquarters; returning to the country about 40,000 Yugoslavs languishing in Mediterranean Allied bases; training pilots, tank crews, drivers, artillerymen, paratroopers, and other specialists in Anglo-American centres in Italy and North Africa, and so forth. Commander Wilson, together with his generals — clearly unprepared for such a conversation, especially since "the agenda and list of questions had not been formally set" — asked for a "few days' pause" in order to prepare answers to the issues raised in what he called "a brilliant presentation by General Jovanović."

In the continuation of the official talks (August

* V. Velebit, *Memoirs*, Zagreb, 1983, p. 268.

** At that time, 6,500 seriously wounded were being treated in Italy, 3,500 were awaiting evacuation from the battlefield, and for operations in the following five months, another 10,000 were expected.

10), nine issues were discussed and agreed upon, most of them formulated on the basis of General Jovanović's opening address. Favourable agreements for the NOVJ were reached in the areas of caring for the wounded and sick, especially their evacuation from the front; determining the quantity and delivery schedule of material-technical aid by aircraft and ships; ensuring the cooperation of Allied air forces at the tactical and operational levels (with strengthened liaison officer institutions); preparing the first two NOVJ squadrons for combat operations; equipping the 1st Tank Brigade with combat vehicles; training specialists; and mutual exchange of intelligence on German forces.*

In the conversation between the chiefs of the supreme headquarters of the two Allied sides — General Jovanović and General J. Gamel — and the representative of the supreme command of the Allied Air Forces in the Mediterranean, U.S. General Ira Eaker, a general agreement was reached to carry out a joint operation on the Yugoslav front — code-named "Ratweek" — the largest combined strategic air and sabotage operation of the Second World War. After expert teams worked out the details, it would be carried out from September 1 to 7, with Allied strategic air forces bombing, during the day, transportation infrastructure, industrial facilities serving the Germans, and military targets

* Collection *Tito-Churchill, Top Secret*, edited by Dr. D. Biber, Zagreb, 1981, p. 263.

in towns and along communications routes, while "at least a third of NOVJ forces" across the theatre would, at night, attack enemy units, destroy facilities, and cut land and water communications.*

Recipient of the highest orders of Kutuzov and Suvorov

In July and August, the Supreme Headquarters coordinated the battles and engagements to break up two German offensive operations conducted in Montenegro, pressing the Allies to ease, at least somewhat, the operational and material situation of the 12th Shock Corps and the "Nikola Tesla" 6th Lika Proletarian Division, which had been pushed onto the harsh Piva plateau and systematically prevented from advancing into Serbia. From Vis, operations were directed for the groups of divisions commanded by Generals P. Dapčević and K. Popović, especially in line with the anticipated radical changes in Romania and Bulgaria, instructing the Operational Group not to linger in the valley of the West Morava ("the throat that the enemy will stubbornly defend"), but to move as quickly as possible — with at least three divisions — to the Rud-

* The carefully and secretly planned operation began at midnight on September 1, simultaneously targeting 37 communication lines — 20 railway, 16 road and the Danube. In night-after-night attacks, around 130,000 fighters from 8 corps participated, while the air force, by day, bombed 33 cities, 14 of them on Serbian territory.

Arso Jovanović receiving the Order of Suvorov, 1st Class, from the hands of Soviet Ambassador I. Sadchikov.

nik-Suvobor-Povlen line and from there gradually strengthen and expand, inserting "light strike units into the Belgrade and Šumadija operational zones." In this, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters left the command free "to choose the manner of implementing the directive," while constantly insisting on top-priority strategic actions — mobilizing manpower and "manoeuvring forces."

He followed the operations for the liberation of Serbia and, in line with his responsibilities, directed the course of the divisions of the Operational Group, the 1st Proletarian and the 12th Shock Corps — eight in total (soon nine) — which were called the First Army Group. They did not occupy the strategic ridge, as from that point on, without consulting the Supreme Headquarters and relying directly on the staff services of Marshal Tolbukhin,

Broz himself directed them until the liberation of Belgrade, Banat and Bačka, and the occupation of the Srem front.* During this time, Generals Ranković and Jovanović, from Vis until their transfer to liberated Belgrade on October 20, commanded operations in other parts of the theatre. As for Serbia, they were ordered to disband the already formed Šumadija Division of the NOVJ,** but the two corps and four divisions recently formed in Serbia and Macedonia remained. This was also a time of intensive cooperation, through NOVJ military missions, with the command of the National Liberation Army of Albania (about 80,000 fighters) and the army of the Bulgarian Fatherland Front.***

On September 5, in Vis, Arso received — by decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, along with five other members of the Supreme Headquarters — the Order of Kutuzov, 1st Class, awarded "for exceptional combat activities and for displaying courage and boldness in the fight against the common enemy." Cooperation with the Western Allies, however, was becoming increasingly difficult: angry over Broz's secretive

* Broz was out of the country (in Moscow and Craiova) from September 18 to October 16, returning from Vršac to liberated Belgrade on October 25.

** Three brigades were designated, weapons provided, and the division commander and commissar appointed — Moma Đurić and M. Radovanović Farbin.

*** Mission chiefs: in Albania, Colonel Velimir Stojnić; in Bulgaria, General Vladimir Popović.

trip to Moscow, they stopped providing aid, especially for the liberation of "royalist" Serbia, fearing that Stalin would give Broz — unlike them, who had supplied heavy weaponry only "by the spoonful" — enough artillery, tanks and aircraft for the NOVJ to quickly grow into a modern and powerful regular army with no rival in Yugoslavia, which did not suit their plans. In fact, Stalin did provide two air divisions, a tank brigade, weapons for 12 divisions (each of 9-10,000 fighters), several frontline hospitals, 50,000 tonnes of grain, and an agreement was reached for two fronts of the Red Army (the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian) to take part in breaking Wehrmacht units on part of the Yugoslav front — in the Ponišavlje and Pomoravlje regions, Banat and the central Danube basin.

An active and successful athlete himself (a noted half-back in football, an excellent shot-putter and a fine marksman), he was a strong advocate of sports competitions, seeing in them a significant contribution to building the overall combat capability of units: in Foča he organized an "Olympics"; in Drvar he initiated competitions among youth corps delegates and units; on Vis he embraced swimming and football matches with Allied contingents, and at the end of August sent NOVJ swimmers and water polo players to Rome to compete against Americans, Britons, Frenchmen and Yugoslavs.*

* He appointed Major Oskar Danon, a talented musician and polyglot, as the leader of the trip, who, on September 2, submitted a detailed and interesting report, noting that they

With the move to Belgrade, the Supreme Headquarters of the NOVJ (from March 1, 1945 the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army) became a highly diversified "direct expert body of the Commissariat (Ministry) of National Defence," responsible for commanding all three branches of the armed forces. It had 13 organizational units, with a deputy and assistants, chiefs for operational and organizational affairs, for the navy, intelligence, technical training, military education, liaison with Allied military missions (USSR, UK, USA, France, Czechoslovakia, Albania and Poland) and more. Command links were established, cooperation between fronts and national staffs was agreed, order was introduced and priorities in supply were clarified, care for the wounded was secured, and other basic conditions for harmonious work towards victory were ensured. In this institution of 330 officers — according to R. Hamović, major general and chief of the Operations Department — "there was a full working atmosphere, harmonious staff work, complete harmony, without a single incident; there was great camaraderie, great enthusiasm," all of which "was primarily thanks to Chief Jovanović." At least half of the personnel was, day and night, "on the front line" from the Drava to Pag, and the Chief himself often flew to visit commanders on the fronts in Podravina, Srem, eastern Bosnia, towards Mostar and in Lika, directly influencing the course of combat operations, planning, regrouping and replenishing units, rearming and technically training new fighters, and mobilizing manpower and material resources.* Regular briefings, thematic consultations, and dispatching Supreme Headquarters delegates were practised; regular reporting was insisted upon, and two commanders' conferences were held under the organization of the armed forces.

had won one first place and one third place, while the water polo team took second.

Three-hour conversation and dinner with Stalin

From January 3 to February 14, 1945, General Jovanović led the NOVJ delegation to Moscow, together with Generals G. Nikoliš, R. Hamović, B. Obradović and S. Manola. At the same time, a state delegation headed by National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia member A. Hebrang — formally the head of both delegations as a Politburo member — was also in Moscow. The two of them were first received by V. Molotov, and on January 9 by J.V. Stalin himself. The content and

* By the end of 1944, 135,809 fighters had been mobilized in Serbia, and at the Founding Congress of the Communist Party of Serbia (May 1945), Blagoje Nešković stated in his political report that by Victory Day that number had risen to 250,000, with about 25,000 not responding to the call-up and around 7,000 deserting. All those mobilized were sent for two months of intensive combat training in replacement centres before going to the front.

especially the conclusions of the meeting were recorded in an official 12-page typed memorandum, in which the autocratic marshal and the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOVJ discussed military issues as equals, especially further inter-army cooperation in reorganizing and rearming the armed forces of the National Liberation Movement, specifying the role of Soviet advisers and instructors in the Yugoslav army, and so on.* From surviving documents, it is clear that during his 43 days in Moscow, Arso met several times with Marshal N. Bulganin of the State Defence Committee and with Army General Antonov and his expert team. Based on their agreements, he "presented the bill" to Stalin, who, on February 10, generously signed off that by August 10 the 12 previously armed divisions (each of 9,000 fighters) would be fully rearmed, and an additional 20 divisions (each of 6,000 fighters) would be completely armed, along with three engineering brigades, three artillery brigades, four signal regiments, three motor transport battalions and another two air divisions (a mixed and a transport), plus equipment for medical services, for military schools and so forth.** Stalin, open-handed

* Collection *Relations between Yugoslavia and Russia (USSR) 1941-1945*, edited by Dr. B. Petranović et al., Belgrade, 1996, p. 652.

** In 701 "items" it listed: 89,165 carbines, 24,839 revolvers and pistols, 38,800 PPSh submachine guns, 181 anti-tank rifles, 1,102 "Maxim" heavy machine guns, 932 artillery pieces, 130 tanks, 299 aircraft, etc.

and fully aware that on the borders with the capitalist world — about which he had no illusions — he needed a strong Yugoslav Army, repeated to its Chief of the General Staff: "Only force is respected, Comrade Jovanović — no one has any sentiment for the weak!"

In the "papers" of Mitra Mitrović and General G. Nikoliš, it is recorded that Marshal Stalin,* at a dinner given for the delegation at midnight on January 25, insistently and provocatively repeated that Bulgarians were better soldiers than Yugoslavs. To this, Arso responded with growing determination and emotion, trying to convince his host that he was wrong, citing arguments about the conduct of the Bulgarians during the Second World War. The dispute went so far that, while firmly defending the honour and dignity of the army whose supreme headquarters he headed, tears came to Arso's eyes. General Nikoliš, often unfavourable towards him during the National Liberation War, would later write that he "conducted himself truly bravely — weakly and unwisely, but bravely."**

Thorough preparations for the strategic offensive

In Belgrade, tasks awaited him in connection with the upcoming visit (February 23-28) of Field

* He would be awarded the rank of Generalissimo on June 25, 1945.

** G. Nikoliš, *Roots, Trunk, Branches*, Zagreb, 1979, p. 638.

Marshal Alexander to the Yugoslav capital and the Srem front, particularly the selection of key issues and the formulation of answers to them. Very important talks were held on inter-army cooperation in the final phase of the war, especially on the coastal strategic flank, so the chiefs of staff of both allied armies, Generals Jovanović and L. Lemnitzer, had their hands full. By location and time, the scope and method of cooperation were determined, as well as coordination between operational units, quantities of aid in weapons and, especially, food (for 60,000 fighters on the coastal flank), fuel (1,000 tonnes monthly) and artillery ammunition, the creation of large depots in the ports of Zadar, Split and Šibenik, the exchange of intelligence data, cooperation at sea and in the air and so forth. Two NOVJ squadrons would take off from Kano, Vis and Zadar, while support on the north-western front would also come from parts of the fleet of 6,000 aircraft based in Italy. Broz offered the Field Marshal the participation of 200,000 fighters in operations in Austria, on the condition that they be supplied with trucks, food and clothing.*

At the same time, and following agreements with Marshal Tolbukhin in Belgrade and near Budapest, the first meeting with army and service branch commanders was held in Belgrade (February 25-March 2). Organized by the Supreme Headquarters, it discussed coordination during

* Collection *Tito-Churchill, Top Secret*, p. 489.

Arso Jovanović welcomes Field Marshal Harold Alexander, Allied Commander for the Mediterranean, at the Belgrade airport in February 1945. Between them is Fitzroy Maclean.

the execution of the strategic offensive for the final liberation of the country, which would be confirmed at the next, second meeting at the end of March.* In mid-March, he would welcome to Belgrade General I. Eaker, supreme commander of Allied air forces in the Mediterranean, whose formations (particularly the U.S. 15th Air Force) had, within the framework of destroying the Third Reich and fighting the Wehrmacht, already

* Army commanders: Lieutenant Generals Peko Dapčević, Koča Popović, Košta Nađ and Petar Drapšin; Air Force and Navy commanders: Major Generals Grance Pire and Josip Černi.

been striking German targets in Yugoslavia for 18 months. Air support for joint ground operations was agreed upon. To determine naval cooperation, General J. Černi and S. Manola travelled to Italy to meet with the Allies.

Everything discussed and agreed in the General Staff was translated into plans, directives, orders, and documents for the archives and for history. Participants in these events recall that the work was demanding and professional, carried out day and night with enthusiasm — sometimes at the front, sometimes in the General Staff offices. A very complex and qualitatively new manoeuvre was adopted, composed of three stages: a double envelopment, a frontal breakthrough and a strike from the rear.

The final offensive for the complete liberation of the country began on March 30 with the offensive operation of the 4th Army (nine divisions, 67,000 fighters), tasked with seizing an operational area about 360 kilometres deep — to Trieste and across the Soča — with an emphasized need for constant reinforcement and air support. This was a particular concern for the Chief of the General Staff, aware that this was a matter of the highest national interest, an act of honour for the Yugoslav Army.

At the time the directive for carrying out the final strategic offensive and breaking through the

Srem Front was issued, the Supreme Commander was in Moscow (April 5-20) to sign, on April 11, the Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Post-War Cooperation with the Soviet Union. In the duties of the Supreme Command, as on Vis, he was replaced by General A. Ranković, who signed the directive prepared in the General Staff according to elements established earlier at the second meeting with the army and service branch commanders (March 25-27).

For the second time among the Slovenians

The leading figures of the General Staff, primarily Generals A. Jovanović and R. Hamović, oversaw the implementation of the directive, with the Chief of the General Staff becoming more directly involved from the outset — and especially after Broz's return from Moscow — in assisting the Staff of the 4th Army. He was mindful of both the significance and complexity of its mission, while also taking care not to limit its independence in decision-making and operational leadership on the left flank of the army's formation and at the junction with the Western Allies. Understanding the need for a faster advance of this army and the liberation of the coastal belt all the way to the Soča River — and certainly for taking Trieste before the Western Allies — Arso

became directly engaged on the army's front as early as April 22, and from April 28 he was largely at the forward command post of Commander Petar Drapšin. From Klana, on his initiative, a substantially reinforced 20th Division was sent from the army's ready reserves to serve as the backbone of a strong operational formation tasked with liberating Trieste. In coordination with elements of another three divisions, it accomplished this on May 1, before the 2nd New Zealand Division reached the Soča.* This pre-empted the implementation of an agreement between the Allies and the German command of Army Group "C" (about 600,000 troops) — whereby the 15th Army Group would push into the Trieste area so that Army Group "E" could surrender to them (and not to the Yugoslav Army). The liberation of Trieste presented the Allies with a fait accompli and forced the German 97th Corps to capitulate.

On May 3, from Bazovica — through the Soča canyon clogged with Allied columns rushing north — Arso ordered the deployment to Austria of a Yugoslav motorized detachment of about 5,000 troops. Operating in Carinthia alongside the 14th Division and units of the 4th Operational Zone, they enabled the capture of General A. Lohr and a group of Pavelić's collaborators.

* Contribution by B. Pecotić in the collection *Final Operations for the Liberation of Yugoslavia*, Belgrade, 1986, p. 410.

With the capitulation of the 97th Corps (May 7) in the Ilirska Bistrica area, combat operations on the 4th Army's front ceased. In 49 days, it had carried out two offensive operations over a theatre stretching from Lika to the Soča — a depth of about 360 kilometres — achieving an advance rate of 6 kilometres per day, defeating two German corps (15th and 97th), and capturing more than 90,000 troops.

Because of Allied political manoeuvring over the fate of the Julian March, the Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army spent, for the second time during the National Liberation War, an extended period in Slovenia,* invested with the broadest authority over some 110,000 troops and heading the military-state commission for negotiations with the Allied Supreme Command** on the fate of Istria, Trieste and the Julian March — parts of Croatian and Slovenian national territory which had been ceded to Italy by the Treaty of Rapallo of 1920. Negotiations were conducted mainly with the Allied military team headed by General W. Morgan, chief of staff to Field Marshal Alexander, both in Belgrade (June 5-9) and in Trieste (the town of Devin, June 13-

* From May 1 to June 26, 1945.

** Composition of the commission — at Kardelj's request: Arso Jovanović, Koča Popović, Jaka Avšić, Vladimir Velebit and Srećko Manola.

29). The talks took place in exceptionally tense circumstances, when two large, well-equipped armies — Yugoslav and Anglo-American, until recently allies — faced each other on a very narrow stretch of land, literally with fingers on the trigger. By general acknowledgement, the Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army — in a situation where Prime Minister Churchill and President Truman were determined to defend, even by force, their own imperial plans and Italy's interests — handled the troops, embittered by Allied actions (especially the cut-off of food and air support), with wisdom, courage and dignity. He firmly defended every inch of Yugoslav land, even while uncertain whether Kardelj and the Slovenian leadership were right, in their imperial zeal, to demand Trieste and "Venetian Slovenia" on northern Italian soil. Largely thanks to General Jovanović's determination and the strength of the forces standing behind him, Istria with Rijeka and part of the Slovenian littoral remained within Yugoslavia's borders, while there was no retaining Trieste or the territory west of the Soča, nor fulfilling the political leadership's request — verbally supported by Stalin — that Yugoslavia's 3rd Army take part in the occupation of Austria within the Red Army's occupation zone.

At Devin, the implementation of the Julian March agreement signed on June 9 in Belgrade

was arranged, with persistent efforts to prevent armed conflict under increasingly strained circumstances. After ten days of talks, in which General Jovanović — according to key participants — fought decisively for Yugoslavia's national interests, the Devin Agreement (implementing the June 9 accord) was signed on June 20, establishing the so-called Morgan Line, which divided the disputed territory into "A" and "B" zones, each under separate military administration.

He returned to the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army on June 26, after a period of very intense "post-war war," just as Belgrade was in euphoric celebration of Stalin's proclamation as Generalissimo. There was a great deal of work: reorganizing the wartime Yugoslav Army of 800,000 troops into six Ground Forces armies and one Tank Army; redeploying units; preparing strategic formations to defend the country's integrity from the south; accelerating the rearmament of the troops; professional training and education of the officer corps — about 100,000 officers and NCOs, 85 per cent of whom had no secondary schooling; building essential infrastructure; assisting the economy; regulating relations between the Ministry of National Defence and its professional organ, the General Staff; drafting legal regulations; ensuring the availability of professional literature, and more.

This was the period when there were 472 advisers and instructors from the Red Army — from ensigns to generals — in the Yugoslav Army's headquarters and schools. There were also misunderstandings with them, and complaints about certain individuals, which led the Minister of National Defence, Marshal Josip Broz, on July 10, 1945 to sign an order that these specialists be used "in the most proper and useful way" and that relations with them "be in every sense brotherly and friendly, with due respect and genuine appreciation." With the status of deputy commander, they had access to all meetings and all data, participated in drafting every document and had copies of them; there were no secrets kept from them. This increasingly bothered General Jovanović, as he confided to his deputy Terzić — all the more so because, by the will of the Yugoslav Army's political-military leadership, made up of "revolutionary cadre" drawn from "workers, peasants and honest intelligentsia," the values, traditions, formations, organization, and training and combat experience of the "former Yugoslav Army" and its officers were entirely ignored and, even when critically assessed, were not applied in building the Yugoslav Army. It is true that in the autumn of 1945, Broz publicly declared there would be no difference in treatment between commanders who had risen in the National Liberation War

and officers who had conducted themselves with bravery and patriotism in prison camps.* But this remained only words, and the "former officers" — at that time senior leaders in the very top of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army, including Generals Jovanović, Terzić, Apostolski, Hamović, Škorpik, Primorac, Poljanac, Obradović, Vujović, Klišanić and others — could no longer influence matters. In contrast, Soviet military doctrine and experience were accepted with virtually no critical thought, especially those of the victorious Red Army. Soviet instructors sought to unify and standardize everything, as in broader social life: organization, formation, equipment, weaponry, combat training, school systems and interpersonal relations among military personnel. It was far too much, imposed far too quickly, and the Chief of the General Staff advocated for greater respect for at least some of the Yugoslav Army's specific features, for valuing experience from its own theatres — not only from the Second World War — and for greater recognition of what thousands of "former officers" knew, could do and were willing to contribute.

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* Speech delivered on October 16 in Zemun, at a gathering of officers who had returned from POW camps; of all the officers who returned to the country in 1945 and 1946, only 1,957 had their former rank recognized, and only 11 generals were "retained."

General Jovanović served as Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army until September 15, 1945, when he handed over the post to Lieutenant General Koča Popović in view of his planned departure for studies in the Soviet Union.* Before leaving for Moscow,** he was decorated with the highest domestic and Allied honours, including the Order of Suvorov, First Class.*** He was celebrated and held up as an example to others,**** sent as the Supreme Commander's envoy and the Yugoslav Army's representative to major events, gave several lectures at the Military Academy, wrote about ten lessons in

* Order of the Minister of National Defence, confidential no. 401 of September 11, 1945. One of the documents he handed over, as per the inventory, was a plan for training 42,286 officers and military officials over the next five years.

** A group of 17 "Voroshilovists" departed for studies in Moscow on March 15, 1946, returning to the country in early June 1948 after passing their final diploma exams.

*** Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of October 15, 1945.

**** The highly influential Mitar Bakić, in November 1945 — certainly with J. Broz's blessing — initiated the proposal to award General Arso R. Jovanović the Order of People's Hero. The drafting of the proposal, under the supervision of Politburo member M. Đilas, was carried out by R. Vukanović and B. Jovanović. The "paper" was approved by the Montenegrin party leadership, but "somewhere in Belgrade it got misplaced."

military science at the strategic and operational levels, and published three notable works on the National Liberation War: on the development of the NOVJ, the Belgrade Operation and the Battle of Pljevlja.* He spoke French fluently and had working knowledge of Russian and English.

As part of an official visit to the USSR (May 27-June 10), Marshal Tito hosted, on June 2, 1946 at the Embassy in Moscow, a formal lunch for the group of our generals studying at the Voroshilov Military Academy. The first toast he raised was to his "chief military associate, General Arso Jovanović, who during the National Liberation War had been the initiator or planner of major operations." In this spirit, he spoke at length about his first wartime military collaborator, stringing together ever more glowing epithets.** Regardless of his motives for saying this at that time, in that setting, and in the heart of Moscow, this — for anyone who understands the nature of hierarchy at the strategic staff level — was the highest recognition a Supreme Commander can give the chief of his wartime staff. This was the full truth, spoken aloud at the time, but within just two

* In official bibliographies, 17 titles from the National Liberation War and 14 about the National Liberation War are listed under his name.

** From the manuscript of Yugoslav People's Army Colonel Radomir Ljaka Vujošević, then a major and student at the "Stalin" Tank Academy in Moscow.

years, due to disagreements over fundamental issues of national defence in the new and highly complex politico-military circumstances, and the forgetting of wartime debts, it was harshly denied — and in the years and decades that followed, denied in chorus. Even to this day, more than five decades after his disappearance from the stage of life, nothing is known of the fate of this General Staff officer, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOVJ throughout the entire National Liberation War, a graduate of the Voroshilov Academy, and bearer of the highest classes of the Orders of Suvorov and Kutuzov, a Colonel-General of the Yugoslav Army and commander-designate of the Higher Military Academy.* It is not even known where his grave lies.

Reflecting on the cruel fate of one of the leading figures of our anti-fascist war prompted the outcry of the well-known historian Prof. Dr. Branko Petranović in the pages of his testamentary book, where, contemplating the fate of this "distinguished soldier of our war," he asked: "Is Arso Jovanović the only one accursed, about whom there must be eternal silence, and what are those forces that fear the graves of their opponents?"** The question has

* According to the Ministry of the Interior's statement, he was killed during the night of August 11-12, 1948 while attempting to illegally cross the border near Vršac.

** B. Petranović, The *Historian and the Contemporary Epoch*, Belgrade, 1994, p. 216.

now remained open for a full fifty years. Over the "case" of Arso R. Jovanović, a grave silence still reigns. For years there has been fruitless correspondence by the "competent authorities" in their efforts to locate the site where his earthly remains rest. General Koča Popović, in his role as Vice-President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, attempted to form a parliamentary inquiry commission to finally uncover the full truth, but it never moved beyond an attempt. Dr. Zoja, the younger daughter of General Jovanović, ended her brief but deeply emotional remarks at the unveiling of a memorial plaque by the door of his birthplace in Zavala by asserting her right to say publicly that her father's bones "should no longer lie in the weeds, and that even today one must still fear those who themselves do not fear sin." With that, we end this account of an era of ideological conformity and one of its most famous victims.

(Arso R. Jovanović: (1907-1948), Vojno-istorijski glasnik, God. 47, Br. 3, 1998, str. 131-177.)

THE JOURNEY IN LIFE OF THE CHIEF OF THE SUPREME HEADQUARTERS OF THE NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY OF YUGOSLAVIA

The commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the victory over fascism could have served both as a reason and an opportunity — at academic conferences, in scholarly studies and commemorative publications, in periodicals, as well as in speeches delivered at ceremonial academies, in newspapers and TV programs — in short, in every place where publicly spoken words are permanently and visibly recorded, to settle some longstanding moral debts. Among others, this includes debts owed to unjustly neglected and forgotten individuals whose contributions to that victory are beyond dispute. This opportunity was missed, at least in the case of Arso R. Jovanović, Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOVJ during all four years of the anti-fascist war — a man who, by the nature of his position and what he did, was one of the most capable, respected and influential soldiers in shaping the course and outcome of the Yugoslav National Liberation War.

This merely continues a practice rooted in ideological conformity and sectarian exclusivity — a practice that, in this case, began in the ill-fated August of 1948, when he was liquidated as a Colonel-General and the head of the Higher Military

Academy then in formation. From that point on, he was publicly discredited and defamed at every opportunity without valid reason or shame, his wartime work was belittled or erased, his merits were appropriated, his mistakes exaggerated, or — what is equally unacceptable — his name was persistently silenced. This erasure of the name and contributions of the wartime Chief of the Supreme Headquarters was based on the ominous principle that something is not officially prohibited but is effectively forbidden. In the case of Arso Jovanović, this principle was enforced at one point in the mid-1960s when General Milinko Đurović, head of the Military Publishing Institute, was ordered not to mention three names in studies, collected works, encyclopedic editions or journals: Petko Miletić, Arso Jovanović and Milovan Đilas. Arso's name, with rare exceptions that prove this rule of enforced silence, was not mentioned until the early 1980s.

The name of this first wartime general of the NOVJ does not appear even where, given the importance of the position he held and his undeniable contributions to the victory over fascism, it absolutely should have: not in the *Encyclopedia of Yugoslavia* (1960), nor in the expanded and revised two-volume *National Liberation War of the Peoples of Yugoslavia 1941-1945* (published in 1965 by the Military History Institute), nor in the *Chronology of the National Liberation War* (1964, also from the Institute), nor in the *Military Lexicon* (VINC 1981), nor in the majority of studies and nearly all mem-

oirs published before 1980, nor in military history textbooks or lessons on warfare at the strategic and operational levels. Moreover, original documents concerning his life and service have been destroyed or deliberately hidden. Even the most basic information from his personal file about his military career before the Second World War is missing, and every detail — especially those that shed a positive light on this professional career soldier — must be painstakingly and persistently sought out in domestic, allied and enemy archives, in the books of both local and foreign authors, and from the memories of key witnesses. From the mosaic formed by these fragments, the figure of one of the most prominent military leaders of the National Liberation War begins to emerge.

Understanding that even the title of this academic gathering — *The Second World War: Fifty Years Later* — organized by two of our most respected scientific and cultural institutions and held in Arso's hometown of Podgorica, offers a chance to right this clear injustice towards a person whose contribution to victory is undeniably significant, we will present just a few details uncovered through our research. Though presented in a fragmentary and heavily abridged manner, they may nonetheless assist in answering the question: who was the first and only Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOVJ, and what was the trajectory of his military and personal development from December 12, 1941 until Victory Day?

Arso Jovanović was born on March 24, 1907 in the village of Zavala, municipality of Piperi, in the Podgorica district. By the standards of Montenegrin village life at the time, his father Radivoje was a moderately well-off farmer, married to Zorka Popović from the nearby village of Blizna. Radivoje fought in both Balkan Wars and the First World War, and during the third conflict — the Battle of Mojkovac in early January 1916, led by the legendary Serdar Janko Vukotić — he was seriously wounded and left permanently blind as a result. Arso was the eldest child in the family and had three sisters: Miluša, Raka and Draga. By a string of tragic circumstances, during what should have been the best years of his youth, Arso lived through the terrible war from 1912 to 1918 with all the suffering it brought — particularly the occupation, famine and the Spanish flu. These three scourges were remembered in Montenegro alongside centuries of Turkish oppression and sung about to the accompaniment of the *gusle*.

The example of a father blinded while fighting for freedom and securing the retreat of the allied and fraternal army, the bitter memories of war, knowledge of Montenegrin history, respect for the people's traditions and collective memory, as well as the ever-present Russophilia and his upbringing in the Royal Yugoslav Army — built on the cult of the Serbian army and its Salonika officers, with the renowned military commanders above all — played a significant role in shaping Arso Jovanović into a

professional soldier and patriot. In this context, we can also find the only possible answer to the question of why, in the uprising year of 1941, he stepped forward without hesitation to lead the Montenegrin people's army, and then, throughout the National Liberation War, served as the head of the Supreme Headquarters of the only anti-fascist and victorious army on the Yugoslav front.

After graduating from the gymnasium in Podgorica, he chose a military career. Upon completing the 53rd class of the Military Academy in 1928, he was promoted to the rank of second lieutenant; in 1932 to lieutenant; in 1936 to captain, second class; and in 1939 to captain, first class. In the meantime, as a lieutenant, he had completed the 34th class of the Higher Military School, later also completing General Staff training. With the required field experience and all the service evaluations necessary for advancement, he would have been promoted to major in the General Staff on April 1, 1942. That would have been the "normal" peacetime career of a successful officer. But by then — at 34 years old — due to the circumstances of war, and by no means by accident, he would already be Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the liberation army, a rise no young officer, however ambitious, could have ever hoped for. Let us also note two more details: as a second lieutenant, he was awarded the Gold Medal for Diligent Service — a rare distinction — and as a captain, first class, while serving at the Infantry Officers' School in Kalinovik, he published

a professional manual entitled *Tactics of the Infantry Battalion*. This publication, approved by the Minister of the Army and Navy, was widely applied and highly regarded by its users, which was also an unusual accomplishment for someone of his rank and in such a remote posting.

The April War caught him in Sarajevo. Immediately following the unconditional capitulation of the army he served in (April 17), he and his wife Ksenija (Senka) and their two daughters returned to his homeland. There, under occupation and through his relative Blažo Jovanović — organizational secretary of the Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia — he quickly joined the preparations for the uprising. He became a training instructor for strike groups from Piperi, and with a group of officers — including Major Vaso Vukčević — he drafted a document on the organization of the insurgent army based on the model of the Montenegrin people's army up to 1916. He also wrote letters to a few officers he trusted, pointing out the most critical targets for attack once the uprising began.

He stood with the fighters from Piperi from the very first moment of the uprising. When their units grew to 862 fighters within the first two days of combat, he formed a battalion and, with about one hundred fighters, set out on July 16 for the Lješanska nahija to incite the uprising. However, facing resistance, he arrived on July 17 at the Operational Staff of about 3,000 insurgents from Bjelopavlići,

who were tightening the noose around the garrison in Danilovgrad. There, he agreed on their participation in the battles for the liberation of Podgorica.

From July 18 to August 8, he served as the commander of the Provisional Supreme Command of the national liberation troops of Montenegro, Boka and the Sandžak. The staff included Milovan Đilas as "liaison with the people," and members Božo Ljumović, Blažo Jovanović, Budo Tomović and, as an advisor, Colonel Bajo Stanišić.

At first, he was stationed on the front towards Podgorica, where he drafted an order to attack the city of his youth. However, due to the harsh reaction of the Italians, the plan was abandoned. At the moment the southern fronts began to collapse, he hurried north to stop the advance of Mussolini's divisions alongside insurgents from the Kolašin, Andrijevica and Berane regions, preserving Vasojevići and the Sandžak as an operational space — both vast and suitable for manoeuvres from a military standpoint. He encountered resistance from some of the officers who had until then served in insurgent commands. In line with directives from London to refrain from fighting the occupiers, they opposed further resistance against the Italians and, certainly, any collaboration with the communists. They were instead determined to fight against "Albanians and Turks" — that is, Albanian and Muslim collaborators who were indeed launching attacks from Plav and Gusinje, from Rožaje and Pešter. The situation grew more complicated by the hour. The insurgent

fronts in northeastern Montenegro were thinning under the assault of the "Venetia" and "Puglia" divisions. This was compounded by sabotage from some officers and their supporters, and increasingly ruthless attacks from neighbouring collaborators. On August 5, the Italians reoccupied Kolašin, leaving only one option — a temporary withdrawal from those positions as well.

On August 8, Arso attended the Provincial Conference held on Mount Kamenik in the Piperi region. The gathering assessed the course of the uprising in Montenegro, defined the upcoming political and military objectives and reorganized the command structure. A Staff for the National Liberation Guerrilla (Partisan) Detachments for Montenegro, Boka and the Sandžak was established, with Arso appointed as Chief of Staff, alongside Commander Đilas and Political Commissar Blažo Jovanović. At the proposal of the Conference, the Party cell from his native Đukovići admitted him into the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. What followed was a period of intense engagement in building the insurgent army: forming squads, companies and battalions, then the planned nine brigades and three detachments — again following the model of the Montenegrin People's Army. Convinced that any weakening of armed resistance would lead to the collapse of the uprising, Arso insisted that the units, especially the basic ones formed on the basis of kinship and tribal ties, should be gathered, trained, live a soldier's life and carry out armed

operations. At his suggestion, in early October, the Staff planned and entrusted the Zeta Detachment with an operation at Jelino Dub. Carried out on October 18, the action resulted in the destruction of 43 trucks, 150 enemy soldiers killed or wounded and 64 captured. It would go down in history as one of the most successful ambushes of the National Liberation War.

He held open and often tense discussions with many "national elements," mostly officers, among them: Captain First Class Pavle Đurišić, a close friend from their second lieutenant days in Sarajevo; General Staff Major Ćorđija Lašić, bound to him by strong ties of godparenthood; his old acquaintance, Air Force Major Andrija Vesković; Colonel Bajo Stanišić, whom he greatly respected for his rank, age and proven bravery; and later on, at Radovče, after the arrival of the "Balzai" British-Yugoslav mission, General Staff Majors Mirko Lalatović and Zaharije Ostojić, who had been sent on a special mission by Army General Bogoljub Ilić, Minister of the Army and Navy, along with British Captain Bill Hudson, representing the Special Operations Executive Balkan Section. There was no doubt that they — on one side — and he, on the other, held fundamentally different views on the same issues. He considered their arguments. It pained him that they were no longer on the same side, but there was no uncertainty in his determination: there would be no laying down of arms while the occupier remained on the homeland's soil, nor

any collaboration with those who cooperated with the occupier.

Some, including highly influential individuals, later wondered how these men — whose opinions Arso respected — had not "won him over" to their side or at least shaken his resolve. The truth is, he could have crossed over to Ravna Gora from Užice, alongside Lalatović, Ostojić and Hudson, just before the negotiations between Draža and Tito in Brajići. He had arrived in Užice with Mitar Bakić, by decision of the provincial military and party leadership, to report to the Supreme Headquarters on the situation in Montenegro and receive new assignments. He was assigned — together with Ivan Milutinović, who was appointed as the new commander of the Main Staff — to liberate Pljevlja, reinforce the National Liberation Movement in the Sandžak, and then, in line with an earlier decision, to send 2,500 to 3,000 Montenegrins to Serbia to form larger and more mobile units, as outlined at the Stolice Conference (September 26).

On December 1, with the Montenegrin National Liberation Movement Detachment designated for the operation in the Sandžak — comprising 3,690 fighters organized into nine battalions and 34 companies — he launched an attack on Pljevlja and suffered a defeat. The headquarters of the "Pusteria" Division was not taken, and the detachment sustained heavy losses: 224 killed and 262 wounded. Although Arso was certainly not the most responsible for the failure and the irreparable

losses — especially considering that the operation had been politically mandated — he could not be absolved of command responsibility simply due to the high military post he held. Still, no one blamed him during the course of the National Liberation War, likely because the operation, conducted under his command, became a prime example of a bold and well-executed manoeuvre by National Liberation Movement units on the Yugoslav front, and the detachment he commanded stood as the largest Partisan unit in the first year of the war.

In Drenova, on December 12, Josip Broz, harshly reminded of the losses in Serbia — due in no small part to disorganization at the strategic level — appointed Arso as Chief of the Supreme Headquarters. He would soon report this appointment to the Comintern, assigning Arso the task of liberating Rudo with his detachment. The town was liberated on December 17, soon becoming the first headquarters of the Supreme Headquarters in Bosnia and the birthplace of the 1st Proletarian Brigade, whose formation Arso saw as the beginning of an operational army — a precondition for future victories.

He played a key role in defeating the offensive actions of the occupiers and collaborators in eastern Bosnia in early 1942, and especially during the 110 days when the Supreme Headquarters operated from Foča, between January and May. He was particularly active in defending the free territory of northern Montenegro from the Chetnik offensive

and eastern Bosnia from the occupation-collaborationist "Trio" operations (April-June). On behalf of the Supreme Headquarters, he personally planned and directed the destruction of the dangerous Ustaša stronghold of Borač in Herzegovina (April 17), and as early as spring, he advocated transferring the bulk of the endangered Partisan forces westward into Bosnia by penetrating the central Bosnian highlands. At the time, however, most members of the Supreme Headquarters favoured a return to Serbia. In connection with that idea, even in May, the plan included taking control of the Vasojevići region and liberating Nova Varoš as a "staging ground" for that offensive. But due to the unrealistic nature of such an operation under the prevailing military and political conditions, it was never carried out.

Remaining committed to his idea of shifting operations towards western Bosnia, Arso took a leading role in the formation of the new 4th Proletarian Brigade. Together with the 1st and 2nd Proletarian Brigades — under more favourable operational conditions, both politically and militarily — it was to become the backbone of the NOVJ. He argued for this strategy until a decision was made to launch an offensive of the group of proletarian brigades precisely into western Bosnia. Among the options — Serbia, eastern Bosnia or the Bosnian Krajina — his plan prevailed. At the start of the offensive, Arso and Đilas represented the Supreme Headquarters within the Operational Headquar-

ters of the right (northern) assault column, which also included the commanders of the 2nd and 4th Proletarian Brigades, Ljubodrag Đurić and Peko Dapčević. On the night of July 3-4, a successful attack was carried out on a section of the Sarajevo-Mostar railway, from Haćići to Tarčin. Gornji Vakuf was then liberated, although two attempts to take Bugojno (July 16-17 and 20-21) failed. Some degree of responsibility for these failures — rightly or wrongly — was attributed to the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters.

Having learned from the failures in the attempts to liberate towns — especially Pljevlja and Bugojno — Arso opposed attacking Livno and, more particularly, Kupres. He proposed that these positions be isolated and bypassed instead. This is confirmed in the testimonies of Radovan Vukanović and Milovan Đilas. However, the Supreme Commander insisted that these fortified positions, especially Kupres — which he referred to as the "Ustaša Alcatraz" — be attacked and taken at any cost. This is also evident from one of Tito's letters to Arso dated July 30, which in content was a rebuttal to a now-lost letter from Arso. Since that letter was not preserved, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters' arguments for bypassing the towns and taking a slightly more indirect but safer route towards the Dalmatian, Lika, Banija, Kordun and Krajina Partisan units remain unknown.

Fortunately, Livno was captured between August 4 and 7 under the command of the Operation-

al Staff led by Arso. However, this major victory left behind three negative marks associated with the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters — marks that would be used to publicly and maliciously attack him, especially after his liquidation in August 1948. The first two were two notes written to Tito by Koča Popović, laced with cynicism, exclusivity and sectarianism, clearly aimed at completely discrediting Arso Jovanović as a commander. These notes were written in response to entirely human and, under wartime conditions, unavoidable misunderstandings. The third was a rumour, often repeated and reprinted in public, that Arso had led the Livno operation from his command post in "Švabino polje," allegedly at least ten kilometres away from the "Mitrović house." This was a lie, as he had spent the entire night in the front line, mostly with the fighters of the 3rd Sandžak Proletarian Brigade — a fact still confirmed by living witnesses.

Kupres, on the first night of the attack, August 11-12, was not taken — despite the efforts of the 2nd and 4th Proletarian Brigades, the 10th Herzegovinian Brigade, a battalion of the 3rd Sandžak Brigade and elements of three battalions of Krajina fighters. As a result, Arso asked the Supreme Commander to relieve him of his duties as commander of the Operational Headquarters of the units which, by Josip Broz's explicit order, were to attack again on the night of August 13-14. He asked to be sent to any other section of the offensive front in any role. He was assigned to the western assault

column, while command of the Operational Headquarters — now reinforced by the 1st Krajina Brigade — was entrusted to Colonel Savo Orović, a member of the Supreme Headquarters, who did everything possible to secure success in the renewed attack. However, the second attempt also failed — primarily due to the strength and fortification of the enemy's defence and the attackers' lack of artillery support. The losses were significantly heavier this time: from the 4th Proletarian Brigade alone, 71 fighters and commanders were killed, including 33 from the 2nd Battalion. The lesson Arso had already learned was now paid for dearly: without adequate artillery, city fortifications could not be taken. Military doctrine dictated that such positions be isolated, blocked and bypassed.

Based on the decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia on October 19 and following repeated requests from Edvard Kardelj for staff support from the Supreme Headquarters, Arso left Oštrelj on November 17 with a group of thirteen officers from Proletarian units. He carried a written mandate from Tito authorizing him to assume command of the Main Staff in Slovenia, reorganize Slovenian units and incorporate them into the NOVJ, and above all, to overcome the limitations of the local resistance movement through larger-scale operations. In carrying out this mission, he encountered strong resistance from the insular and overly sensitive Slovenian leadership. As a result, on January 12, 1943, Kardelj

sent a letter to Tito — full of insinuations, half-truths, political disqualifications, sectarian judgements and conspiratorial undertones — in which he delivered a harshly negative assessment of Arso's mission in Slovenia. He even criticized Arso's intention to transform the Partisan forces into regular military units — something Tito himself had specifically demanded. This letter would later be frequently cited after Arso's death, naturally in ways that suited the respective agendas of those quoting it. The seven officers he brought from Slovenia are rarely mentioned, and the written authorization itself was not published until 1982 in Volume 13 of Tito's *Collected Works*. Two other documents related to this mission remain unpublished, meaning that for far too long, no balanced analysis of both sides' arguments has been possible.

Upon returning to the Supreme Headquarters (July 5, 1943), its Chief took on numerous duties: re-establishing connections with the Main Staffs and corps headquarters that had been disrupted during the "Weiss" and "Schwarz" operations; planning further operations; forming a military intelligence service; addressing the challenges brought about by Italy's capitulation; organizing new corps and divisions; caring for the wounded; coordinating Allied military aid; developing the wartime education system; and ensuring operational cooperation with foreign military representatives. After the session in Jajce, where he was a council delegate, he led efforts to break a series of German winter

operations carried out by the 2nd Armoured Army — reinforced with three divisions — in the central theatre. This temporarily delayed the planned shift of the NOVJ's operations to the eastern part of the country. Given the Supreme Commander's preoccupation with Allied cooperation and the campaign for international recognition of the new Yugoslavia, Arso personally maintained direct communication with the Main Staffs and headquarters of eleven corps and multiple divisions operating along the main fronts. He also closely — and quite literally, day and night — followed and directed, to the extent possible under conditions where the enemy deciphered every order and directive and the Allies failed to fulfil their promises of air supply, the offensive push by the Shock Group of Divisions (the 2nd Proletarian and 5th Krajina Divisions) from March 16 to May 20, 1944, towards the Ibar River and then into western Serbia.

In Drvar, on behalf of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOVJ, Arso greeted the delegates of the 2nd Youth Congress (May 2-5). During the Drvar Operation, he played a key role alongside Žujović and Ranković. Then, in early June — during the most dramatic moments for the survival and continued functioning of the Supreme Headquarters — he considered three potential evacuation options. He advocated for transferring the Supreme Commander and the Allied military mission leaders by plane from one of seven regional Partisan airfields to the liberated territory of Montenegro,

secured by the 2nd Shock Corps. There, they would await the arrival of the 1st Proletarian Corps, and together with a group of assault divisions from eastern Bosnia, carry out a breakthrough into Serbia. This would mark the beginning of the final liberation battles in cooperation with the already formed four divisions and numerous National Liberation Movement detachments in that region. The Supreme Commander, however — undoubtedly influenced by the senior officers of the Allied missions — decided instead to be evacuated on the night of June 3-4 from Kupreško polje to the island of Vis.

On the island of Vis, in cooperation with a group of prewar high-ranking officers from all three military branches, Arso organized efficient staff services and developed close collaboration with Allied command units stationed there. However, his top-priority task was to re-establish the communications system that had been disrupted during the Drvar Operation — a task he successfully accomplished thanks to the use of seven powerful radio stations. Then, on June 14, representing the military and political leadership, he welcomed Dr. Ivan Šubašić, president of the royal government, and subsequently worked with Serbia's top military and police leadership to define and elaborate plans for the final liberation of the eastern front. From August 6 to 14, with only brief interruptions for urgent staff duties on Vis, Arso participated in high-level talks in Caserta with Tito and Žujović, meeting with General H.M. Wilson, Supreme Allied Com-

mander for the Mediterranean, and his staff. At the very first meeting, Arso confused the Allied leadership with his well-reasoned and wide-ranging demands: coordination for potential joint operations, requests for Allied military aid, the transfer of the royal navy and merchant fleet under the command of the NOVJ Naval Staff, the return to Yugoslavia of some 40,000 Yugoslavs stranded at Allied bases across the Mediterranean, the training of aviators, tank crews, drivers, artillerymen and other specialists in Anglo-American centres in Italy and North Africa, and the care of thousands of wounded, among other issues. General Wilson and his generals — clearly unprepared for such a conversation — requested a "multi-day pause" to prepare their responses. During those negotiations, Arso, as Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOVJ, and General James Gammell, Chief of Staff to General Alexander, agreed on — and later developed — a joint operation codenamed "Ratweek," to be conducted between September 1 and 7. According to the plan, Allied strategic air forces would bomb transportation infrastructure, industrial facilities supporting the Germans, and military targets in cities during the day, while approximately 100,000 NOVJ fighters would carry out night raids — attacking enemy units, destroying installations and disrupting communications across the entire front.

During July and August, Arso coordinated the battles against the Andrijevica and Durmitor operations, and through radio links, he worked to ease

the situation for the 12th Shock Corps and the "Nikola Tesla" 6th Lika Proletarian Division, which were being systematically blocked from advancing into Serbia. Deeply moved by the plight of over 1,000 wounded fighters stranded on the extremely endangered Piva Plateau, he decided — with the Supreme Commander's approval — to fly to an improvised airfield near Donji Brezani and personally direct the evacuation operation to Italy. He arrived in Bari, securing a firm promise from Air Marshal William Elliot that the wounded would be transferred from Piva. However, that very day he was blocked by Britain's impenetrable military bureaucracy, so he had to oversee the evacuation of thirty-six transport plane loads of wounded from the airfield in Bari. The next day it was already too late — the Germans seized the improvised airstrip near Šavnik, fortunately only after all 1,059 wounded had been evacuated.

Arso monitored and, within his authority, directed the operations to liberate Serbia, as the divisions of the Operational Group, the 1st Proletarian Corps and the 12th Shock Corps — eight, and soon nine divisions in total — were grouped into the 1st Army Group. They occupied the strategic ridge stretching from Rudnik and Suvobor to Maljen and Povlen. From that point on, without consultation with the Supreme Headquarters and relying solely on the staff services of Marshal Tolbukhin, operations were directed exclusively by Marshal Tito until the liberation of Belgrade, Banat and Bačka, and

the occupation of the Syrmian Front. During that time, Arso and Ranković, still stationed on Vis, continued to direct operations on other parts of the front until their transfer to the capital.

On November 9, in liberated Belgrade, as the representative of the NOVJ and its Supreme Headquarters, Arso attended the session of the Grand Anti-Fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Serbia, where he delivered a noteworthy congratulatory address.

With the move to Belgrade, the Supreme Headquarters of the NOVJ (from March 1, renamed the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army) became a highly structured professional institution within the Ministry of Defence, comprising thirteen departments and deputy chiefs responsible for operations and organization, the navy, intelligence, military education and more. According to Rade Hamović, then a major general and head of the Operations Department, "a full working atmosphere prevailed in the institution, the staff functioned in harmony, there was complete camaraderie and great enthusiasm" — all of this "primarily thanks to Chief Jovanović." At the same time, at least half of the personnel were around the clock on the front line, and the Chief would frequently travel by plane to visit commanders at the front, directly influencing the conduct of combat operations and the planning of final liberation offensives.

From January 7 to February 10, 1945, Lieutenant-General Arso Jovanović was part of a mil-

itary-political delegation visiting the Soviet Union. The delegation was led by Andrija Hebrang, and other generals in the group included Gojko Nikoliš, Rade Hamović and Branko Obradović. One of Hebrang's telegrams reveals that Stalin, along with his closest political and military associates, received him and Arso Jovanović on their very first night in Moscow, and that military matters were discussed, with a report promised — though it was either never written or, more likely, not preserved. However, according to the participants' testimony, Arso held talks at the Red Army's General Staff on coordination in upcoming operations, the organization of the Ministry of Defence, reorganization, rearmament and training of units, the deployment of Soviet military advisors and instructors to NOVJ operational and technical-tactical staffs, aid in food, ammunition, fuel and medical supplies, replenishment of air force losses, pilot and signal operator training, the transfer of the 2nd Tank Brigade from Tula to the Syrmian Front and more. Notes preserved by Mitra Mitrović and Gojko Nikoliš recount a dinner with the entire delegation, during which Generalissimo Stalin repeatedly and provocatively — for reasons known only to him — claimed that Bulgarians were better soldiers than Yugoslavs. Arso, increasingly emotional, insisted that Stalin was wrong. The argument escalated to the point that Arso, while firmly defending the honour and dignity of the army he led as Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, was brought to tears.

In Belgrade, where he had been temporarily replaced by Lieutenant-General Velimir Terzić, new tasks awaited him — particularly those arising from the visit of Field Marshal Alexander to the capital of the new Yugoslavia (February 22-28) and from very important discussions on cooperation during the final phase of the war. At this stage, the chiefs of staff of both the Yugoslav and Allied armies had their hands full. Additional tasks emerged from the days-long February and March meetings of senior officers from the General Staff, army commanders and the Yugoslav Navy, at which, under the leadership of the Supreme Commander, the methods of engagement and cooperation in executing the strategic offensive for the final liberation of the country were established. Everything that was discussed and decided was translated within the General Staff into plans, directives, orders and documents for the archives and history. According to participants in those events, the work was intense and continuous — sometimes at the front, sometimes in offices where military beds were set up — offering moments of rest amid tireless service for victory.

At the time when the directive was issued for the final strategic offensive and the beginning of the breakthrough on the Syrmian Front, the Supreme Commander was in Moscow (April 5-20) for the signing (April 11) of the Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Post-War Cooperation with the Soviet Union. During his absence, Ranković took over the duties of the General Staff and signed

the directive based on elements previously agreed upon at the meeting with army commanders from March 25 to 28, while generals Arso Jovanović and Rade Hamović oversaw its implementation. From the start — and especially after Tito's return from Moscow — Arso became more directly involved in assisting the 4th Army Staff, considering the importance and complexity of its mission. At the same time, he took care not to interfere with the army's independence in decision-making and conducting operations on the left wing of the strategic formation, still in contact with the Western Allies. Understanding the need for the army's faster advance and the capture of the coastal area up to the Soča River — and especially the goal of taking Trieste before the Western Allies — Arso became actively involved on that front already by April 22. From April 28, he was mostly stationed at the forward command post with General Petar Drapšin and Commissar Colonel Boško Šiljegović. From there, the significantly reinforced 20th Division was sent to capture Trieste on May 1, which it achieved before the forced advance of the 2nd New Zealand Division to the Soča. On May 3, following Arso's order, a Yugoslav motorized detachment was sent from Trieste through the Soča canyon — blocked by Allied convoys rushing north — into Austria. Operating in Carinthia, this unit prevented the evacuation of the Wehrmacht's Balkan group and the remaining Ustaša forces, capturing General Lor and a group of Pavelić's criminals.

Due to Allied political manoeuvring over the fate of the Julian March, the Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army was appointed head of the military-state delegation for negotiations with the Supreme Allied Command. The delegation also included generals Koča Popović, Vladimir Velebit, Jaka Avšič and Srećko Manola. Negotiations were held mainly with the Allied military team led by Admiral Frederick Morgan, Chief of Staff to Field Marshal Alexander, in Belgrade (June 5-9) and in Trieste (the town of Devin, June 13-20). The talks took place under extremely tense circumstances, with two large and well-equipped armies — formerly allied, the Yugoslav and Anglo-American — facing each other in a confined space, literally with fingers on the trigger. It took great military wisdom in the service of euphoric politics to maintain composure among the troops and prevent incidents. In Devin, they negotiated the implementation of the agreement on the Julian March, which had been signed at the highest level in Belgrade on June 9, with constant efforts to avoid a potential armed conflict — one that could have erupted at any moment and resulted in bloodshed with unimaginable tragic consequences. At the same time, according to members of both the Yugoslav and Anglo-American delegations, General Jovanović firmly defended the national interests of Yugoslavia. On June 20, he signed the Devin Agreement on the implementation of the June 9 treaty, establishing the so-called Morgan Line, which divided the disputed territory

into zones "A" and "B" under military administration. The Yugoslav detachment's strength was set at 2,000 soldiers and officers.

Arso Jovanović served as Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army until September 17, 1945, when he handed over the post to Lieutenant-General Koča Popović due to his departure for further studies in the Soviet Union. Before leaving for Moscow (in mid-March 1946), he was decorated with the highest domestic and Allied honours, including the Orders of Kutuzov and Suvorov. He was celebrated and held up as an example to others, sent as a representative of the Yugoslav Army to major events. He gave several lectures and published three notable works on the topics of the National Liberation War: on the development of the NOVJ, the Battle of Pljevlja and key military operations. These publications were withdrawn from circulation and destroyed after his death.

On June 2, 1946, during a friendly visit to the Soviet Union (May 27-June 10), Marshal Tito hosted a formal lunch at the Yugoslav Embassy in Moscow for the Yugoslav General Staff officers studying at the "Voroshilov" Academy. On that occasion, as recorded by Radomir-Ljaka Vujosević — then a major in tank units studying at the "Stalin" Academy — Tito raised the first toast to his "chief military associate, General Arso Jovanović, who during the National Liberation War was the initiator or planner of major operations." He went on to heap praise upon his first wartime military associate, using one

superlative after another. Regardless of the reasons for choosing that time, place and company to speak those words in the heart of Moscow, for anyone who understands the nature of hierarchical relationships in strategic-level staffs, this was the highest recognition a supreme commander can give to the chief of his wartime general staff. It was the full truth, spoken aloud at the time — yet within two years, it was crudely denied, and in all the years and decades that followed, continually denied in unison, right up to the present day. We still know nothing about the fate of the distinguished soldier Arso R. Jovanović — not even where his grave lies. The tragic fate of one of the leading military figures of our anti-fascist war was the reason for the outcry of the eminent historian Prof. Dr. Branko Petranović on the pages of his testamentary book *The Historian and the Contemporary Epoch* (VINC, 1994), where, reflecting on the fate of this "distinguished soldier of our war," he asks: "Is Arso Jovanović the only one cursed to be forever silenced, and what are those forces that fear the graves of their adversaries?"

This question has remained open for a full 47 years. A grave silence still reigns over the "case" of Arso R. Jovanović. The dead lips of the victim cannot speak — and the executioners remain silent.

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IN PURSUIT OF THE FATE OF ARSO R. JOVANOVIĆ

Born on March 24, 1907 in the village of Zavala near Podgorica; valedictorian of the Podgorica Gymnasium; ranked among the top cadets of the 53rd class of the Lower Military Academy (1925-1928); began his officer career in the Takovo Regiment; author of the noted publication *Tactics of the Infantry Battalion*; the April War interrupted his preparations for a General Staff career.

In July 1941, he became the commander of the insurgent troops in Montenegro, Boka and the Sandžak, and as of December 12 that same year, Chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the NOVJ, a position he held continuously until Victory Day. He was the first to hold the rank of Major General in the NOVJ (May 1, 1943). During the National Liberation War — in addition to carrying out key staff duties — he successfully completed several diplomatic missions: he was a member of Broz's team* at the negotiations in Caserta (Italy) with the Supreme Allied Commander for the Mediterranean, General H.M. Wilson (August 6-12, 1944); he headed the NOVJ** delegation in Moscow (January 3-February 14, 1945) where, in a three-hour

* The delegation also included: Generals S. Žujović, G. Nikoliš and I. Rukavina, and Colonels V. Klišanić and K. Levičnik.

** Members of the delegation: Generals R. Hamović, G. Nikoliš, B. Obradović and S. Manola, and Colonel Z. Ulepič.

conversation with Stalin, he secured an agreement on arming another 20 infantry and 2 air divisions; he led the "Generals' Commission,"* which, on behalf of the new Yugoslavia, conducted difficult negotiations in Belgrade and Trieste in May and June 1945 on the fate of Istria, Trieste and the Julian March. He also played a prominent role in cooperating with the heads of Allied military missions — General N.V. Korneyev and Brigadier F. Maclean — as well as in talks with Air Vice-Marshal V. Elliot (December 1944), Field Marshal H. Alexander (February 1945) and Air Force General I. Eaker (March 1945), along with other leading figures from the top Allied commands.

For his proven contributions in the anti-fascist war, he received all the highest military decorations of the "second Yugoslavia." He is the only professional Allied officer to be awarded both the Order of Kutuzov (September 5, 1944) and the Order of Suvorov (October 15, 1945), First Class, by decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

Because he was slated — along with 16 other generals and colonels of the Yugoslav Army — to study at the "Voroshilov" Higher Military Academy in Moscow, he handed over the duties of Chief of the General Staff on September 15, 1945 to Lieutenant General Konstantin "Koča" A. Popović.**

* Alongside the Chief of the General Staff, the following generals were present: K. Popović, J. Avšič, V. Velebit and S. Manola.

** Order of the Ministry of National Defence, reference no. 401, dated September 11, 1945.

Devoted to his profession, trained to work expertly, responsibly and with discipline, Arso used the six-month period before departure for language studies in Russian,* wrote editorials for *Narodna armija* and *Borba*, and authored special publications on the Battle of Pljevlja, the Belgrade Operation and an *Overview of the National Liberation War*.** On several occasions, he was assigned as an envoy of the Supreme Commander.

Along with a group of influential generals — "former officers" still active in the General Staff — he worked to secure military or civilian posts for as many returning officers and generals as possible, whose patriotic and anti-fascist conduct in German camps had earned them respect. With General M. Apostolski, who was in charge of military education in the General Staff, he developed a five-year professional education plan for the then 42,286 officers and military administrators, which he entrusted to General Koča.***

After several postponements,**** the "Voroshi-

* He spoke French fluently and had working knowledge of English, German and Russian.

** In bibliographies, his name is listed alongside the titles of 17 contributions published during the National Liberation War and 14 about the war.

*** A 1951 report from the Personnel Department of the Ministry of National Defence assessed that one in nine officers was "insufficiently trained" and as many as 10,793 were "completely untrained."

**** Training was initially scheduled to begin on Oc-

lovists" finally departed for Moscow on March 15, 1946, together with students from five other Soviet Army academies.* Well housed and supplied for the conditions of the first postwar year, they studied intensively, focusing on map-based operational planning at corps and army levels in offensive campaigns across Western and Central Europe. The instructors — generals and senior officers — were highly competent and personally courteous and well-meaning. As far as anyone could tell, none of the students were recruited by the NKVD, and it is questionable what secrets the Yugoslav Army even held for Soviet intelligence, given that 472 Soviet instructors or advisors — with ranks ranging from warrant officer to general — operated openly, under contract and with full authority, from division staffs to the military leadership.

They were free to go into the city and receive visitors, toured battlefields from the 1812 Napoleonic campaign and the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, and — as young and good-looking men — often socialized with women from Moscow. Arso was no exception. Although known as a devoted

tober 1, 1945, but started on March 15, 1946. The group included generals Arso Jovanović, Peko Dapčević, Radovan Vukanović, Dušan Kveder, Božo Božović, Milutin Morača, Đoko Jovanić, Male Jerković, Colonels Sredoje Urošević, Moma Đurić and others.

* The academies: *Frunze*, *Dzerzhinsky*, *Lenin*, *Stalin* and *Kuibyshev*. At that time, 3,740 Yugoslav Army officers were undergoing training in the USSR.

husband and caring father, he was often seen in the company of the attractive Marusya, rumoured to be the daughter of a Red Army general. He claimed it was to improve his Russian. That relationship, apparently innocent, would later — following Arso's liquidation in August 1948 — give rise to at least two vicious rumours: the first, that it was a spy affair, which some powerful figures immediately found "clear and convincing," leaving behind written records to that effect; the second, that in August 1948, he "turned his back on the homeland" and fled across the Romanian border into Marusya's arms.

Everyone struggled with the separation from their families and friends back home, whom they could visit only once a year. They also faced — with open discomfort — not only Moscow's material shortages but also the flood of invalids, beggars, con artists and all kinds of lost souls on its streets. For many Yugoslavs, this was the source of deep incomprehension and even disillusionment with Soviet reality.* Encounters between the "Voroshilovists" and official Yugoslav representatives in Moscow (ambassador, military envoy and CC of the

* In a letter to Đilas written during the waiting period for "Arso's group" to depart for training, B. Ziherl, President of the CC of the CPY in Moscow, suggested that "politically reliable people should be sent to Moscow — those who will not become demoralized at the first encounter with the everyday difficulties here, but who will understand what the Soviet Union sacrificed in this war and will not ask for too much."

CPY representative) were extremely rare, but they were more frequent with numerous state, military and party delegations arriving from Yugoslavia. The heads of these delegations would summon the "Voroshilovists" and other academy students to gatherings hosted by the ambassador or military envoy, especially including the party organization secretaries appointed by the representative of the CC. One of the earliest delegations arrived on May 27, 1946, led by Marshal Broz, who stayed in Moscow until June 10. The delegation included Generals A. Ranković and K. Popović. After touring several military academies where Yugoslav officers were studying, the Supreme Commander hosted a formal lunch on June 2 at the FPRY embassy villa for the "Voroshilovists" and other selected attendees. At the very beginning of the lunch, he raised a toast to his "chief military associate, General Arso Jovanović," as he called him, "the initiator and planner of major operations." He continued at length, using the strongest terms his limited vocabulary could offer, showing no restraint in giving praise. The Marshal's words sounded like the highest commendation a Supreme Commander could bestow on his Chief of Staff — and only the pragmatic leader, as B. Petranović would say, a "master of applied dialectics," still a guest in Moscow, truly knew their real meaning. In any case, Arso, taken aback and overwhelmed by the eulogy, stood up, came to attention and said, "Comrade Marshal, I was just an ordinary soldier carrying out your orders!" Without

hesitation, Tito stood up and replied, "And I was an ordinary soldier carrying out Comrade Stalin's orders! And tomorrow, if needed, our army will lead the Red Army to the English Channel!" The hall erupted in applause, and when Tito mentioned the possibility of an offensive to the Channel, his closest associates lifted him into the air and tossed him toward the ceiling.

In January 1948, a military-state delegation arrived among the "Voroshilovists": Political Bureau member M. Đilas and generals K. Popović, S. Vukmanović-Tempo and I. Rukavina. The meeting at the ambassador's residence was remembered in particular for Arso's sharp criticism of Koča, questioning why the General Staff had structured a division's organization after modern, heavily motorized and mechanized armies, disregarding Yugoslavia's own poverty, wartime experience and the traditions of the Serbian army — where horses and oxen had borne much of the burden in the past four liberation wars. He added that although the conditions of warfare were changing radically and the future must be considered, these experiences should not be neglected when forming peacetime and wartime units — even less should Yugoslavia copy modern armies, as it would not be able to afford such equipment and weaponry for a long time, nor to establish the envisioned mechanized corps and fronts. Koča, visibly uncomfortable in his chair, stayed silent for a long time, prompting Arso — in a rather tense atmosphere — to continue criticizing the work of

the Chief of the General Staff and his 364 associates. Understandably, Koča "accepted the challenge" and, visibly irritated, responded sharply — not just about the "Serbian horses and oxen." The discussion was cut short, but it left the impression among those present that the wartime Chief of the Supreme Headquarters had publicly questioned the professional competence of the current Chief of the General Staff at a moment in time that was clearly growing more complex.

Đilas informed the group: "In a few days, Albania will officially join the union with Yugoslavia," and authorized — even tasked — the party organization secretaries to relay this to their comrades.*

The "Voroshilovists" took their final exams at the end of May 1948, and all received certificates showing they had completed their studies on time, "with good marks" (successful).** The occasion was marked by a ceremony at the residence of the Yugoslav ambassador. The mood — at least outwardly — was as celebratory as in the best of times: there was food and drink, with toasts made mostly to Stalin and Tito, to the Yugoslav and Soviet armies, to victory and peace, to the homeland and communism,

* That statement — clearly an expression of official policy — is not found in any party documents or in Đilas' books. Military historian Colonel Radomir "Ljaka" Vujošević, then a major and secretary of the CPY organization at the "Stalin" Tank Academy, preserved it in his notebook.

** All diplomas were registered under number 200, dated May 28, 1948.

to alliance and brotherhood in arms, and finally to each general at the table. Although known for his dislike of alcohol, Arso was compelled to respond to these toasts until he was overcome by drink, repeatedly shouting, "Long live the Soviet Army!" This exclamation would later be used by some of his critics as further proof that he had "sold his soul" to the NKVD.

Their hosts saw them off to Belgrade without openly lobbying for or pressuring any of them to stay in Moscow.* None of the men — at least publicly — expressed any desire to remain, and to be fair, they did not know enough, let alone the essential facts, about the real nature, scale and intensity of the rift between the Central Committees of the CPY and the CPSU(B), or between Tito and Stalin — especially following the withdrawal of 472 Soviet military advisors and instructors.** Nor were they aware of the true reasons behind the CC of the CPY's decision on May 20 not to send the general secretary or his representatives to the Cominform meeting in Bucharest. In fact, what was really happening in those relations was communicated to

* According to data from the Personnel Department of the Ministry of National Defence, at the time the Cominform Resolution "broke out," 1,424 Yugoslav Army officers were in training in the Soviet Union. Of those, 1,082 would return to Yugoslavia, while 342 remained. Earlier, from April 1945 to the end of 1947, 5,135 had been trained in the USSR.

** They were withdrawn on the basis of a letter from Marshal N. Bulganin dated March 18, 1945, with the explanation that they were "surrounded by distrust and hostility."

the "Voroshilovists" in Moscow only "selectively" by Ambassador Vlado Popović, CC representative Puniša Perović and Military Attaché General Niko Jovićević. Still, being far removed from the centre of decision-making, they knew little.

Grouped together in Miločer and Bled, through representatives of the Main Political Administration, they were informed within the frameworks of party cells and official publications from the CC of the CPY and the Ministry of National Defence — *Borba* and *Narodna armija*. During those 20 "rest" days, most felt like "a kind of detainees," or at least senior generals set aside "for purification," meant to be freed from any possible pro-Soviet leanings or loyalties. In any case, they were excluded from the highly intense political life of the Party and the Yugoslav Army* during a period of fierce struggle to achieve ambitious defence goals — especially the development of Yugoslavia's own military industry, through which the country aimed to grow rapidly into a regional military power by strengthening all three branches of its armed forces. This radically focused defence policy, according to some of the "Voroshilovists" in Miločer, could irritate neighbouring countries — particularly Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria — pushing them to reinforce their (limited) military and police contingents, and provoke imperialist circles to target Yugoslavia from Greece

* At that time, the Yugoslav Army, with 128 generals, had around 100,000 officers and non-commissioned officers, along with 700 aircraft and 600 artillery pieces.

and Italy, with potential U.S. support from sea and air. A significant number of senior military officers and confirmed patriots were concerned about escalating tensions with the West — and now also the outcome of the evidently deep discord with the East. Some "Voroshilovists" — taught by the Party to speak freely and believe that truth is the supreme standard of practice — expressed these concerns in conversations with their wartime and academic comrades. They said it was necessary to attend the Cominform meeting and defend the truth there. Some added that the Red Army's military aid to the NOVJ had been invaluable, even decisive for final victory; that the decision to send two divisions of the Yugoslav Army to Albania* was open to legitimate criticism; that military industry development costs were excessive and the Army too large and expensive.

As a sort of test, they were made to discuss the content and message of the Soviet film *In the Mountains of Yugoslavia*, which, according to the Agit-

* By Broz's decision, announced at the Political Bureau session on January 21, 1948, two divisions of the Yugoslav Army were to be sent to Albania — for its defence, relying on the Yugoslav military base in Korča — against the monarcho-fascists from the southeast, from neighbouring Greece. Of the two, the 2nd Proletarian Division, stationed in Bitola, was ready to depart, while another, sent for preparations to Manjača, was expected to be ready by February 15. Confronted with the backlash from the all-powerful Generalissimo, Broz rescinded the decision at the Political Bureau session on March 1, 1948.

prop department, portrayed the National Liberation Movement in an "oversimplified, rather inaccurate and certainly unfair" way — showing small, poorly clothed and lightly armed partisan units whose salvation supposedly lay in Soviet assistance. Provoked, some "Voroshilovists" did not judge the film so harshly, nor did they see such malice in the Russian filmmakers' intent — especially since they recalled how, in August 1944, some elite Proletarian divisions had fewer than 2,000 fighters, and the newer units were armed almost entirely with light infantry weapons either captured from the enemy or supplied by the Allies. The Soviets had, between September 1944 and Victory Day, supplied them with artillery and aircraft "by the truckload," which was now being described in the press as "so-called fraternal aid," with claims that "everything had been well paid for." On some of these matters, Arso also voiced opinions — including details that, in those heavy-handed times, were still "under review" but could have been used to counter the CC of the CPY's harsh assessments. At the same time, Arso and all the other "Voroshilovists" fully supported the key message conveyed in a letter sent by the CC of the CPY to Stalin and Molotov on April 13 — that "no matter how much one of us may love the land of socialism, the USSR, one must not, under any circumstances, love it more than our own country, which is also building socialism."

In Belgrade, Arso had "informational" conversations with generals Tempo and Gošnjak, followed

by a meeting with Ranković, and ultimately, Broz spoke with "the six hardest-liners" at Brdo near Kranj. During the discussions in Belgrade, it became clear that most of the "Voroshilovists" were deeply troubled — torn by concerns, doubts and suspicions about the country's fate under potential economic and military pressure, international isolation and even aggression. They sensed how early ideological and inter-party disputes were evolving into inter-state confrontations. They had thoroughly studied the wartime doctrine of the world's most powerful military force — one that held all the "people's democracies" under "a single helmet." They were familiar with new strategic realities brought by the introduction (at the beginning of 1947) of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, which, in effect, formed the backbone of the "strategic containment of the USSR." Those without access to information about the Western powers' stance — not allowing Tito to fall in a conflict with Stalin — reasoned as follows: if 280 million people from the "people's democracies" turned against 16 million Yugoslavs, the country would face total and dangerous isolation, especially at a time when Yugoslavia had diplomatic relations with only 26 countries. This was no longer a matter of ideology, but of arithmetic — of precise military science, in which the balance of forces was always a critical premise for Arso. In the days that followed came the Cominform Resolution and the CC of the CPY's response — both lengthy, harsh in tone and bitter

in assessments. Their messages helped the "Voroshilovists" navigate the political whirlwind only to a limited degree. Then came the seven-day 5th Congress of the CPY, marked by staged, aggressive and enforced unity. Some began to see things more clearly, others withdrew, and a few considered it a patriotic duty to mourn the truth. One might say that things seemed to end well — with a telegram of support sent by the "Voroshilovists" to the CC of the CPY, published on July 8 on the front page of *Narodna armija*, in which they stated their belief that "the Cominform Resolution is a grave insult, a serious historical injustice," expressing hope that its authors would realize it was "the result of being misled by false information and a lack of understanding of the situation within the CPY."

Another telegram of support for the Party came from 200 Yugoslav Army officers — students of academies and cadet schools in the Soviet Union — sent while travelling through Romania. They returned to Yugoslavia during the 5th Congress (July 21-28), and their message was published in *Narodna armija* on July 24 as an expression of "support for that historic gathering."

Meanwhile, all the "Voroshilovists" were reassigned to posts within the Yugoslav Army.* Arso was appointed head of the newly founded Higher Military Academy (VVA), whose first class included 82 students, among them 12 generals and 19 colonels. The program was to begin on October 1 — a tight deadline given that nothing had yet been prepared. Under Arso's leadership, teams worked to define the objectives, content and schedule of instruction, determine the optimal structure, ensure the basic conditions for work and select faculty for the 12 departments. The first group of students consisted of the Army's top generals, reflecting the importance placed on the academy's founding and the choice of its head as a figure of authority among the General Staff elite. There is no original record suggesting that Arso felt sidelined for not being reinstated as Chief of the General Staff. However, in his memoirs, General P. Jakšić recounts that after returning from training in the USSR, Arso burst — somewhat agitated — into a generals' meeting in the War Room of the General Staff building, where organizational issues were being discussed, including the structure of the Supreme Command. He took the floor and said, "Tito needs an authoritative general and a strong figure beside him" (clearly referring to himself) — and after that, he was "gone for good." V. Dedijer would later recall in *New Contributions* that Arso was "a victim of his own immature and unrealized ambitions," and that Broz confided in him that "a plan existed along the Moscow-Bucharest line for Arso to escape from Belgrade on Ana Pauker's plane."*

* According to the order of the Ministry of National Defence, reference no. 764, dated July 1, 1948.

* A member of the Political Bureau and Minister of Fo-

Still, Arso did not hide his dissatisfaction for other reasons: that two generals — I. Gošnjak and K. Popović — lacking essential qualifications and unwilling to sit through even one lecture on strategy or operations, had been appointed to two of the most important positions in the armed forces he had dedicated his life to; that the Chief of the General Staff had formally been "demoted" to the role of third assistant to the Minister of National Defence; that political power had completely overridden military professionalism in the Army...

In July, despite his other duties, Arso worked on four papers he held in high regard: an inaugural address to the first class of the VVA; a study of Brusilov's 1916 offensive as an example of troop offensiveness; a study on the 1943 Battle of Kursk as the largest clash of military technology in modern history; and a lecture titled "Support of Aviation and the Navy to the Army on the Coastal Strategic Wing," based on operations by the 4th Army of the Yugoslav Army. General Terzić recalled that Arso had completed these works "in draft form," giving each in turn to him, as a "former officer," and to fellow "Russian students" Generals Božo Božović and Dušan Kveder — not seeking praise, but requesting constructive feedback.* However, from October 1,

reign Affairs of Romania — already publicly aligned with the call to the "healthy forces" to overthrow the leadership of the CPY — stayed in Belgrade from July 28 to August 18 during the sessions of the Danube Conference.

* Those "papers" would soon share the fate of his other

the VVA would be led not by Arso but by General V. Terzić, joined by two other "Voroshilovists": General M. Morača as deputy and S. Urošević as head of the Department of Tactics. Of the original 17, Arso was already dead, and Moma Đurić would fall victim to the wave of Cominformist purges.* The others would survive — likely having learned from Arso's tragic example — and even the pragmatic Broz, under the storm of Soviet propaganda surrounding the "case," came to understand that in increasingly complex military-political relations with Moscow, it was unwise to target generals of the "Russian school."** This does not mean they were not "fully monitored by security." Yet, even their ranks would begin to thin, and by the late 1950s, not a single one remained in the Army.***

manuscripts — they were confiscated, both from his home and office, by KOS agents.

* A two-metre-tall prewar national shot put champion, he was brutally tortured in the infamous Petrova Rupa on Goli Otok, his body weight dropping to 42 kilograms. In his *Goli Otok Trilogy*, Milinko Stojanović — himself among the first punished in Petrova Rupa — names, alongside generals B. Poljanac, Đ. Mirašević, V. Žižić and B. Petričević, a total of 23 colonels (including the two brothers of P. Dapčević, Vlado and Milutin), 3 lieutenant colonels, 6 majors and 5 captains of the Yugoslav Army.

** The political leadership also classified V. Terzić among the "Russian students" — who, despite serving 20 wartime months as the head of the NOVJ mission in Moscow, was labelled "unsuitable" and forced into retirement at the age of 50.

*** In April 1949, S. Rodić died suddenly. In the ear-

In 1985, with Arso's fellow countrymen, classmates, service colleagues and close friends — General V. Terzić and Colonel Milutin Šušović — I compiled a "list of possible grievances" that tormented him in the summer of 1948, in Terzić's home in Miločer. These included: the overtly arrogant behaviour of the security services; the Party's overwhelming role in the Yugoslav Army's personnel policy; the amateurish work on defining wartime doctrine; the prioritization of "class background" in evaluating officer competence; the dominance of titles, honours and idol worship; the brutal crackdown on political dissenters (especially S. Žujović, with whom he had a close wartime bond). He was also a witness who knew too much: about the Supreme Headquarters' negotiations with the Germans in March 1943 — brought up by Stalin and Molotov to Broz, who denied them; about the demolition of the bridges over the Neretva in March 1943, now celebrated as "proof of the Supreme Commander's operational genius"; about the conduct of Broz and Kardelj in the Drvar cave, while Žujović, Ranković and he risked their lives to defend them — a moment Broz later claimed as one of his own heroic deeds. As a delegate to the 5th Congress, Arso did not share the views of those

ly 1950s, P. Dapčević and D. Lekić — and later D. Kveder — were assigned to diplomatic posts in Western capitals; R. Vukanović was forced into early retirement, and S. Urošević was "transferred to the reserves" at the age of 40; Milutin Morača was "reassigned" to a civilian post.

who, from podiums, rallies and newspapers, thundered that Tito was a "brilliant military leader" responsible for all victories. He believed that the National Liberation War — with its mix of guerrilla and operational warfare — was very specific, but also that the partisan method of combat, as Stalin and V.M. Molotov "reminded" Tito, was in fact more than 140 years old. He found unacceptable the crude denial of the extent and importance of Soviet military aid to Yugoslavia, particularly in armaments.* He held in high regard the fact that, in a three-hour conversation on January 9, 1945, Stalin had promised him weapons for 20 more divisions — and kept that promise. But he could not forgive Stalin for placing the NOVJ fighters behind the Bulgarians. At the same time, he could not accept the belittling of the true value and advantages of Soviet military doctrine. He feared that "the baby would be thrown out with the bathwater" — that the current bitter conflict might sever the deep spiritual ties between the Serbian and Russian peoples, whose importance the "Western-trained" officers now at the top of the Yugoslav Army failed to grasp.

In short, Arso — as a leading military figure — knew a great deal and could have been an un-

* According to *Military-Historical Journal* no. 5 from 1978, pp. 67-72, during the war the NOVJ — later the Yugoslav Army — received from the Red Army: 96,515 rifles, 68,423 light and heavy machine guns, 4,430 artillery pieces and mortars of all calibres, 65 tanks, 491 aircraft, 1,329 radio stations, 11 field hospitals and more.

comfortable witness, even a strict judge in someone's eyes. In the ruthless ideological showdowns of the time, he would not have been easily silenced or removed — at least not as easily as Political Bureau members Žujović and Hebrang had been. Yet he — politically inexperienced and unaware of others' power games — was determined neither to flatter nor yield to Broz, but instead to remain, as they say in his homeland, "clean before God and men," naively believing that such integrity was advantage enough. While he was a member of the CPY — a requirement for survival in the liberation army and his top-level staff role — he was never a communist in the Comintern or conspiratorial sense. Never a sectarian, he always seemed "artificially stitched" to the small circle of five or six people who made up the army's top leadership. He was Chief of Staff under the Supreme Commander — a Comintern student and political resident, a believer and captive to the ideology — with whom Arso showed solidarity and, as a subordinate, loyalty. But he was never a like-minded ally in the execution of the revolutionary course, especially the radical politicization of the army and the struggle for power. He never understood the visible discord and disunity among top communists — their compulsion to belittle and fight one another, even to destroy each other within national and international arenas. As a result, much about the conflict between the Yugoslav and Soviet party leaderships, especially the clash between Tito and Stalin, was incomprehensible to him. He

struggled to understand the contradictions in the mind of the General Secretary: during the National Liberation War, Tito would report to Moscow four times a day and demand from his subordinates to die on the bunkers shouting Stalin's name; in 1946, right in Moscow, he was announcing the Yugoslav Army as the vanguard of Stalin's advance to the English Channel; and then, in 1948, in an effort to protect his own prestige, turned against Stalin.

Arso's mother, Zorka, remembered how "two men in trench coats" came for him, supposedly "on the orders of Comrade Marshal." From the doorstep, dressed in uniform, he told her he was going to Avala and would be back shortly. The wait for his return would stretch into days. The evening before he was taken, he had dinner with General V. Velebit, a man of Tito's utmost trust. At that dinner, he objected to Tito's decision to send two Yugoslav Army divisions to Albania (where a Yugoslav air regiment was already based), without even informing the Kremlin, which had significant strategic interests at the far edge of the "community of people's democracies." He argued that this reality should have been taken into account in the decision-making and said that Yugoslavia should have gone to Bucharest.

Most likely after Arso's detention, Broz — walking around the White Palace complex and Brdo near Kranj — was seen several times engaging in heated arguments with his first general. They would wave their arms, stop and pause, and then

Broz, irritated, would walk off for coffee, leaving Arso alone on the path. At least three of Broz's guards — officers, one of them his nephew Branko — recalled these incidents. Today, Broz's concern is understandable: to have, at least in his own mind, an unreliable top military figure in an army with 85 per cent of its officers who — according to Political Bureau assessments after the 5th Congress — still might not raise their rifles against the Soviet Army, posed a major risk in the anticipated harsh ideological and even state-level conflicts. This was especially true in a context where, in Bucharest, political émigrés were beginning to gather around the resigning ambassador R. Golubović and the defector General P. Popivoda — forming the nucleus of the "healthy forces." Later, in his deeply controversial *New Contributions*, Dedijer wrote that during those days at Brdo near Kranj, between two extended Political Bureau sessions, Broz spoke with six of the "hardline Voroshilovists," among whom only Arso "stood there like a drenched hen." Shortly afterward, Arso disappeared. Then, on August 18, *Borba* published an official statement from the Ministry of the Interior: that during the night of August 11-12, generals Jovanović and Petričević and Colonel Dapčević had attempted to cross the state border illegally and armed, near the village of Sočica by Vršac, during which Jovanović was killed.

The first to deliver the grim news to the family — on the morning of August 12 — was General Koča Popović, sincerely shaken by the brutality of

it.* Repressive measures followed immediately: the family was evicted from their villa and placed in substandard housing, cut off from phone communication and contact with former friends. His wife, Senka, was fired from her job and told she could quickly resolve all issues of livelihood for herself and their daughters if she would only "renounce her traitor husband."

Following the *Borba* report on August 18, which described his death as occurring "in an attempted escape across the border," a wave of public condemnation against Arso erupted. Among the first to speak out were generals Tempo and P. Dapčević and others, linking "this shameful act of treason against the country and the people" to his "class background" and time spent in the USSR, where he was allegedly "recruited by the NKVD." Waves of arrests followed: his sister Miluša, a wartime fighter, his brother-in-law Major Luka Stojanović, and his neighbour Colonel Dukljan Vukotić. In the next two years, until the trial of those allegedly involved in the "case" and up until Stalin's death — whether related to Arso's fate or not — thousands of his wartime comrades, officers, were imprisoned, accused

* In his home on Lackovićeva Street in Dedinje, Koča told me in 1986 that he had passed on to Arso's wife, Senka, what Broz had told him. Later, in the 1960s, as Vice President of the Republic and under pressure from various versions about the fate of the "sinful Arsenije," he initiated the formation of a state commission to establish the truth — but it "did not pass" in the Federal Assembly.

of "crimes against the state and the people," and sentenced to long prison terms* or stripped of their ranks in disciplinary proceedings.**

Broz also issued a ban on mentioning Arso's name "except in a negative context," which is why his name does not appear in encyclopedias, in the two-volume *Liberation War of the Peoples of Yugoslavia* (1965), in Vojo Todorović's monograph *The Podgorica District in the July 13 Uprising* (1952), in any of the 18,323 chronological entries across the 1,265 pages of *Chronology of the Liberation War* (1964), nor in the *Military Lexicon* (1982), the VVA monograph (1982) or similar works. Where he is mentioned, a footnote about treason is always attached. In accordance with Broz's (belated) decision from 1977 — three years before his death — that nothing about him or his comrades be altered in official documents (!?), Arso is referenced in more than 260 places across the 20 wartime volumes of *Collected Works* (published from 1982 to 1988), but always with the note: "Accepted the Cominform

* According to the archive of the Personnel Department of the Federal Secretariat for National Defence, military courts sentenced 2,345 Yugoslav Army officers of all ranks as "Cominformists" for "acts against the state and the people." The Goli Otok Association cites a figure of 3,319, providing ranks as well, while M. Đilas, in his memoirs, claims the number reached as high as 7,000.

** Around 16,500 officers and non-commissioned officers were, between 1948 and 1953, punished with loss of rank in disciplinary proceedings within units and institutions due to "mild disagreement" with the practices of CPY bodies.

resolution, became an enemy of socialist Yugoslavia; died on the border while attempting to flee the country, August 1948."

At the trial of Arso's alleged companions at the border — General B. Petričević and Colonel V. Dapčević, held nearly two years later (June 1-4, 1950) — loudspeakers announced that "appropriate expert analyses were conducted at the scene of death," yet there was no record of any testimony besides the two accused and the already condemned Kovačević. There was no trace of any findings from doctors, legal experts, ballistics analysts or other specialists, which would be essential in such an investigation. Furthermore, the "Arso Jovanović File" — according to those who would be expected to know — "was not preserved." And so it happened, as Dr. Branko Petranović told me in February 1995 when I asked whether a book should be written about the life of General Arso Jovanović: "Write it — of course! He was the most prominent soldier of the National Liberation War, 'the number one man in the General Staff,' as old Smodlaka put it. But remember: if it had been possible to write that book earlier, they wouldn't have left it to you — not with all of us historians around. It's a subject that cannot be brought to a close until the archives of KOS and UDBA on one side, and the NKVD on the other, are opened." Those were the words of a scholar who, in his testamentary work *The Historian and the Contemporary Epoch* (1994), concluded his brilliant essay *An Epistolary Exchange of Views*

with three questions: "Is Arso Jovanović the only one condemned to eternal silence? What are the powers that fear the graves of their opponents? Is the graveyard silence over his 'case' more fruitful than the analysis of the drama of a man crucified by the storm of old faith and betrayal by former high priests?"

It took me four years to realize that Petranović, in the end, was right. In my search for relevant material in the archives and through conversations with hundreds of people who had suggested they could help clarify the "case" of this important figure of the National Liberation War — I came across 29 different versions of how his life ended. Realizing that not one of them was grounded in verifiable facts to the extent that it could be believed without reservation, I gave up, deciding to set aside the 800-page manuscript — the result of meticulous research — as a legacy for the future. What those former UDBA and KOS officers, drivers, party officials, border guards, generals, couriers, ambassadors and others — almost all unwilling to speak publicly — claim to remember does not, individually or collectively, fully answer the question of when and how Arso was killed, or where his grave is. But it does provide compelling testimony to a brutal era that, along with its victims, cannot avoid the judgement of history. This means that sooner or later, we will learn where the mortal remains of General Arso R. Jovanović lie: near the state border at Vršac, or beneath Avala, under the foundations

of a house in Banjica, at the bottom of the Danube, beneath the paths of the White Palace or on the hills of Brdo near Kranj.

After all this, I remain firmly convinced of only one thing: this was a political liquidation, carried out on the orders — or at least with the approval — of a leading figure in the party, the state and the military. It was neither the first nor the last victim of the lust for power and despotism. In any case, not one of the "Voroshilovists" I asked, none of his close wartime comrades, none of his personal friends, family or kin — and almost without exception, not even the citizens who followed the newspapers 50 years ago or the younger generation who heard or read about him — believes the official statement regarding his death. One of them, academic Milan Milutinović, head of the Department of Criminology at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade, was asked in 1995 to analyse the official report and verdict from a scholarly standpoint. His conclusion: they "don't hold up in any aspect." It was never proven that Arso died. Key witnesses V. Dapčević and V. Kovačević contradict each other — the first said a burst of fire hit Arso in the forehead, the second claimed he fired a rifle, single shots, and discharged four bullets while a fifth misfired. There are no accompanying documents: no forensic reports, no ballistics investigations, no findings from the joint border incident commission that is, in such cases, legally required in all circumstances. The name of his supposed guide, Svetolik Rabaljac, is entered in

the official death registry, and his grave is known — while Arso's name appears nowhere in that mandatory document. There is no trace of his grave either — arguably the most glaring failure in this entire "case."

Official Moscow not only wrote about Arso as a talented and distinguished commander of an Allied army and requested exhumation of his body in pursuit of the truth, but — surely also guided by political motives — made a chivalrous gesture: upon receiving news of Arso's death, and by order of Generalissimo Stalin himself, the entire armed force of the Slavic empire (five million soldiers from Sakhalin to Berlin) stood at attention and honoured him with a minute of silence. This, according to academic Branko Pavićević, is a fact — and it should be trusted, along with the rational conclusion that a great power does not pay such respects to a spy, an informant, a sellout, a coward or a traitor to his homeland. Even less would it bestow, during his lifetime, its highest military decorations — the Orders of Kutuzov and Suvorov, First Class — on such a man. And those honours were stripped away only by those who never awarded them in the first place.*

Even though it is understood that Arso was

* In internal material on personnel policy and practice from 1945 to 1985, authored by Colonel General Dr. Drago Nikolić, it is stated that Arso was, "by decision of the competent authorities," stripped of his rank, decorations and honourable rights — but neither the authorities nor their decision are disclosed.

not "one of them" — he was neither a Goli Otok prisoner nor a Cominform supporter — he was nonetheless clearly a victim of the wave of "Stalinist anti-Stalinism," of ideological dogmatism and sectarian practice.* On June 12, 1994, the Goli Otok Association for Montenegro — recognizing that the state would not reveal his grave, despite repeated requests — mounted a commemorative plaque on the wall of his birth house in Zavala. At the gathering of National Liberation War veterans and youth, including a company of soldiers, the atmosphere was one of deep emotion — as such an occasion deserves. Among the speakers were intelligent and heartfelt words from his younger daughter, Dr. Zoja. We will close this account with her final sentence: "As the daughter of General Arso Jovanović, I have the right to say publicly that my father's bones should no longer lie in the weeds, and that even today, we must fear those people who themselves do not fear sin."

(Tragom sudbine Arsa R. Jovanovića, Jugoslovensko-sovjetski sukob 1948. godine: zbornik radova sa naučnog skupa, str. 183-194)

* Uncertain which (of the many and controversial) versions of Arso R. Jovanović's death is accurate, the editorial board of the publication *The Revolutionary Movement of the Municipality of Titograd 1919–1945* (1975) lists, next to his name in the register of participants, "died after the war." The previously mandatory designation as a Cominformist killed while attempting to flee across the border is also absent from Milija Stanišić's book *Leading Cadres of the National Liberation War in Montenegro* (1995).

Proof